

TEACHERS' READING COURSE.

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Discipline.

It is worthy of notice that writers on the subject of discipline agree with remarkable unanimity that the aim should be to produce a self-governing being—not to produce a being governed by others. Yet the most thoughtful and experienced writers on the subject do not agree upon the means or methods of discipline.

Probably more teachers are familiar with the views of Herbert Spencer in his Moral Education and of Rousseau in his Emile than with any other authorities. Mr. Spencer, we remember, makes a very strong argument in favor of letting the punishment of a wrong act be the natural consequence of that act. He gives these advantages of such a method of discipline:

1. That it gives that rational comprehension of right and wrong conduct which results from actual experience of the good and bad consequences caused by them.

2. That the child suffering nothing more than the painful effects brought upon it by its own wrong actions, must recognize more or less clearly the justice of the penalties.

3. That, recognizing the justice of the penalties, and receiving those penalties through the working of things, rather than at the hands of an individual, its temper will be less disturbed.

4. That mutual exasperation being thus in great measure prevented, a much happier and a more influential state of feeling will exist between parent and child.

Rousseau compares the Lycee's in France with the ordinary private boarding schools in England, and declares that the discipline in the former is really injurious because it takes away all liberty of action from the pupil and prescribes every act for him.

The principle insisted upon by these two writers was evidently in the mind of Bulwer when, in "The Caxtons," he tells how the father of young Pisistratus—and a delightfully whimsical father he was—educated his only son. One incident is specially illustrative. The son has accidentally broken a beautiful vase or flower-jar belonging to his mother. He is sorry and nothing is said about punishment. It happens, however, that both father and son take a walk to a neighboring village not many days after the accident. The father intentionally turns his steps toward a certain shop. As they pass slowly by, something in the window catches the attention of Pisistratus. He stops suddenly, looks at his father eagerly. He has seen a flower-pot that very much resembles the one he broke. Noting the look of understanding in his father's face, he enters the shop, breathlessly asks the price of the pot and gladly spends his month's allowance for it. When the father sees the joy with which

the little fellow carries his gift to his mother, he feels well satisfied that he has deliberately planned to give his son an opportunity to grow by voluntarily repairing an injury to another.

Now while we are becoming thoroughly convinced that Mr. Spencer is entirely right, and that a right principle can be reduced to practice if only there are intelligence, patience and skill, it is somewhat disconcerting, on first thought, to hear Mr. Fitch say of Mr. Spencer's idea: "Valuable as such teaching is, experience proves to us that it is wholly inadequate as a theory of moral government either for a school or for a State."

Now, Sir J. G. Fitch, who wrote this sentence, is an inspector of schools in England, and one of the lecturers on the Art and Method of Teaching at the University of Cambridge. His opinions are surely worth considering.

The State, he declares, cannot rely wholly on natural punishments because, for her purpose, they are too light. You may prove to a thief that nine out of ten thieves come to ruin, but he is by no means affected because he is confident of being the tenth. The argument that wrongdoing will bring about deterioration of character will not affect him either, because he has already fallen too low to be moved by such a consideration.

On the other hand, he continues, the parent or teacher cannot rely wholly on natural punishments because for his purpose they are far too severe. A child inclined to gluttony, for instance, should not be allowed to suffer the natural consequences lest his constitution become enfeebled.

A timely imposition of an arbitrary punishment will prevent his suffering from the crueler Nemesis which nature has provided for wrongdoing.

Yet Mr. Fitch acknowledges that Mr. Spencer's principle covers a good many school offences. The obvious punishment for late coming is, he thinks, late going; for doing an exercise ill is to do it again well; for wasting time in school to forfeit some hours of leisure. It is the certainty of a punishment rather than the severity which deters; corporal punishment should not be altogether denounced, he thinks, nevertheless "the triumphs of school discipline is to do without punishments altogether."

Teachers who are not already familiar with Spencer's Education and Fitch's lectures on Teaching will find them very helpful—that is, if they are not seeking devices, but wish to consider the subject broadly, and aspire, in a measure, to be like the ideal teacher of Roger Ascham, having a "lust to labor" and being "always desirous to search out any doubt, not ashamed to learn of the meanest, nor afraid to go to the greatest, until he be perfectly taught and fully satisfied."

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