

CHAP. VIII.

Attention to Children when not at their Lessons.—Amusements.—Behaviour of Children to each other.—Quarrels.—A Domineering or a Teasing Spirit.—Selfishness and Jealousy.—Conduct of the two Sexes to each other.—Domestic Effects in well and ill educated Families contrasted.—Acquaintance.—Familiarity with Servants.

I HAVE intimated the necessity of a vigilant attention to children, during the time when they are not engaged by their lessons; and I must now dwell a little on this important branch of my subject.

If the primary object in education be to put things in the most favourable state for the formation of a new creature, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, in opposition to the strong bent of Nature, how can it be hoped that this will be effected, if, during great part, and in early childhood by far the greatest part, of every

day, Nature is suffered to take her course with only partial and irregular counteraction from the parent ; and if the new principle and spirit to be infused and cherished meet with as partial and irregular support? We all know, that in the moral as in the natural world, powerful and systematic tendencies will not fail to produce a large share of their appropriate effects, unless opposed by what is also powerful and systematic. Thus in the planetary system, the constant force of gravity is only balanced by the centrifugal force, equally constant ; and in our political system, the tendency of each of the branches which form the legislature to increase its own power, would not be kept in check, if the other two bodies were not continually ready to resist encroachments, either by the exercise of their constitutional powers, or (as is generally the case in practice) by their influence. Is then the natural tendency of man to evil the only uniform tendency which does not require constant counteraction? And is it in his earliest years, before settled habits of virtue are formed, and before systematic caution and recollection to guard against deflections from the right path are acquired, that we can

safely dispense with such counteraction? The prudent Christian father will judge far otherwise. His parental watchfulness will be as unremitting as circumstances will allow, and the care and earnestness with which it will be employed will be in some measure proportionate to the supreme importance of the object to be attained. I will proceed to point out some leading points, which will require attention when the child is out of the school-room.

First, then, with respect to *amusements*.—Of these God has made a most liberal provision, and I need not show that they are absolutely necessary for children. The parent ought to take care that they are not only harmless, but as useful as possible: and very useful they may be rendered, if he give his attention to this point with just views of human nature and of vital religion. By being forward to promote his child's pleasures, he will increase his affection, and gain his confidence, and sweeten the restraints and labours of the school-room:—by guiding him in the selection of them, he will show him practically what a natural propensity children have to sinful gratifications, but what a sting such gratifications leave behind them;

and also what an abundance of innocent pleasures our all-bountiful God has placed within our reach. He will make him sensible how frequently, while amusing himself, he may promote the happiness of others, and cherish just principles and good dispositions in his own bosom : and that pleasures which produce such fruits will generally be the sweetest in immediate enjoyment, and still sweeter in retrospect. He will also communicate much useful knowledge, while his child thinks only of his own amusement ; and he will discover many a fault and many a promising disposition, which would scarcely have shown themselves amidst the restraints of the school-room. He will often find himself able to correct the one without any grave process for that purpose ; and he will take advantage of the other at a season when the openness of the heart and the flow of the affections give him the best opportunity of connecting it with Christian principle, and of giving it a holy direction. Above all, he will make him sensible how conducive good principles are to pleasure ; that not only he is the happy *man*, but

He is the happy *boy*, whose life e'en now,
 Shows somewhat of that happier life to come:—
 that the ways of religion are “ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” This will be done by leading him to compare the
 Solid and heartfelt delight
 which he has enjoyed in amusements sanctioned by the Divine approbation, with the anxiety and the fears which must attend guilty pleasures, and the remorse which must follow them. He will thus begin to learn from his own experience, that

True piety is cheerful as the day;
 and that the misgivings and forebodings of a troubled conscience must poison every enjoyment. And this truth early fixed, and strongly felt at the time of life when the sensibility is all alive, will do much, by God's blessing, towards securing him from the power of temptations not only in childhood, but at subsequent periods, when many of them will attack him with greater force.—Let it not be thought, that the age of the parent will unfit him for promoting the pleasures of his child in his play-hours. On the contrary, if, instead of forcing amusements upon the child, he suffers him to

follow, in a great measure, the bent of his inclinations, and merely prevents every thing wrong, while he now and then lends his aid to remove little obstacles and to forward his child's objects, he will find himself a very acceptable companion. He will admire the Divine wisdom and benevolence, which, while it makes youth the joy of age, thus enables age, not only to guide the inexperience, but to sweeten the pleasures of youth.

But a parent must not expect to be a pleasing and useful companion to his child, without making some sacrifices. As in the material, so in the moral and intellectual worlds, there is no region in which those who will not submit to the toil of culture can expect a harvest. He must often forego his own wishes, to meet those of his child. During a walk, for instance, he must be content to break the thread of his own thoughts to give explanations which cannot but appear to him trifling, and to hear remarks which convey to him no information. At one time, he may be requested to look at a pebble when he was ruminating on the re-establishment of the independence of Europe; and at another, he may be called upon to cut a twig from a

tree when looking at a fine passage in Milton. If, however, he form a right estimate of education, he will bear such interruptions with complacency; and reflect, that the pebble and the twig, viewed in connection with their concomitant circumstances, may probably be, at that time, more important objects of his attention than European Politics or our great Epic Poet. And when, at the close of the day, he reviews its events, with how much greater pleasure will he look back on such little instances of self-denial, and on the advantage he may hope that his boy has received from them, than he could on his speculations respecting the happy results of the late war, or on the pleasure which he derived from the noble flights of Milton.—Not that a parent is to give up all his time to his children. This surrender would be incompatible with the discharge of his other duties. But he will do well, I think, in allotting to their society, and without allowing the intervention of such company as would prevent him from giving to them his attention, a portion of the time which he sets apart for recreation.

In superintending the amusements of children, it is important to give them a taste for

those which are not expensive and are easily obtained, and which are calculated to draw forth ingenuity, and to exercise bodily and mental powers. Such as are expensive—as have little but novelty to recommend them—as have any connection with mischief or deceit, or are likely to give pain to any companion, or even to any of the brute creation—ought to be carefully avoided.—It is obvious, that games of violent competition are very likely to lead to evil; and indeed, all competition is dangerous in a greater or a less degree, and calls for vigilant attention on the part of a parent, especially where the competition is direct and palpable, and the temper of the child is sanguine and ardent. It should be a rule in a game of competition, that as soon as a child shows any unfairness or wrong temper, or plays in a way likely to excite bad tempers in others, he is no longer to be considered as fit for such a sport, and must leave it to those who have more generous integrity, gentleness, and self-command. If he can himself be made sensible of his weakness, and brought into a disposition voluntarily to relinquish an amusement which in his case involves a breach of duty, this will be far better than the exercise

of parental authority: but if his passions are too far engaged to admit of this victory of reason and principle, the parent must interfere with such decision as to stop the progress of mischief. Sedentary games of chance or skill, as drafts, are certainly dangerous, when in frequent use, and I think that they are better avoided altogether. They are objectionable, partly because they are sedentary, and therefore ill-suited to an age when lively exercise is so natural and so conducive to health and vigour; partly, because their very essence is competition; but chiefly, because they may give a taste for cards, and perhaps for gaming. Little gardens distributed amongst the children of a family, and to be managed entirely by themselves, are admirable sources of amusement. A few small tools and implements of carpentry, in a father's custody, to be lent occasionally to his children, answer an excellent purpose; and particularly if he is qualified to assist a little, when difficulties occur in the use of them.

But whatever are the favourite amusements, which will vary with the age, sex, and natural turn of mind, *moderation* in them is of the highest importance. Children ought to learn

early that life and all our faculties are given to us rather for business than for pleasure; that they are talents to be employed in our Lord's service, and must not be wasted in idleness or frivolous pursuits. Amusement must be represented as no longer innocent, when encroaching on the time which ought to be employed in serious occupations, to which it must always be considered as subordinate. It must be represented as truly sweet, (such is the wise and gracious connection which God has appointed between pleasure and duty,) only when confined within due bounds; and as producing satiety—as engrossing the mind, and alienating it from God—as generating bad passions—and as leading to shame and remorse, and to eternal ruin, when it occupies the chief place in the heart. Thus persons who have given themselves up to wickedness, are described in Scripture as “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;” and the rich man in the parable is said to be tormented in hell, because in this life his great object was to indulge in pleasure. This is a point, in which young people are very apt to transgress.

There is one amusement which I have reserved for separate consideration; because, while it

are high and the passions warm, and when the objects in view are interesting, children will always be in danger of giving way to selfishness, and of falling into little quarrels; and if the evil is suffered to proceed, contradictions, criminations, misrepresentations, falsehoods, hard names, threats, and perhaps blows will follow. If such scenes are often repeated, domestic love and harmony will give place to mutual dislike and alienation; to tyranny in the elder, and to an abject or a bitter spirit in the younger, who, in their turn will often be disposed to repay themselves for their sufferings by domineering over those below them. If tyranny produces slavery, it also produces tyranny. What a scene does a family present, when under the influence of such passions, and addicted to such habits! What obstacles are opposed to meekness and gentleness, candour and forbearance: to the charity which "thinketh no evil;" which "suffereth long and is kind;" which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things:" to the love of man, and therefore, to that which cannot exist without it, the love of God! "He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God

whom he hath not seen ?"—I dwell the more on this point, because many, who would be shocked by quarrels among their friends, see them take place among children with very little concern. Do not contentions spring in both cases from the same root? And is not the fruit which they produce, however different in form and appearance, essentially of the same species? Surely then, the utmost pains should be taken to prevent and to heal differences, and to promote harmony in a young family. It is by no means sufficient to silence a dispute by the voice of authority, and to keep down all outward expressions of disagreement. The evil may yet remain in the heart, and rankle there in all its malignity. Persevering pains must be taken to eradicate it. A Christian parent on such occasions will show his child from what tempers quarrels arise, and make him sensible, by God's blessing, of the hatefulness of such tempers, and of their contrariety to the character of his God and Saviour. He will pourtray, in simple but glowing colours, the beauty of the opposite tempers, their tendency to conciliate affection and esteem in this world, and to promote that renewal in the Divine image which is indispensable to a union

with Christ in the next. He will give additional force to these general topics by bringing into view all the claims to forbearance and to love which belong to the child with whom the quarrel has arisen ; and the grief and the bad consequences which attend such family differences, and the happiness and the numerous advantages of mutual kindness. Nor will he rest satisfied, till he sees all the remains of ill-will give way, and the child brought into a frame of mind candidly and cordially to make every requisite acknowledgment to his play-fellow, and to desire a complete reconciliation. While the parent is bringing matters to this issue, he will be particularly careful to show, that although he is impartial, and can see in a true light the faults on both sides ; yet it becomes the child to think only of his own guilt, and to be anxious for forgiveness from God and man, and for the restoration of cordial harmony.

In the observations which have been made on quarrels, a domineering spirit has been slightly mentioned as connected with them. But this spirit requires farther attention. It is the natural fruit of the two leading evils in our nature, selfishness and pride ; and therefore, a parent

must not be surprised to see it among his children. The elder will expect a compliance with their wishes and humours on the part of the younger; the boys will exact obedience from the girls of nearly the same age; and they will all be disposed to assert a superiority over some of the servants. I have seen a young urchin, in the nursery, play the tyrant with a high hand over his maid: and sometimes, little creatures, who should be practising submission and deference towards their elder relations, presume on the fondness of one or another of them—an aunt perhaps, or even a mother—and behave in a manner as injurious to themselves, as it is revolting to all who witness the unnatural scene.—I need not enlarge on this subject to make a Christian parent sensible of its importance. He will recollect, that humility and submission are the very foundations of religion, and of the whole range of religious tempers; that there cannot be a greater solecism than a self-willed or a tyrannical Christian: that he who would be high in the kingdom of the lowly Saviour, must be “least of all, and servant of all;” that the most impetuous and high-minded by nature of all the Apostles, when matured in his Christian

course, said with unusual emphasis, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." He will therefore by no means view this point with indifference: he will not leave things to find their own level, as the phrase is, in his young family: much less will he be dazzled by the appearance of spirit in a boy of activity and vigour, who aspires to be the master of all about him. He will earnestly inculcate mutual kindness and forbearance and condescension; which all should be forward in exercising, but backward in requiring:—he will inculcate, that true fortitude and greatness of mind show themselves in nothing more clearly than in not being overcome of evil, but in overcoming evil with good: he will dwell on the beauty of a character which obtains such victories—on the evil prevented and the happiness diffused by them—on their value in the sight of God—and on their important influence in promoting some faint resemblance of Him who, with all his meekness and lowliness, was a perfect pattern of holy fortitude, and at length died for his enemies. These topics will furnish abundant matter for impressing the young mind; and if that of the parent is in true harmony

with them, they will be seldom used in vain. There will, however, be frequent recurrences of the fault in question, where the temper is sanguine and eager, and still more where there is a tendency to jealousy or passion. In such cases, a parent will find it of the highest importance to watch his own temper ; for equanimity and tenderness in the use of his authority, joined to constant firmness, will do much towards repressing a domineering spirit in his children. These qualities will put to the blush the impatience, and violence and thirst of power, which may appear among his little ones, and lead them by sympathy to a better spirit : while the display of tempers at all similar to theirs, however it might terrify the culprits into instant submission, would leave a fire covered with ashes, but unsubdued, and ready to break forth again with undiminished force.

Sometimes, a nursery is infected by a spirit of teasing in some of its inmates : a spirit which is often combined with much cunning, and delights in drawing a playfellow of a more unguarded nature into imprudences and excesses, and then in laying all the blame upon him. This mean habit must be strictly watched. It is the bane

of every thing kind and generous, and leads to systematic deceit and falsehood. Hasty quarrels leave little of bad leaven behind them, compared with this cold blooded and odious practice.

Selfishness and jealousy generally appear very early in children, and are amongst the most unamiable of all the bad dispositions inherited from our First Parents. Every mother can testify what reluctance children show by nature, to giving or lending their own play-things; how eagerly they grasp at those which belong to others; how earnestly they contend for the first occupancy of such as are a sort of common property; how ardently they long for any thing when another child is playing with it; and how indifferent to it they often become as soon as he has relinquished it. And with respect to jealousy, the original bias is quite as striking. Even infants show it, when the women that have the charge of them bestow caresses on other children; and in subsequent years, though the feeling is known to be wrong, and its outward expression is in a measure restrained, yet from time to time evident symptoms of it appear.

It is needless to say, that such feelings should be repressed : they are not only evidently incompatible with the law of love, but are condemned even by the lax code of worldly morality. Let every parent be indefatigable in his endeavours to correct them : and let him constantly bear in mind, that merely to check outward appearances, will by no means be sufficient ; that the child who is subject to such tempers is conscious of their baseness, and naturally desirous of concealing them ; and that the object in view can be attained only by the eradication of the evil itself from the heart, and by the implantation of those Christian virtues which are opposed to it. This must be the work of the Holy Spirit, whose humble instrument the parent may be in cleansing and preparing the soil, and in sowing the good seed.

The proper conduct of the two sexes, each towards the other, is of high importance, even at this early age. Boys are apt to feel their superior strength and hardihood, and not to treat girls as they ought ; and sometimes, I fear girls, presuming on their exemption from that kind of treatment which impertinence experiences among boys, give to their tongues liberties

which are subversive of family concord. In addition to the immediate evils flowing from this state of things, a foundation is laid for still greater in future life. In the whole range of associations between persons of different sexes, the consequent advantages extremely depend on the maintenance of fixed and habitual sentiments of mutual respect. Such sentiments are essential to delicacy and tenderness in men, and to willing deference and submission in women; and to cordial affection in the nearer relations of life on both sides. How desirable, then, is it, that the foundations of right feelings and right conduct should be laid in early life : and how well employed is the attention by which this object is effected ! It would be necessary, were the subsequent stages of education brought under review, to treat this subject with more particularity.

And can we pass on to other topics without reflecting for a few moments on the delightful spectacle of a young family living together in harmony that is seldom interrupted by contentions, overbearing conduct, rivalries, jealousies, or suspicions : a family in which contentment, love, generosity, mutual forbearance, and a

spirit of mutual accommodation, founded on Christian principles, are the prominent dispositions, and in which the performance of daily duties, and the promotion and participation of the general happiness, appear to be the leading occupation? Struck with the beauty of such a scene, one who was familiar with family discord exclaimed, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" In such a family, adversity will seldom inflict a deep or lasting wound. Many sweet drops will find their way into the bitter cup: and in no long time tears will be succeeded by smiles, and a recollection of the trial may be attended, perhaps, with not more pain than pleasure.

If we were to look round for the opposite picture, should we not find it presenting so many deep shades of depravity and wretchedness as to make us shudder at the view? I will not give myself and my readers the pain of contemplating the scene more closely. Were we to do so, we should be all ready to exclaim with Isaiah, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked!" and with St. James, "Where en-

vying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."

All the benefits of a useful education may be lost by acquaintance with children of bad habits. Such is the natural propensity to evil; so great is the vivacity, the curiosity, the love of novelty, and the want of caution at a tender age: so lively is the sympathy, so active the spirit of imitation; that even occasional intercourse with dangerous companions will seldom fail to be highly injurious to children. Surely it is the part of wisdom to keep them as much as possible from moral contagion, till they have acquired some strength to resist it. If the weakness of man is such, that our Saviour, in giving a short Prayer for universal use in his church, saw fit to insert in it the petition, "Lead us not into temptation," how much must it be the duty of a Christian parent to preserve the little creatures committed to his care, whose good principles and habits are as yet unfixed and infirm, from a species of temptation most seductive and dangerous? They must at length go forth into an evil world: but they ought to be prepared against its allurements by education, and intro-

duced to them by degrees. At this early age, the tender plant should be preserved with care from the frosts, and storms, and droughts, which it will be better able to encounter at a future period, if guarded and sheltered while its stem is weak, and its roots are few and superficial. But besides the present danger from undesirable companions, a foundation is often laid for bad connections in future life. The little play-fellows become attached, and wish to keep up their acquaintance in succeeding years : and unless the desire to discontinue the intimacy be mutual, either of them will find it difficult to break off the connection, however alive to the snares and dangers which attend it. The importance of this consideration is great ; for a man's steps through life usually depend not a little upon the nature of his early friendships. Nor is it from children only that danger is to be apprehended, but also from visitors of a more advanced age. Instead of strengthening the hands of the parent, they are too apt to flatter and humour the little ones ; to entertain them with foolish stories ; or to teach them to be impertinent, and to take improper liberties. More mischief is sometimes done in this way,

in a few days, than the parent can undo in as many weeks. A single instance of bad example is dangerous. How destructive, then, must be its frequent repetition; and how important must it be to guard the sacred work of education from such interruptions, and to make great sacrifices to effect this object! Parents are too apt to make their own taste and convenience the great, if not the only, rule in the selection of their acquaintance. Now, ought not the safety and welfare of their children to enter at least equally into their consideration? Here, probably, is the most vulnerable point, and here ought provident caution and measures of defence to be most carefully employed. Parents frequently leave their home and their circle of acquaintance for a considerable time, in order to afford to their children an opportunity of acquiring accomplishments. Shall there be less interference with old habits, less change of situation, or of acquaintance, when the object is to shield them from the allurements of sin, and to give them a taste for the paths of true religion and virtue? Are we not called upon to apply the spirit of the precept, to cut off the offending right hand and to pluck out the of-

fending right eye, to the case before us, and resolutely, though with all mildness and courtesy, to avoid in our social intercourse whatever may be dangerous to our children? It is true, that the question is one of comparison. *Some* risks to the young family must be incurred, if we would not do extreme violence to private friendship, to the ties of relationship, or to the duties of hospitality. But those who feel the importance of preserving their tender charge from the contagion of evil, will allow great weight in forming a decision to the circumstances which belong to that side of the question. With respect to forming new connections, there is seldom much difficulty; but with regard to old associations, we shall often be called to introduce changes as to the frequency and duration of visits, and sometimes as to their continuance;—changes which may appear unkind to others, and will be extremely unpleasant to ourselves. Let it, however, be our earnest prayer and endeavour to do all in the spirit of Christian affection; and this will greatly facilitate our object. I remember many years ago being struck by a little incident in a parish, where the incumbent, a man

of most extraordinary Christian benignity, when in company with a clerical friend, rebuked in very plain terms one of his parishioners for gross misbehaviour on a recent occasion. The reproof was so severe as to astonish his friend, who declared, that if he had addressed one of his own flock in similar language, he should have expected an irreconcilable breach. The clergyman of the parish answered him, with a gentle pat on the shoulder, and with a smile of Christian wisdom, "O, my friend, when there is love in the heart, you may say any thing." And in like manner, I believe, when there is true and warm love in our hearts, and our measures are prompted by a calm and sincere sense of duty, we may do almost any thing without giving great offence; at least, without giving offence deep and lasting.

After what has been said respecting servants, little needs to be added to guard parents against suffering a child to make them his companions. He should always treat them with kindness, but should be led not to amuse himself with their society in his play-hours. This remark applies with particular force to the men-servants, who will generally be much more dangerous to chil-

dren than the maids. But, with very few exceptions, both the one and the other, if treated by the children as favourites, will be apt to flatter and humour them, and teach them to be guilty of little deceits, and to be fond of self indulgence. Vulgarity of manners and of language, though the most obvious, is perhaps the least of the evils to be apprehended from such companions.