CHAP. IV.

The Period between a Child's beginning to read and going to School: — its Importance.— The Objects of Education, and their relative Value. — Commencement of Instruction in Reading.—Rousseau:—Education a Discipline.—Choice of Books.—Tones and Articulation.—Care in the Use of religious Books:—Selection of them.—Catechisms.

DURING the period between a child's first beginning to read and the time of his going to school, the mind becomes capable of more continued and systematic instruction. Its powers expand and acquire a degree of firmness; and a far more regular foundation may be laid for the opinions, dispositions, and habits which ought to predominate in mature age. That wondrous being, man, displaying so many marks of his high origin, as well as of his deplorable fall; whose astonishing progress in knowledge, when his powers are cultivated, and whose

more astonishing capabilities of knowledge, clearly point him out as destined to a more exalted state of being; and whose no less astonishing progress in good or in evil, and further capabilities of both according to the course he takes, afford clear indications that that future state will be one of righteous retribution, eminently blessed or eminently wretched:—that wondrous being, at an early age, receives impressions which sink deep into his as yet soft and yielding nature, and acquires habits which take such firm hold of that nature as almost to become part of it. With what anxious care, then, should this spring-time of life be employed in preparations for the future harvest! If there be not a harvest of good, there *must* be one of evil. The heavenly sickle will most assuredly, in due time, gather either the one or the other: and then with what unspeakable joy or grief will parents look back on their conduct towards their offspring during the years of early childhood!

There is a further consideration, which, in the case of boys, adds extremely to the importance of parental exertions in education during the period in question. On its expiration, they

usually leave their father's house, never afterwards, during the whole course of their education, to spend in it any very large portion of their time. And whither do they go? To school, where they are surrounded by new companions, and find in abundance new sentiments, new habits, and new temptations. Their parents are no longer at hand; and it is impossible for the master to afford them the protection which parents can afford against the inroads of folly and vice, especially out of school hours. His time is too much occupied, and his family is too numerous to admit of close personal attention to his individual scholars, in their general manners and habits. If they enter this new world without decidedly good principles, and corresponding conduct of some continuance, what is to be expected? Can it be rationally hoped that they will resist their own natural bias to evil, stimulated, as it will be, by bad example and false shame? If the father sees, on his son's return home for the holidays, a change which shocks him (though parental partiality will often make him in a great measure blind to that which is apparent to others), how is he to remedy the evil? He

will exert himself during the boy's continuance at home. But that is short; and to be followed by a much longer period, during which his son will again be exposed to the same temptations which he was before too weak to resist;—temptations now more formidable from not having been resisted. The parent will engage the master to counteract the evils he deplores: but the master, whatever may be his ability and good intentions, cannot perform impossibilities, nor, if the number of his pupils is not extremely small, give the time and attention to the case of this one boy which it would probably require. Supposing, however, his engagements to admit of his executing this task effectually, I confess I should be apprehensive that he will very rarely be found disposed to do so. His affection for the child cannot be expected to be that of a parent, and therefore he will generally be found deficient in the delicate and unceasing duties of an office which requires all the tender solicitude that flows from parental affection. The father also writes frequently to his son. Letters, in such a case, are a very inadequate substitute for ocular inspection and *vivâ voce* admonition. Perhaps,

however, he adopts what he deems the most efficacious measure, and sends his boy to another school. Is there not reason to fear that the new school will have its own peculiar disadvantages? But supposing it to introduce him to no new evils, is there any valid reason to hope that it will furnish a radical cure for the old mischiefs? God's grace can do every thing; and his mercy often effects more than we can ask or think; but I cannot avoid looking upon the prospect of a parent, whose child has not taken to school with him a good foundation of religious principles and habits, and enters on bad courses there, as very gloomy and discouraging.

Enough, I hope, has been said on the vast importance of making the best use of that period in education which is now under review. How is this purpose to be effected? Without presuming to give a full answer to that momentous inquiry, I will offer some practical observations on this subject.

