

**PALMER'S MORAL INSTRUCTOR:
THE MORAL INSTRUCTOR; OR,
CULTURE OF THE HEART,
AFFECTIONS, AND INTELLECT,
WHILE LEARNING TO READ, PART III**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649651856

Palmer's Moral Instructor: The Moral Instructor; Or, Culture of the Heart, Affections, and Intellect, While Learning to Read, Part III by Thomas H. Palmer

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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THOMAS H. PALMER

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3
PART III.

This the first duty, carefully to train
The children in the way that they should go;
Then of the family of Guilt and Pain
How large a part were banish'd from below.

SOUTHEY.

BY THOMAS H. PALMER,
AUTHOR OF THE PRIZE ESSAY ON EDUCATION, ENTITLED "THE
TEACHER'S MANUAL."

BOSTON:

WILLIAM D. TICKNOR & CO.
Corner of Washington and School Streets.

1847.

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Phil 8890.2.3

1863. May 1.
Gift of
George Lincoln,
of
Cambridge.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1842,
BY THOMAS H. PALMER,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Vermont.

STEREOTYPED BY
GEORGE A. CURTIS,
H. ENGLAND TYPE AND STEREOTYPE FOUNDRY, BOSTON

PREFACE.

NEVER, surely, was there a moment when the public mind was more fully awake than now to the importance of education. Men everywhere begin distinctly to see that it is easier to restrain vice by schools than by jails, and cheaper to endow seminaries than to support almshouses. They are also beginning to discover (how strange that the fact should ever have been overlooked!) that, in order to have good government, our governors, the people, must be enlightened; that a democracy like ours, based upon any thing but universal virtue and intelligence, must be unstable as water, uncertain as the wind.

But, although the truth of the general proposition is readily admitted, that the permanence of our free institutions depends upon the virtue and intelligence of the people, and that these can only be secured by a sound system of public instruction, yet how few are there who extend their views beyond *intellectual* education—who consider, that with all the boasted improvements of our public schools, we *may* actually have been doing little more than training up in them a set of *accomplished rogues*. *

* Mr. Attorney-General Austin said publicly, that his professional experience convinced him, "that crime had increased with the increase of intellectual education. There is less violence; there is more craft, subtlety, and over-reaching. A mayor of this city [Boston,] said with truth, 'that the march of mind *alone* was the rogue's march.'"

When we consider how much progress has been made of late, in sharpening and improving the intellect, while so very little has even been attempted, in our public schools, towards developing and exercising the moral sense, can we wonder at the strides our community have been taking towards utter depravation of morals? that every mail should bring new instances of breach of faith among all classes of our citizens? Is not a want of conscientiousness the true source of nearly all our political and social evils? and is it not time that some attempt should be made to arrest them?

A clerical friend of mine lately remarked, that he had frequently serious doubts whether he and his brethren of the ministry *could* be acting right in expending so much time and exertion, in the way of religious instruction, with such small results. But how can the trifling amount of these results be a matter of surprise, when it is recollected, that one of the *most important means* of spreading religion is entirely neglected? God has commanded us to "*train up a child in the way he should go.*" Have we fulfilled that command? Are our children "*trained in the way they should go?*" What should we think of a farmer, who should sow his seeds upon hard, stony ground, without the slightest previous effort to soften and mellow it by plough or spade? Would it be rational to expect any return? And yet, is not this precisely the course we adopt respecting religious instruction? We take no pains to awaken and develop the consciences of our youth, and to excite them to action. They are never called on to look within, to judge between right and wrong. How can we wonder, then, that the seeds sown from the pulpit on this unprepared ground should fail to take root, and that, "when the sun was up," they should be "scorched, and wither away?" We *do* perform a part of our duty. We *do* provide religious instruction for the people. But we neglect an *equally essential* part, for the want of which what we do perform is rendered almost null, and of no effect. And yet we calmly wash our hands, and say, "We are innocent of the blood of this people." We exclaim against the hardness of men's hearts, and complain of the inefficiency of the preached gospel.

Let not any thing that is here said, however, be dis-

torted so as to appear like advocating the teaching of religious tenets in schools. In the present state of society, divided as we are, and as we are likely to remain, into such a variety of sects, the scheme would be a failure—perhaps deservedly so. But, because the great variety of religious faith, and modes of worship, and the danger of converting the school into an engine of religious proselytism, absolutely forbid the teaching of religious doctrines there, does it follow that every species of moral training must be excluded? Does not this circumstance rather enhance the necessity of a peculiar attention to that part of moral instruction to which no such objection can apply? Is there not an extensive field, which may be regarded as common ground, in respect to which every portion of society is perfectly agreed? Is there *any* parent, who does not desire his child to be trained to the practice of virtue, and to the avoidance of every vicious habit? that he should be inspired with veneration, gratitude, and love to God? that he should be honest, faithful, humane, and gentle, obedient to his parents, true to his word? that he should possess moral courage and self-control; industry, perseverance, economy, and temperance; patience, fortitude, magnanimity, and cheerfulness? Surely not. On these, and such like points, we shall meet with perfect unanimity.

The series of reading books, of which the present forms a part, has been written principally with the view of introducing into our schools an easy method of awakening and developing the conscience, and keeping it in continual action. This is not attempted to be done, however, by moral lectures, or sage apophthegms. These will rarely have any effect upon early youth, save the pernicious one of producing a dreamy wandering of mind, of the most fatal tendency both to intellectual and moral culture. But the plan is, to excite the conscience to judge and act for itself, and to strengthen it by continual use, by means of a series of questions, arising naturally from the subjects read, and suited to the capacity of even infant minds.

Nor will the *effects* of this moral training be exclusively confined to the culture of the heart. It is believed, that a glance at these questions will show, that they will afford

an important aid in unfolding *all* the mental faculties; that observation, comparison, reflection, abstraction, judgment, reason, imagination, and taste will be improved and strengthened by the simple exercises connected with the reading lessons. Thus, the understanding and the affections will alike be cultivated, and some approaches made towards the development of the *whole man*, in his habits of thought, feeling, and action; and we shall no longer see so many of those *mental distortions* produced by the excessive culture of the memory, while every other faculty is left almost totally dormant.

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