

## CHAP. V

*Mechanical Reading:—how obviated —School-Lessons to promote Moral Qualities:—Obedience; Regularity; Attention; Patience; Alacrity.—Happy Fruits of these Qualities.—Failures to be expected.—How to be borne.*

IT often happens that reading is made too mechanical. If the words are properly pronounced, and attention is paid to the stops, and the parts of the sentence are put together with tolerable propriety, the teacher rests satisfied, though the understanding of the scholar has been little employed. This is very generally the course with village schoolmasters, and many parents of good education too nearly approach it. Even the mere reading, were this alone the object, as it often is in a village school, can never be good when the mind does not thoroughly enter into the sense; but that parents, whose views extend much farther, should ever acquiesce in their children's pronouncing sentences some-

what like parrots, and missing a large portion at least of the information and improvement which it was the intention of the author to convey, is really surprising. When this kind of reading is permitted, I believe it is owing in a good measure to their not being aware how imperfectly their little scholars understand what is so plain to themselves. The evil in question is of far greater importance than may at first appear. The child is led into a habit of reading without thinking, and of resting contented with a very confused notion of what is read. Scarcely any thing can be a greater obstacle to the acquisition of sound and useful knowledge, and of vigorous habits of investigation. If these are not acquired, the mind will generally become a prey to frivolity and intellectual idleness; and it is well if it do not also resign itself to low pursuits, and sensual indulgence. As one antidote, through Divine grace, to these most unchristian and often fatal evils, let a child always be made, as soon as he can read a sentence, to understand what he reads, and to give an account of it afterwards. In order to effect the latter object, when his reading has been more than three or four lines, let him take his book and look it

over, and give the account when he finds himself prepared. The parent must not expect this to be given without leading questions to draw it forth; and he will think it an important office to make this part of the business pleasant to his scholar, by smoothing difficulties, making the best of imperfect answers, and interspersing the whole with suitable illustrations and moral remarks, in a tone and manner favourable to the right feelings of his pupil, and likely to exclude wrong ones, or to administer a gentle cure to such as may be rising. So also, whatever is to be got by heart, should always be previously read, explained, illustrated, and (if I may so say) practically applied.

But the parent ought always to bear in mind, that every lesson is as truly a lesson in the moral qualities to be acquired and strengthened by its being properly learnt, and properly said, as it is in the branch of knowledge to which it relates. Those qualities are of a very high order, and the character in future life depends extremely on the progress made in their acquisition during early youth. I will particularize five of them: *obedience, regularity, attention, patience, and alacrity*. These ought to be in

exercise during every lesson ; and a proper regard to them in the pupil during school-hours, will do much, under the Divine blessing, towards making them habitual.

1. *Obedience*.—I well remember being much impressed by a sermon about twenty years ago, when I was a young father, in which the preacher said, that were he to select one word as the most important in education, it should be the word “obey.” My experience since has fully convinced me of the justice of the remark. Without filial obedience, every thing must go wrong : with it, if the parent has right views of his duty, and is consistent in his practice, notwithstanding present appearances may be very unpromising, every thing may not improbably become right. Is not a disobedient child guilty of a manifest and habitual breach of the Fifth Commandment ? And is not a parent, who suffers this disobedience to continue when he knows he is armed with sufficient power to overcome it, an habitual partaker in his child’s offence against that commandment ? How can those who are thus criminal hope for God’s blessing on any part of their conduct ? and, without that blessing, what can they expect

but a progress from bad to worse? Besides, without obedience, there will be no respect for the parent; but he will be the object of disregard, and even of a portion of contempt. He will be treated slightly; his opinion will be criticised; his judgment will be questioned; and the very endeavours he uses to lead his son to better sentiments will probably produce more harm than good. It is surprising, that under the Divine government, the enforcing of obedience should be so essential a duty of parents, when the whole tenor of Scripture shows us, that obedience is the very groundwork of Christianity? The natural propensity of man to shake off the yoke of legitimate authority, is the disposition most adverse to God and his service. By the disobedience of our first parents, sin came into the world; and through the obedience of the Second Adam, are the gates of heaven opened to true believers. The wicked are emphatically styled, “the children of disobedience:” and it is clearly the primary object of the Divine plan of salvation to conquer the rebellious spirit of man, and to bring him into a state of humility and submission. Parental authority is one powerful instru-

