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AND

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT.

BY

JOHN GILL,

NORMAL COLLEGE, CHELTENHAM.

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PREFACE.

To that large and increasing body, who are being prepared for the onerous duties and great responsibilities of the teacher's office, the following pages are addressed. This office—not to be measured by the character of those who sustain it, nor by the amount of pecuniary recompence attached to it, but by the trusts and interests it involves—is of inestimable value. A thorough conviction of this will be found the best incentive to seek the qualifications required to the rightful discharge of its duties. We offer then to our young friends some considerations on the importance of the office for which they are preparing, and we point out a few of the qualifications they should seek to possess.

The *development* and *culture* of the mind constitute an important function of this office. For this object the plastic nature of children is entrusted to your care, in which marvellous faculties and affections lie hidden and undeveloped. The minds of children are capable of an expansion and growth which would fit them for noble pursuits and extensive usefulness; but if these are uncultivated, their condition rises little above that of the brute, and existence remains a blank. They are placed in the midst of a scene containing a thousand sources of the most exquisite delight, which will be opened or sealed to them as the eye of their mind is lighted by intelligence or glazed by ignorance. There is nothing within the range of science which they may not make their own—no level which the most gifted minds have reached to which they may not attain. But success or failure, progress or retrogression, depends mainly on the culture they receive at the hands of their educators.

The *formation of right habits* by those committed to him forms another part of the teacher's duty. They will form habits which will be the charm or the curse of the social circle, which will make them instruments of good or evil to their fellow-men, and blessings or pests to their country, and whose results will extend into another life. What sort of habits they shall form depends to a certain extent on their teachers. "They," says Mr. Symons, "are moulding the character of the generations among which we and our children are to live, and by which our highest interests here must be determined." To a certain extent this is true, but

not entirely. The teacher is only one of many who are thus moulding the character of the youth of our nation. Other influences besides *his* surround them; amongst these stand prominent the influences of home and those of the streets—influences which are sometimes powerful enough to neutralize all that the teacher can exert.

Nevertheless the teacher does exercise a powerful influence on the habits and character of his young charge. There is the direct influence of his teaching and discipline, though there is more power in that which is incidental and indirect. "The personal character of the master," it has been said, "produces a continual effect. In a certain sense he is teaching always, and often when he least thinks of it. The lessons which he gives insensibly are perhaps the most availing of all, and it is hardly too much to say that what he conveys without being conscious of has a deeper effect than what is taught more formally. He is constantly imparting his own likeness, reproducing in the minds of his scholars the impressions and convictions of his own. A silent influence is at work which he little suspects. The words which drop unobserved from his lips, the acts which he performs mechanically and immediately forgets, his daily habits and deportment, have their effect, and may be made subservient to the highest ends. The very way in which his school is managed, its order and impartiality, the tone of kindness which pervades it, the reverence openly paid to what is good and true and generous, are so many parts of moral training." It is by these influences that the habits and character of children are formed. They are more powerful than direct teaching, as lessons only enforce what is right, but example allures to the practice of it.

But it must not be forgotten that personal influence may be for evil as well as good. Children imbibe the spirit of their master. They will not be industrious if he is indolent, punctual if he is laggard, nor truthful and honest if he only cares for appearance. If, for example, his school is energetically worked in the presence of visitors, but becomes indolent and loose on their departure; if there be special preparation for Government inspectors or public examinations: if, in a word, there be an attention to appearances more than to truthfulness, then the influence of the teacher is of a most injurious and evil character.

But the importance of his office is enhanced by the consideration that children are committed to the teacher when the mind is most pliable and the character most impressible

The powers are not yet developed, nor the habits fixed; consequently the character is not formed. Almost any impression can now be made on the mind—almost any feature delineated on the heart. A child is so susceptible of impressions, and so open to the influence of circumstances, that if these were right, and his educators were skilful, his character could almost be moulded for him. But this state does not last. "Some stones when first quarried are so soft and pliable as readily to take any form you may wish to impress upon them, but so harden by lapse of time, as almost, at any subsequent period, to render impossible any further change." So it is with man. His heart feels less, and his conscience yields less, as childhood gives place to youth, youth to maturity, and maturity to age.

Again, that intellectual cast, moral tone, and impartation of himself which we have described, are not, it must be remembered, confined to the schoolroom, but, like the ever-widening circles produced on the surface of a lake by a drop of rain, spread themselves around until the labours and the influence of a teacher are felt through society at large.

How important then, is that office, which involves interests so vast, and has to do with mind and character at so critical a period! And of what moment it is that you who are so soon to go forth on the great mission of education should do so with no light estimate of its importance, and with no careless feeling as to its results!

The notion, now fast dying out, that any one is able to undertake the office of the schoolmaster, was a great mistake. This office, in fact, demands such peculiar qualifications as are rarely combined in one individual—qualifications not innate, and only acquired as the result of hard labour and long experience. Let it be your deep conviction that these qualifications are not—as an article of dress—assumed at pleasure. Consider the estimate which the Government has put on them, in not only requiring a five years' apprenticeship, but also exacting at least a twelvemonth's instruction in the best methods, and in the practice of the art of teaching. Let it be your earnest persuasion that the acquisition of the required qualifications is worthy of your most vigorous and untiring efforts.

About youth there is a ceaseless activity, an unwearied energy, and great elasticity—the mind and its instruments, when the child is awake, seeking constant and varied employment; hence the necessity for the teacher to possess great

physical energy and untiring activity, as it is evident that one whose temperament is dull and phlegmatic is here out of his element. Without such qualifications the school machinery is a drag, and a sense of irksomeness and misery is associated in the children's minds with its exercises; school ceases to be a pleasure, and the moment of dismissal is hailed as that of liberty from tyrannical and unnatural restraint.

An essential qualification for a successful teacher is a *love of education*. A few of the elements of such love are—sympathy with children so as to participate in their feelings, and appreciate their wishes and wants; interest in the development and culture of their faculties; and an intense desire to promote their present and eternal well-being. No place has such attractions as the schoolroom for such a teacher; he enters it early and willingly; he works in it with pleasure—his whole manner showing the children how much interest he has in them; he lingers about it after his labours are over, and tears himself away from it with reluctance. To such a teacher the discouragements and difficulties of his position are no reason why his work should become irksome, but only furnish additional incentives to labour with increased vigour. Such a love as this should be assiduously cultivated. Some of the means of doing so are—making children subjects of study, closely observing the opening of their faculties, and devising plans for their benefit. To get love for an object you must work for it.

A knowledge of *mind* as the material on which he has to operate, is as essential to the teacher as that of the body is to the physician, or of plants to the gardener. A knowledge of its laws, which are as fixed and certain as those which obtain in any department of physics, will not merely enable him skilfully to adapt the matter of his instruction to the state of his pupils, but will furnish him with certain means for their discipline and instruction; without this knowledge he is as one stumbling in the dark.

Closely allied to this is acquaintance with *method*. Teaching, as an art, is a combination of certain modes of developing the mental faculties, and of presenting instruction so as to secure its reception. Thus it embraces a knowledge of the methods themselves, as well as practical skill in their use. You are at present in the infancy of its study; your knowledge is certainly being extended and corrected daily; but it will require from you years of laborious application to acquire thoroughness and skill.