

**THE RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION OF AN
AMERICAN CITIZEN**

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The Religious Education of an American Citizen by Francis Greenwood Peabody

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OF AN
AMERICAN CITIZEN



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NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR
BUT THEN FACE TO FACE

I DO NOT DOUBT, DEAR WIFE, THAT WE SHALL PROVE
SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, THE TIMELESSNESS OF LOVE;
THAT, THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF TIME AND SPACE,
I SHALL BE LED TO SEE YOU FACE TO FACE;
AND, SEEKING PEACE, SHALL, WITH A GLAD SURPRISE,
FIND IT, AS EVER, IN YOUR PEACEFUL EYES.
YET, FROM THESE HOPES, UNREALIZED THOUGH SWEET,
WHICH BECKON AND ALLURE, BUT STILL RETREAT,
I TURN TO SEE THEIR IMAGE STANDING FAST
UPON THE UNCLOUDED MIRROR OF THE PAST.
I SEE YOU THERE, CONSOLING, PATIENT, KIND,
TO FAULTS FORGIVING AND TO FOLLIES BLIND;
I WATCH YOU THERE, THROUGH BUSY WORKS AND DAYS,
UNMOVED BY THANKLESSNESS, UNSPOILED BY PRAISE;
MOST HAPPY WHEN MOST SILENT AND UNSEEN,
YET IN THE WORLD SAGACIOUS AND SERENE,
AND WINNING THE BEHOLDER TO CONFESS
THE CONQUERING CHARM OF SELF-FORGETFULNESS.
I SEE YOU STILL ABOVE YOUR FLOWERS BEND,
EACH SHOOT TO STRAIGHTEN AND EACH BUD TO TEND;
UNTIL, AS BY PERSUASION FROM ABOVE,
YOUR GARDEN YIELDS ITS ANSWER TO YOUR LOVE.
AND, STANDING BY YOUR SIDE, I DIMLY SEE
THE SON OF MAN IN HIS BENIGNITY,
TRAINING YOUR WILL, AS YOU HAVE TRAINED YOUR FLOWERS,
TO BEAR LIFE'S CHILLING STORMS AND SULTRY HOURS;
AND SMILING AS HE SEES THE UNCONSCIOUS GRACE
WHICH SHYLY LIFTS ITSELF TO MEET HIS FACE,
IF IN THE MAGIC MIRROR OF OUR LIFE
SUCH IMAGES REMAIN, BELOVED WIFE;
IF TWO WILLS, MADE SO DIVERSE, GREW TO BE
MIRACULOUSLY MERGED IN UNITY;
IF ON MY MEMORY SINKS THIS CLOUDLESS SUN,
AND HAPPY YEARS DEFY OBLIVION;
IF I HAVE HAD THIS GLIMPSE THROUGH HEAVEN'S GATE,
SHALL I NOT PATIENTLY BELIEVE, AND WAIT?

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The purpose of this series of loosely connected chapters is to call attention to some of the influences which direct, and some of the qualities which mark, the religious education of an American citizen. The normal life of an American proceeds from childhood to youth and from youth to manhood, through the shifting environments of home, school, college, business, citizenship and Church; and at each step he is met by conditions and demands which may either promote or obstruct his religious education. What, then, are the circumstances which are likely to be most favorable for a healthy-minded and progressive religious experience? What can be done by parents, teachers, employers, statesmen, or pastors, to reinforce American citizenship with a rational religious life? What are the special obstacles which American civilization offers to religious progress? What are the traits of the American character on which teachers of religion may most confidently depend?

These questions lead one quite beyond the region of technical administration or ecclesiastical

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

tical authority. They are not concerned with catechisms, or Sunday-schools, or Church membership. All this mechanism of organization and instruction, indispensable though it is, assumes a susceptibility in pupils or in converts to religious motives, a responsiveness to religious truth, a thirst for the living God, a restlessness of human nature until it finds rest in Him. The mechanism is designed to utilize and convey spiritual power, to develop and direct instead of checking or wasting it, and the invention and regulation of such machinery is the business of religious engineers. But the power itself, as it flows from the high places of human experience down to the plains of daily life, is the essential prerequisite of effective engineering, the source of that energy which turns the wheels of the Church. How to conserve that force, how to store it at its remote and hidden sources, how to keep it clear from taint and secure its abundant and unobstructed flow,—this is the problem of religious education. It lies, as it were, higher up among the hills of life than any determination of doctrinal conformity or ecclesiastical practices, and on its vitality and force the efficiency of these operations must ultimately depend.

These considerations lead one to explore, in