ment for effecting this change. It is intended to bend the stubborn will, to repress froward humours, and, by habituating a child to subjection to earthly parents, to prepare him for Christian obedience to his heavenly Father. In proportion as filial obedience is calculated to smooth the way for true religion, filial disobedience must produce the opposite effect. The parent who habitually gives way to it, has appalling reason to apprehend that he is educating his child not for heaven, but for hell. His labours for its good may be many and great; but what produce can he expect from such a soil? The heart, poisoned by pride and selfishness, will be removed very far indeed from that "honest and good heart" in which the seed produces "thirty, sixty, a hundred fold." I have been induced to dwell the longer on this subject, from having observed many good people fail to require regularly and steadily prompt obedience from their children. This failure proceeds, I think, principally from that affection, and that suavity of manners, which are the genuine fruits of Christianity: but partly from a perversion of the Christian tenet, that "God alone is the Author of all good," inducing, or

rather tempting, them to leave to Him, with too little effort on their part, as his instruments, the cure of those evils against which they find it most irksome to contend. Let them, however, recollect, that Jesus Christ, our model, united the most determined and invincible resolution with more than human love; and personal exertions, almost too great for his mortal frame, with perfect reliance on the Divine Power.

2. *Regularity.*—Whoever has observed its high importance in human concerns, and the natural propensity of man to be changeful and desultory, will enforce its observance in his system of education. Man is formed to attain to far higher powers than those with which he is naturally endowed, and to reach far higher objects than those which appear to be within his grasp. But these can only be obtained by continued and progressive efforts, which carry him on from step to step, till, from a state little differing from that of the brutes, he arrives at one which exhibits strong marks of his divine original, and no slight prognostics of a high destination. In such a course, regularity is absolutely necessary. Without it, the greatest human exertions will be productive of compa-

ratively little good; and however they may sometimes astonish the beholders, they will rather resemble the extraordinary leaps of a wild animal, than the steady pace of the domesticated horse, which carries the rider to the end of a long journey. And yet how unwilling is man to submit to the rules and restraints indispensable to success in his best pursuits! He is fond of novelty; fond of ease; and loves, if active, rather to riot in the wanton and capricious exercise of his powers; and, if of a quiet disposition, rather to waste them in sloth, than to make a steady and well-directed use of them and reap the rich fruit of their legitimate exertion. To counteract this propensity, and give the habits a right direction, must be one of the objects of education. But this work must be carried on with moderation, and, for a few of the first years of the period under review, the parent must be content to let regularity be interrupted by a variety of little circumstances already noticed, when its observance would be particularly trying to the child; but it ought to be his endeavour to shorten this period as much as he properly can, and at length to reduce his system to strict order and method.



The hours of business must be regular, and the lessons regular: regularly got, and regularly said. This regularity will be found not more favourable to the acquiring of knowledge, than to the subduing of selfishness, and the wayward humours which attend it, and to the growth of self-command and self-denial, and to the practical elevation of a sense of duty above all the allurements of external objects or vagrant fancies.

3. *Attention.*—It consists in a steady employment of the mind on the business immediately before it. It is surprising in how great a degree the ability of thus chaining down thought to any prescribed object is given by a right education, and of what high importance it is, not only in many of the walks of science, but in the common affairs of life. I once was for several weeks with a foreigner of very fair natural abilities, but never subjected to the discipline of early study, who would often arrive at right conclusions by a kind of jump, of which he could give but little explanation, but was incapable of fixing his mind on a train of reasoning so as to see the dependence of the several parts, each on the other. He took considerable

pains to obtain a little mathematical knowledge; but his thoughts were so quick in their movements, and so intractable, that I question whether he could be said fully to understand any one proposition in Euclid. In giving an account of any piece of history which he had been reading, instead of telling you with some regularity what he had found in his author, he drew you a picture of his own, lively, and often to the purpose, but produced by illustrations and analogies, and a sort of theatrical exhibition, and not by a narration of consecutive facts. Through the general diffusion of regular education in this country among those with whom we associate, I suspect that we are apt to look on this intractability of thought as a mental disease in a greater degree than we ought; and that, among savage nations, it is by no means uncommon, or rather it is perhaps the ordinary state of the human mind. Whether this opinion be well-founded or not, we shall all agree in deprecating such a state of intellect among our children, and be anxious to prevent it. Let, then, parents make a point of using their children, and especially their daughters, whose natural volatility most needs

