

HOUSEHOLD EDUCATION

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Household Education by Harriet Martineau

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HARRIET MARTINEAU

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BY

HARRIET MARTINEAU,

AUTHOR OF "EASTERN LIFE," ETC.



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PREFACE.

A PORTION of this work appeared, some months ago, in papers in the People's Journal. The appearance of these papers was suspended by the change in the affairs of that Journal. From that time to the present, applications have been made to me at intervals, to request me to finish my subject. In deference to these requests, I have completed my original design. For its suggestion, I am indebted to Mr. Saunders, the late editor of the People's Journal. For the imperfections of the work, which I know to be many and great, notwithstanding my earnest interest in what I was writing, no one is responsible but myself.

AMBLESIDE,

November 16th, 1848.

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CHAPTER I.

OLD AND YOUNG IN SCHOOL.

HOUSEHOLD EDUCATION is a subject so important in its bearings on every one's happiness, and so inexhaustible in itself, that I do not see how any person whatever can undertake to lecture upon it authoritatively, as if it was a matter completely known and entirely settled. It seems to me that all that we can do is to reflect, and say what we think, and learn of one another. This is, at least, all that I venture to offer. I propose to say, in a series of chapters, what I have observed and thought on the subject of LIFE AT HOME, during upwards of twenty years' study of domestic life in great variety. It will be for my readers to discover whether they agree in my views, and whether their minds are set to work by what I say on a matter which concerns them as seriously as any in the world. Once for all, let me declare here what I hope will be remembered throughout, that I have no ambition to teach; but a strong desire to set members of households consulting together about their course of action towards each other.

It will be seen by these last words that I consider all the members of a household to be going through a process of education together. I am not thinking only of parents drawing their chairs together when the children have gone to bed, to talk over the young people's qualities and ways. That is all very well; but it is only a small part of the business. I am

not thinking of the old, experienced grandfather or grandmother talking at the fireside, telling the parents of the sleeping children how they ought to manage them, and what rules and methods were in force in their day. This is all very well; and every sensible person will be thankful to hear what the aged have to tell, out of their long knowledge of life: but this again is a very small part of the matter. Every member of the household—children, servants, apprentices—every inmate of the dwelling, must have a share in the family plan; or those who make it are despots, and those who are excluded are slaves.

Of course, this does not mean that children who have scarcely any knowledge, little judgment, and no experience, are to have a choice about the rules of their own training. The object of training is one thing; and the rules and methods are another. With rules and methods they have nothing to do but to obey them till they become able to command themselves. But there is no rational being who is not capable of understanding, from the time he can speak, what it is to wish to be good. The stupidest servant-girl, and the most thoughtless apprentice-boy, are always impressed by seeing those about them anxious to improve; and especially the oldest of all endeavouring the more to become wiser and wiser, better and better, as their few remaining days dwindle away. If the family plan, therefore, be the grand comprehensive plan which is alone worthy of people who care about education at all—a plan to do the best that is possible by each other for the improvement of all—every member of the family above the yearling infant must be a member of the domestic school of mutual instruction, and must know that he is so.

It is a common saying that every child thinks his father the wisest man in the world. This is very natural; as parents are their children's fountains of knowledge. To them their children come for anything they want to know: and by them they are generally satisfied. But every wise parent has occasion to say, now and then—"I do not know, my dear." The surprise of