First, then, in taking a Christian view of the objects of education, there can be no doubt that the first is to instil and cherish, in dependence on the Divine blessing, true religion,

both in the soul and in the daily and hourly habits of life: and the second, to convey general knowledge and form the mind and the manners. These objects are in no small degree coincident each with the other. Nothing is so conducive to whatever things are lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy in the various walks and stations of life, as a heart renewed by the Holy Spirit, and a demeanour corresponding with such a renewal. But, so far as they are distinct, the first has a decided pre-eminence. Happy is it when in practice it meets with the superior care, attention, and solicitude, which in theory is readily allowed to be its due! Partly from causes which have been pointed out, and partly from the example of that vast majority of mankind which has not true religion really at heart, even Christian parents are apt to slide into a system of education, if not directly opposed to the foregoing principle, yet certainly one which, in the opinion of St. Peter or St. Paul, would be thought too nearly approaching to "the course of this world." Let it be strongly borne in mind, that if we do not set out with a just and distinct view of our objects in the

management of our children ; and if we do not continually try our practice by our principles, and use vigorous and unceasing endeavours to keep it up to their standard, the stream will be poisoned at the very fountain, and we shall have cause to deplore the consequences.

An attention to the relative importance of the objects in education, is necessary, even in the very first step to be taken by a parent in the period under consideration. He must determine at what age it will be best to begin to teach his child to read. Were he to make mere progress in reading his chief concern, I am by no means certain that he might not defer the commencement of his instructions a year or two longer than is desirable, if he considers the acquisition of good habits as of still greater importance, and to be greatly promoted by calling a child to the obedience, attention, patience, self-denial, and other good habits which he must practise, in acquiring the first rudiments of reading. However, the weakness and volatility of the little scholar, and the great repugnancy of our nature to exchange ease and play for restraint and toil, must be borne in mind. But little must be put upon him. For a time, attention

must not be required for more than a very few minutes, and that not more than once or twice a day. But what is done, be it ever so little, should be done with a regular aim at correctness. "A little and well," should be the teacher's motto. Above all, the utmost endeavours, consistent with sober and sound instruction, must be used to sweeten the labour, and not only to prevent bad tempers, but to foster every thing good and amiable. Times must be chosen for lessons, when no particular cause exists for ill humour or impatience; and whatever is likely to excite such tempers must be kept out of the way. If any thing unexpectedly occurs to make the child greatly wish for an earlier release than usual, it will be generally right to indulge him more or less, according to circumstances, in this point, if he has been tolerably good in his lesson: and even when he has not, and it is impossible to speak of the favour as in any degree the fruit of his good conduct; or if from any other cause, from bad temper, for instance, it is doubtful whether he is in a state to go on properly with his reading; it will usually be best to stop the lesson. But for obvious reasons he must not, in the latter case, be treated

with indulgence, but made to feel that he has been an offender by some little restraint or privation, and, above all, by a suitable conversation on the subject. A delicacy of management is requisite on these occasions. They call not only for a due appreciation of their importance, but for sagacity, thought, lively and well-poised feelings, self-command, and active and sound principle in the parent. In most of these requisites, mothers far exceed fathers. Let this consideration, while it gives confidence and vigour to the exertions of the mother, also point out to her the extent of her criminality, if she fail to make a good use of a talent bestowed upon her for the benefit of her offspring; and let it impress on the father the necessity of using double diligence in qualifying himself for the discharge of his parental duties, than which none can be more clearly indispensable or more sacred.

As the child becomes rather older, and a little habituated to his business, his lessons will naturally be increased both in length and in frequency. Less care will be requisite in choosing the time for them; and after a while that care will cease, and the school hours will be stated and determinate: less weight will be

given to obstacles in the way of proceeding with a lesson: and in all points more regularity, more self-possession, more voluntary exertion, and longer and stricter attention will be expected from him.—I would, however, caution parents against looking for a rapid or uninterrupted change in these respects. They will so much wish for such a change, both for the sake of their scholar, and to lighten their own burthen as teachers, that they will be under a great temptation to expect it, and to be somewhat impatient and harsh when disappointed. This state of mind in parents will be very prejudicial to both parties; and unless there be a timely consciousness of error, and a recurrence to a better course, the most disastrous consequences will follow. The bonds of affection will be loosened, the confidence of the child will be lost; and he will be led to feel towards his parent as a severe master, instead of a wise and tender friend, armed indeed by the Almighty with extraordinary power, but always unwilling to use it, and effecting his purposes, if possible, by the most mild and gentle means. In truth, it is highly unreasonable to expect little creatures to make a regular and rapid improvement in their

reading. Such an improvement may now and then take place: but in general the change will be very gradual, and subject to great fluctuations. For a time, a child may make great progress, then suddenly appear to make none at all, or even to retrograde. Surely, this is very natural in a little being come into the world with a strong disposition to please itself, rather than to do its duty; and ready to be impatient and fretful and self-willed, when thwarted in its wishes; and with mental powers but just opening, and habits, if on the whole good, yet very new and imperfect, and affording no security against the sudden inroads of temptation. I have often seen parents so highly unreasonable as to treat evils of this kind as if they were quite extraordinary, or almost intolerable, and such as call for expressions of dissatisfaction, and a severity of treatment, not at all to be vindicated; and the course they have pursued in addition to other bad consequences has often tended to aggravate the very evil they so irrationally deplore, and treat in so injudicious, not to say in so unchristian a manner. Undoubtedly such faults are to be counteracted; but by moderate measures, unaccompanied by anger or discon-

tent in the parent, and not habitually harassing to the child, or likely to make him hate reading, and dread the lesson-hour, and, worse than all, likely to alienate his affections from his natural protector and guide.

What has been said will show, that though a warm advocate for mildness, temperance, and forbearance in education, I am no friend to Rousseau's plan, or those, built on the same foundation, which have been proposed by others. I shall not stop to speak of such plans at any length, because I do not believe they now receive much countenance among those who are likely to read these observations, and shall only say that they are founded on not merely an erroneous view of human nature, but on a view the very reverse of that given of it in the Scriptures; and that in their operation they are calculated to set aside the Christian system, and to steel the mind against it. What can be more false and mischievous than to represent, and treat man as a creature disposed of himself to act rightly, and to cultivate every good disposition, if he be but preserved from being spoiled by priests and pedants, and be put in the way to see, by the established

order of things in the world, that virtue will best promote his happiness? Had this been agreeable to truth, since man confessedly wishes to be happy, we should have seen virtue clearly predominant among men, if not universal; and vice merely an exception to the general state of things. It is true, that God, in his wisdom and mercy has so ordered things, that virtue does promote happiness, and vice leads to misery, even in this world. At least, this is the strong tendency of things; and it is very important to point out this truth to children, and to accustom them to feel it in the common occurrences of life. Doubtless, the writers under consideration have ingenious devices for effecting this object: devices, however, in which there is by far too much address and management to suit my taste. I should be very apprehensive, that placing a child in the midst of so artificial a system was a bad introduction to the sincerity and godly simplicity of the Gospel. But if this objection were unfounded; if these devices were as innocent and useful as they are ingenious; still as to adopt the system of such writers, as a whole, would be most ruinous, so to recommend their works without great circum-

spection to those around us, is, in my opinion, highly dangerous. I have thought some good people very unguarded on this point. Such a recommendation is, in fact, a recommendation of poison, for the sake of the virtues that, by a chemical process, may be extracted from it. But in the cases to which I allude there has been no due caution against the deleterious qualities of the poison, and no due consideration whether those to whom the recommendation was given had any competent skill in Christian chemistry.

According to a just view of human nature, whether derived from religion, from observation, or from history, in education it cannot be left to the choice of the child, what he will learn, and when he will learn it. Education cannot by any means be reduced to a sort of play; but it must be a discipline upheld by parental authority—mild indeed, and gentle in its exercise, and sweetened by affection, but still a discipline—having for its object, in humble dependence on the Divine blessing, the conducting of an immortal creature, in the first stage of its existence, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Its great

business must necessarily be the counteracting of the natural bent of the mind to evil, and the instilling and fostering, under the guidance and by the help of the Holy Spirit, of a new nature, the very reverse of that which we all bring into the world.—How can this be effected on the plan of Rousseau or his followers? It is plainly impossible; and the attempt would only increase the evils which education should remedy, and fill the mind with fascinating but deadly errors which it would be very difficult afterwards to eradicate.

The ends of education are to be attained partly by regular lessons, and partly by attention to the child out of school hours.

With respect to lessons, I have already made some remarks, and now proceed to offer others.

It is important that the lesson should be learnt in the presence of the teacher for some years after reading commences. A young child is too thoughtless, and has too little self-command, to be left by himself, while he learns a lesson. His time will probably be mispent, and the lesson will be neglected, and he will accustom himself to trifle over his book: and, what is more important, he will fall into a habit

of omitting what he knows he ought to do, which will naturally be extended to other branches of duty; and this failure will, in all probability, lead to another and a worse evil—namely, that of making disingenuous excuses, and even of telling direct lies, in order to avoid punishment.

Another circumstance, nearly allied to the foregoing, deserves attention. A parent should be ready, if possible, to hear a child his lesson as soon as he offers to say it. It is not uncommon with teachers to make their scholars wait as long as suits their own convenience, and expect them to be getting their lessons better during this delay. Such expectation is not at all rational, and will almost always be disappointed. It is not easy to induce a child to attend to his lesson, even when he is convinced of the impossibility of saying it unless he gives his attention. But to expect continued attention from him to the study of a lesson in which he thinks himself already perfect; to expect that he will bestow on the lesson time and labour which appear to him superfluous, and proceed in the same dull round of getting and getting what he thinks he can say already, this

surely is absurd. Is it not also an offence against that law of love, which, while it demands an attention to the feelings, and a condescension to the weaknesses of all mankind, lays us under a peculiar and more pressing obligation to consult the happiness of our children, and forbids us to expect to occupy the place we ought in their affection and confidence, if we will not obey its dictates? An unnecessary delay in hearing lessons must tend not only to disgust the scholar, but to add to the labours of the teacher, who will generally find that a lesson which would have been said ten minutes before with good humour and alacrity, is now either not said at all, or said in an imperfect manner, and with weariness and dissatisfaction. Where there are several scholars, it will be difficult entirely to avoid this evil; but by good management it may be brought within such narrow bounds as not to be formidable. When children become somewhat older, say eight or nine, they may bear waiting for a short time till a teacher is ready; and, under proper guards against attendant evils, it may sometimes be even a useful discipline.

Something will shortly be said as to religious

books. With respect to others, there is ample choice of proper ones; but there is a still greater number of such as are improper. Those ought to be selected which are not so easy as to require little, if any, mental exertion, nor so difficult as to be necessarily a burthen; which will be interesting to the child, but not frivolous or absurd, or bearing a resemblance to novels; which convey useful instruction, and which harmonize with good principles.

Little children are apt to contract unnatural tones in reading, and also a low, indistinct, and muttering articulation. A teacher must guard against these evils. The latter is best prevented by placing the scholar first at a little distance, and by degrees at a greater, till he and his instructor, each having a book, are removed several yards asunder. As the bad articulation usually arises from their being close together, and poring over the same book, so it is prevented by changing that system. The only objection to the course I propose, is the interruption to other scholars who are getting lessons, by the loud voice of the one who is engaged with the teacher. In some cases this may be so great an evil as to make that course unadvisable; in

others, a little ingenuity in arrangement will be necessary to make it practicable; and this will be cheerfully employed, if its benefits are properly appreciated. Of course, it cannot be adopted until the time is arrived when the teacher is no longer obliged to point to the letter or word to be read by the scholar.

With respect to books of a strictly religious description, some further remarks are necessary. In using such books, care should be taken to keep their *great* object constantly in view. It would be a desecration of the awful subject to use a book of this kind entirely, or even principally, for the purpose of teaching a child to read. Such a proceeding would be somewhat like employing a church for some common worldly purpose. It is of high importance, that religion should always wear her holy garb, and that the youthful mind should never approach her but with the sentiments which she ought to inspire. Whatever tends to dissociate her from such sentiments; to habituate children to hear her truths, or use her language, without such sentiments; does them an injury which it may be very difficult to repair. To speak of God, his word, or his will,

without holy reverence, is, I conceive, repugnant to the spirit of the Third Commandment, and therefore a breach of it: and that reverence will not be retained, if books on such subjects are taken up when religious improvement is not the leading object.

If this be so, let parents beware of using such books merely as vehicles even of religious knowledge. Religious knowledge, without religious dispositions will not impress the mind with reverence. The head may be stored; but when the heart remains cold, Divine Truth not only fails to produce the effect intended by it, but the mind is gradually hardened against right impressions at a future time. To hear solemn truths, without feeling them, grows into a habit. God forbid that any approach to so awful a state should be contemplated with indifference! We all know how tremendous it is, as exhibited in the case of some loud but hollow professors of religion. We also may have seen or heard of instances of desperate obduracy in persons who have grown old in assisting in the outward services of religion, without yielding to its power. How attentive, then, should parents be to the frame of their own minds, and how

desirous of promoting a devout spirit in those of their children, when the reading or conversation is on religious subjects! Let them endeavour to make it a holy exercise to both parties. Let them endeavour to exclude a curious, or a cavilling, or a controversial, no less than a formal spirit, in the little beings to whom they are opening the heavenly path. Let them be quite in earnest in making their lessons lessons of humility, reverence, modesty, devotedness to God, and trust in him, and love of him, as well as lessons of religious truth. Then, with the Divine blessing, will a beautiful harmony exist between the head and the heart. Then will parents have the highest gratification which they can enjoy as parents; that of seeing their charge make sensible progress towards perfect men and women in Christ, and grow in favour both with God and man.

But among the books to which these remarks may apply, the holy Scriptures are beyond comparison pre-eminent. They never should be approached but with *deep* reverence for the Divine Author, and a *deep* sense of their inestimable value. When employed in reading them, the parent should set an example sometimes of

short aspirations to God, (short, simple, and modest, but from the heart,) for his blessing, and always of a devout spirit; and the very book should be used and preserved with more than ordinary care. Somewhat of the temper of mind inculcated on Moses, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground," should be sought and cherished on such occasions. In order the better to instil and preserve a proper reverence for the Bible, I would recommend the not beginning to read either the Old or the New Testament with children before their general respect for religion, and their progress in self-command, afford reasonable security that they will conduct themselves rightly while so engaged. They should also have attained some facility in reading, that the difficuties they find in a sentence may not so far occupy their attention as not to leave it sufficiently disengaged for the attaining of the spiritual advantages which ought to be the great object in view. When they do begin to read the Scriptures, let those parts be carefully selected which they can best understand, and which are most likely to interest them; and let the read-

ings always be short, and be held out rather as a favour than as a task, and always as a religious duty.

Perhaps there is no religious book with which it is better to begin than Watts's Hymns for Children. They are very simple and attractive, and contain (if I may so say) a body of sound nursery divinity; and this is presented in such a dress as to gratify the imagination, and affect the heart while it informs the understanding. Some of these hymns may with great advantage be gradually taught to children from the mouth of the parent before they can be read. This work may commence even before a child knows his letters. It cannot, however, be conducted too tenderly, and scarcely too gradually. Very great care should be taken not to disgust the little ones with that occupation. He should never have religion brought before him but with a smiling though a serious aspect;—such an aspect as may invite to a further acquaintance. These hymns should be carefully explained, as they are learned, and in a tone, and with little illustrations, and with gentle but lively applications to the experience and conscience of the scholar, all congenial with the spirit of Watts's

poetry: and they should continue a standing book until all of them have been learned and repeated (and never without appropriate observations from the parent) two or three times over.

Some short and easy Bible History (as Mrs. Trimmer's) is very useful as soon as the child can read with tolerable ease. It will convey some general idea of the longer narratives; and while it will furnish useful lessons at the time, and give the parent a wider range in his illustrations, and in his appeals to the conduct of others either in the way of example or of warning in his incidental conversations with the child, it will prepare the way for reading the Bible itself at a rather later period with more advantage. The different parts of a long historical narration, interrupted often by digressions in the Sacred Volume, will thus be more easily kept in the memory so as to form a whole in the child's mind as he proceeds. There is another history of the Bible of a higher class, which has great merit, and will be found extremely useful in its proper season. Its title is, "The History of the Bible in familiar Dialogues, by a Lady," 4 vols. 12mo. printed for and sold by Gardiner, 19, Prince's Street,

Cavendish Square. This is a work which combines solid instruction and sound views of religion with that share of dialogue, and that ease of manner and style, which are pleasant to children. Parents are much indebted to the authoress.

As to catechisms, it is best to begin with Watts's, which are far better calculated for very young children than the admirable one of the Church of England. They should be learnt, like his hymns, very gradually, and with explanations and illustrations. His first is adapted to a child just beginning to put letters together; and his second to one two or three years older.

To the second will succeed our Church Catechism. It appears to me a sad mistake to make children say this by heart, without suitable explanations and remarks from the teacher. When this course is followed (and it is too common) the child generally understands very imperfectly what he is repeating; the repetition, it is to be feared, is accompanied by no devotional feelings or self-application; and as far as the child does attend to the sense of what he is saying, there is reason to apprehend that the evils will accrue

which have been already noticed as flowing from religious truths passing through the mind without making religious impressions on the heart. To avoid such evils, and to derive from the catechism the good it was intended to convey, it is advisable, I think, to divide it into four or five parts: and to let one part be said every Sunday, (or oftener,) and made a ground work for considerable explanations and illustrations. Questions will be put to the children, to try how far they understand what they have been saying, and are acquainted with those parts of Scripture which have a close connexion with it. Their answers should be kindly elicited, and kindly treated. They will often be erroneous, and generally crude and imperfect; but instead of being forward to find fault, the teacher should give what encouragement he properly can, and gently and often indirectly, correct errors and supply deficiencies by his amplification and illustration of an answer, and by his further questions on the subject. He should not only be willing to answer questions himself, but should rather invite them; taking care, however, not to be materially drawn away from his object, or led into

desultory conversation. The whole, on his part, should be marked by Christian seriousness, attempered by parental love and condescension. He should be

> Much impressed
> Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
> And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
> May feel it too: affectionate in look,
> And tender in address.

But care must be taken that the conversation or lecture (whichever it may be called) shall not harass or agitate, but wear a soft and smiling dress, and rather slide gently into the heart than seize and appal it. The new situations and circumstances which his children respectively have before them, with their attendant temptations, wants, advantages, and duties, will be borne in mind, and have considerable influence as to the turn he will give to his discourse. They will suggest much information to be communicated, much advice, many warnings, and much encouragement.

The parent will also have an eye to the present faults and defects of the individuals of his little audience, and he will now and then openly speak of them; but he will always execute this part of his duty with

delicacy and tenderness, and qualify what he says by introducing, when he honestly can, some commendation of those whose faults he mentions, and always by laying a stress on the means of improvement, and on the grounds of hope that such means will be employed. *Such* a mention of faults is useful: but it must be managed with some address, and with a careful attention to the disposition of the child; or it may be revolting, and do mischief, especially, if other children are present. I have always found these catechetical conversations pleasant to children, and highly beneficial. As the little circle becomes older and better informed on religious subjects, the illustration and application of the several heads will become more extensive, and the several divisions of the catechism as they are repeated in their turns, may be considered as each consisting of two parts, which may be alternately the subjects of comment. Thus, if the *first* parts are the special objects of attention in one course of these lectures, the *second* parts will be so in the next course; and the same portion will recur for illustration only on every eighth or tenth Sunday, or five or six times in the year. This

plan will afford a pleasing variety to older pupils and yet bring each part of the catechism sufficiently often under review. I usually continue these lectures with my children till they are fifteen or older.

It may be proper here to introduce some remarks on the importance, and on the best means, of fixing passages of Scripture in the memory of children.

I fear it is too common to be satisfied with a less intimate acquaintance with the Word of God than becomes creatures to whom so inestimable a treasure is given. The Bible is at hand, and is often, perhaps is regularly, read. Its different parts are recognised as old acquaintance on each re-perusal; and they are not passed over without care and attention. In this way a foundation is laid, with the Divine blessing, of sound religious knowledge, and of solid piety. Still, however, there is often but little readiness in producing from memory the very expressions of Scripture. There is a wide departure from the spirit of the directions given to the Israelites:—"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them dili-

gently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."* And yet on an ability to produce the very words of Scripture promptly and correctly, from the stores of memory, depends often our right and ready application of this our Divine Rule, both in directing our own course through life, and in giving useful advice to those about us. Have not we all felt the prodigious advantage of an apposite passage of Scripture striking the mind on occasions when temptation has pressed upon us, or when we have doubted as to the course we ought to pursue? Nor is the advantage less, when we can support our advice to others by the very words of Holy Writ. But the benefits resulting from this knowledge of Scripture are by no means confined to such occasions. They extend to the general frame of the soul, and to

* Deut. vi. 6—9.

its growth in graee; and, in this point of view, are far more important than in any other. What a rich treasury for a supply of holy thoughts, and for the cultivation of holy affections, with the Divine aid, does that man possess, whose mind is well stored with the Word of God! To him "nunquam minus solus quam cum solus" will be emphatically applicable. No lonely walk will be dull to him. Even sleepless hours on his bed will seldom pass unpleasantly, but will be marked by a heavenly calm, if not also by filial joy. How often, when thus employed, will he find time slide swiftly away, and be surprised to find the morning break on him much sooner than he expected! But these gratifications, though so pure and substantial, are of small value compared with the gradual transformation of soul which, through the Divine blessing, will accompany them. Perhaps nothing human promotes more powerfully a renewal in the Divine image, especially in persons of active pursuits, than a habit of gently dwelling, in hours of solitude and retirement, on such portions of the Divine Word as best suit existing circumstances and the existing temper of the mind.

This exercise

Luxurientia compescet, nimis aspera sano
Levabit cultu, virtute carentia tollet.

All that is within will be purified, harmonized, cheered, and elevated; and it is apparent how much a frequent recurrence of such an inward frame must tend to form a new creature.

I may have an undue partiality for this mode of employing the thoughts in religion; but I must say, I greatly prefer it to suffering them to roam at will, and pour themselves forth in extemporaneous effusions. When so let loose, they are apt to be more under the guidance of human passions, and are more likely to run into superstition or enthusiasm. At all events, it can scarcely be hoped that the pictures they present to the soul will be so innoxious, so pure, so dignified, and so edifying, as those which are found in the inspired records of the communications of God to man.

In order to enjoy the full benefit of this species of religious contemplation, our knowledge of Scripture must be extensive and accurate. It will not answer the purpose to be master of a few passages; or to be acquainted with many, but only in a loose and imperfect way. The

power of selection should be as extensive as the occasions which call for it, and the dispositions of the soul, are various; and when a passage is selected, we ought to be able to make use of it without mistake or difficulty.

Now, how will this knowledge of Scripture be best attained? Beyond all doubt, by learning much by heart during the period of youth. I have heard a gentleman, very eminent for ability and for biblical knowledge, say, that he remembers no part of his Bible so well as verses which he got by heart when a boy, as proofs of the different positions in the Church Catechism. It is in youth that the memory is most retentive; and the stores it then lays up are the least subject to loss or decay from the lapse of time. Like certain flowers gathered at a proper season for preservation, they retain, even to a late period, much of their original freshness; while passages learnt in after-life are apt to fade, and escape altogether out of the mind, if not frequently reinstated by repetition. Besides, by beginning early, there is ample time for laying in a large store of the more important parts of Scripture; and what is learnt will take deeper root, not only in the memory, but in the affec-

tions, and become more, if I may so say, a part of ourselves. The impressions thus received will, with God's blessing,

Grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength,

and contribute essentially to the formation, in due time, of the perfect man in Christ.

In order to acquire this knowledge, let children learn a certain portion of Scripture every day, and say it to one of their parents. The number of verses appointed to be learnt, should not be such as to make this business burthensome. When the passage is repeated, it should not only be explained, (if necessary,) but pains should be taken to lead the young person to enter into its spirit, and to be properly affected by it. Without this, little is attained. It will soon be neglected and nearly forgotten, when the superintending care of the parent no longer keeps it in the memory by fresh repetitions. Such repetitions are very importants part of the system. They should take place at considerable intervals, say every six or nine months with the younger children, who are still, at other times, making daily additions to their stock of Scripture-passages; and every year, or year and a half, with

the elder ones, who are no longer making such additions systematically, though a passage which happens to strike them will now and then be added to those they had learnt before. Every repetition should be attended by affectionate and familiar conversations, calculated to lead to such feelings and dispositions as the passages respectively ought to excite. If this is done with tenderness, and with due attention to the age, acquirements, and natural temperament of the children, and with a care to avoid whatever may make the employment irksome or harassing, a parent will seldom find any of his children attend him on such occasions with reluctance, but will generally see in their countenances and manner marks of interest and satisfaction.

It is possible, that the young and the diffident may sometimes fancy that they shall find some difficulty in fixing on passages for their children to learn; and this may be an obstacle in the way of adopting the course I have ventured to recommend. Let them make the attempt, and they will succeed sufficiently well. However, as they may think otherwise, I will put, in the Appendix, a collection of passages

from the New Testament, which I have known to be used in a young family with good effect. Great nicety is not requisite in a selection of this kind.

Two cautions, however, may be necessary in making a selection.

Avoid passages which have a very direct bearing on abstruse and much-controverted points.—Children ought not to be puzzled in religion. In this sense, as in others, spiritual milk, and not strong meat, is their proper food. The great aim should be to make, by Divine aid, their heavenly Father, and their Sanctifier, but, above all, their Saviour and his Gospel, the objects of their reverence and of their affections; and this end will be greatly counteracted by fatiguing and bewildering their understanding. When difficulties occur to themselves, or are so far connected with the subject before them that they cannot be entirely passed over, it appears to me best to avoid entering minutely into them, but to show, that from the infinite distance between God and man, difficulties, and insuperable difficulties, must necessarily be expected, when God vouchsafes, to his creatures any communication respecting his own nature,

and his own government. Nor is it less important to avoid controverted, than to avoid abstruse points:—indeed, those which are abstruse are generally controverted. Controversy subjects vital religion in adults to imminent danger, unless they are very advanced and eminent Christians, and even then it is not without its perils: and, in my opinion, it never ought to be undertaken, except in cases of necessity, or pushed beyond that necessity. But in the case of children, with such weak intellects, such shallow knowledge, such lively and ill-regulated imaginations and feelings, and, above all, with religious principles and habits so extremely frail and imperfect, it *must* humanly speaking, be fatal to all that is good.

In general, do not select those addresses to God which are likely to be considered by the child as intended to be used by himself in lifting his thoughts to Heaven. However edifying these may be to persons more advanced in the Christian course, as expressing in the language of Inspiration their devout breathings of soul, they are unfit and unsafe for children. It cannot be supposed, that the language which suited the religious affections of David, will suit those of a

child, who is just beginning that spiritual course, in which David had made so extraordinary a progress, as to be "a man after God's own heart." And, if David's language is unfit, it must be unsafe, for a child. Nothing is more important in religion, than modesty, simplicity, and godly sincerity: and it is evident, that addresses to the Deity, or expressions of inward feelings, which go at all beyond what the actual state of our souls would naturally prompt, are not compatible with those estimable qualities. Nay, I confess, that even in adults, and much more in children, I am better pleased when the outward manifestations of devotion evidently fall somewhat short of the internal impressions. By proceeding in an opposite course, many, I believe, have been led to direct hypocrisy, and many more have become self-deceivers. Where there appears to be, if not a sort of contest who shall use the most fervent expressions, at least an endeavour, while engaged in religious exercises or conversation, to work up the feelings to a high pitch, and to express them in words to the full as warm and glowing, who does not see that we are in danger of endeavouring to appear to others, and in most imminent danger of ap-

pearing to ourselves, more spiritual and devout than we really are? Look at the concise modesty of the address of the justified Publican, and at the beautiful simplicity of the Lord's Prayer; and compare them with the exuberant, if not the extravagant, style too often met with in human devotional compositions, and still more in extemporaneous prayers.