this discipline, not only to give their attention to the business in which they are engaged, but to listen, very early to a *little* reasoning, (at first a very little,) and give a short account of the argument they have heard; the parent taking care that the steps shall follow each other in their right order, and that none of them shall be omitted. By degrees the arguments may become longer. A skilful teacher will select a subject interesting to the pupil, who will consider what passes as conversation, (and not as (what in truth it is) a lesson in which the *dulce* is most visible, and the *utile* rather concealed. A habit of occasionally passing a quarter of an hour in this way, and of proceeding on a similar plan, when the children give an account of what they have been reading, and are asked for opinions respecting it, will do much towards making them reason methodically, which is a great point gained towards reasoning justly, and therefore towards acting rationally, as they pass through life. We often meet with a person who declares that he (or more frequently, I am afraid, she) cannot understand an argument used in conversation, though plain in itself. And why? Scrutinize a little, and you will

generally find the true cause to be an indisposition to apply the mind with regular attention to it; an indisposition, in fact, to bear a burthen which has not been rendered light by the introduction of proper habits in early years.

It is almost superfluous to add, that habits of attention, besides laying a foundation for usefulness in future life, contribute essentially to the comfort of the school-room, and to the moral improvement of the scholars. They not only extremely facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, but do much towards making study pleasant, by making it vigorous and productive: they thus draw forth the faculties, prevent the tædium which is apt to prey on children in their school-hours, when their minds are not fully employed; promote self-government; and do away the temptation to those false excuses and pretences, of which idleness seldom fails continually to avail itself.

4. *Patience*.—Scarcely any disposition is more wanted in life than this, and education affords ample means of instilling and fostering it. Man is not only called to endure many natural evils, and many evils brought upon him by his fellow-creatures: but in his Christian war-

fare with his own innate depravity, he must continually mortify his strongest inclinations and restrain his fondest wishes. "He that will come after me, must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." "If ye live after the flesh," (that is, according to your own natural desires,) "ye shall die : but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Eternal life is promised to those who seek for it "by *patient* continuance in well doing." And we are told, that if we would be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing," we must let "Patience have her perfect work." Such was "the good fight of faith" required by our Saviour and his Apostles, and such must it be to the end of time. In this case, as in every other, God makes no demand with which he does not enable man to comply. Not only the Holy Spirit is ready to aid him, but under the Divine government he is placed in circumstances calculated to prepare him for obedience to the Divine will. Among these circumstances, education is intended by the Almighty to hold a distinguished place. And the better to render education a powerful instrument for the attain-

ment of this end, God has bound parents, not only by duty, but also by a strong and present interest, operating daily and almost hourly, to inculcate patience. An impatient child, if not the plague of the house, can scarcely fail to be the plague of himself and of his instructor. How happens it, then, that this fault is so frequently suffered to prevail among children? Because the parent is often impatient himself; and this fault will completely frustrate all his efforts to conquer impatience in his child. He is also often self-indulgent; and his interest, however great and apparent, will not induce him to take the trouble requisite to subdue a fault, which incessantly re-appears, and calls for his unremitting attention. Perhaps, too, he persuades himself that wayward fits and cross humours must be tolerated in children, but that they will give way to good sense and maturer principles at a future period.

Vain reason all, and false philosophy!

Such a plea will not stand a moment before the maxim of the wise King of Israel: "Train up a child in the way he should go." From whatever cause the failure of a parent in promoting and

enforcing patience in his young charge may arise, let him count the cost. Let him recollect the speedy flight of time, and view the precious months and years of childhood, when his parental power is in full vigour, and the youthful mind pliable and docile, sliding swiftly away never to return. Does he think habits of impatience will not strengthen by indulgence? Or that he shall find it more easy to make a salutary and deep impression on the mind of the academician, aspiring to all the privileges of manhood; or of the sturdy school-boy, who, during three parts of the year, is out of his sight; than on that of a playful child, always with him, and conscious of entire dependence upon him? But his reliance is on the boy's future good sense and good principles. Miserable reliance!—and indulged at the expense of parental duty. Good sense and good principles *may*, in after life, effect, by God's blessing, a change of temper. But with what reason can a parent trust to a future change, while at present he suffers a child's judgment to be clouded by passion, and his practice to be at variance with good principles? And how, without a very offensive presumption, can he hope that God will in some other way confer

an advantage on his child, which he himself has not endeavoured to obtain for him by the appointed means of a good education ?

5. *Alacrity*.—A lesson may be got and said with obedience, regularity, attention, patience, and yet in the sight of God be got and said very ill. God “loveth a cheerful giver :” and not less a cheerful scholar. He requires that the heart shall do him homage, and willingly join in the performance of all our duties : and he accepts of nothing as true service done to him, which is done “grudgingly, and of necessity ” Hence the supreme importance of leading children, on Christian grounds, to go through their school-business with alacrity. How much this will also smooth the path of the teacher, and by drawing forth energy, and giving life to ingenuity, promote the progress and conduce to the happiness of the scholar, is apparent. So true is it, in this as in every thing, that “godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” The disposition which we are considering crowns all those which have been mentioned, at the same time that it is dependent upon them. The queen of school-room graces will shun the



spot where harsh and violent means are employed to secure them. The discipline by which they are enforced must be mild, rational, and enlightened ; and all the honest arts the parent can devise, must be employed to ward off temptations to evil, to lighten them when unavoidable, and to smooth the path of right conduct.

And now, let parents form to themselves an idea of a young family, in the main obedient, regular, attentive, patient, and cheerful in their school-hours, and contrast it with another of opposite habits and dispositions, and let them say whether the qualifications which have been mentioned will not amply repay any pains which can be taken to promote them, even if the present comfort and reputation of themselves and of their children were alone considered. Let them say, whether, even in this limited view, such fruits are not to be classed with the most valuable a school-room can produce. But, when they further consider, that several of them are strictly of celestial origin, and prepare those who possess them for eternal bliss; how unspeakably will they value them, how unwearied will they be in their cultivation !

I am almost afraid, lest the foregoing view of the happy effects of a proper education, under the blessing of God should lead parents to expect too much from their labours, and to be disheartened when they experience important failures. They will assuredly meet with much forgetfulness in their children, many instances of negligence, with some capricious fancies, and some cross humours; and, perhaps, in their young family, they may meet with individuals on whom it may be exceedingly difficult to engraft one or other of the five qualities which have been mentioned. But let them not be discouraged. A deep sense of their own frailty and propensity to evil, notwithstanding all the grace of God may have done for them; and a recollection that these same qualities, less corrected perhaps by Divine grace, are inherent in their children; should lead them to expect great obstacles, and rather to wonder at their success, than at their failures. In fact, how could they succeed in any one instance, but for the divine aid? How patiently then, and with what sweetness of temper, should they bear with difficulties and hindrances among their children, praying, and waiting quietly and se-

renely for the blessing of God, while they steadily and unweariedly continue to employ the means which, on full consideration, appear to them to be the best in their power! It is surprising how such conduct succeeds in the end: children altering unaccountably for the better, and a bright dawn opening on a parent when he thinks that a long and dark night is before him. Under discouraging circumstances, it is of the highest importance that he should possess his soul in patience, and not suffer his affection to be alienated from his child. If he fails in these respects, his ability to conduct him into the right path will assuredly be weakened—perhaps entirely lost. He will naturally apply himself with most care to rectify what he deems most faulty. But he ought to bear it in mind, that in these points the child will find a change most difficult. It is here, therefore, that the parent must not look for more than a very gradual improvement, interrupted probably by relapses and retrogressions, and must be particularly on his guard against haste and violence. In his other children, or perhaps in some parts of the character of the very child who causes

him great uneasiness, he may find much to cheer him. Such cordials, (if I may be allowed the term,) he may freely use, returning thanks for them to the Giver of all good : but let him never forget, that they must not lead him to lose sight of the evil existing in his family, or relax in his endeavours to remove it: