

Moral Education of the Adolescent

By Newel K. Young

X -- The One Essential Method

There is just one vital and essential method in education. It is the contagion of influence and character -- the impelling influence of one personality upon another. The great Teacher said to his followers, "*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?*"

H. C. King well says: "*But the one final method back of all subsidiary methods is the contact of life with life. Ultimately the one indispensable thing is a man of character and judgment, and the honest response of honest souls to such a soul. Granted that, the faultiest methods cannot wholly fail. Lacking that, the most scientific pedagogy will not suffice. The method of contagion of the good life is the inevitable method. Finally we are shut up to that.*"¹

Hear these prophetic words of Frank Cramer as a witness to the same truth:

*"There is a latent moral power in our half million common school teachers that we have hardly tested yet. When they become fully conscious of it themselves, they will be the American prophets of morality. Even when we are fully agreed on what moral training should be given, we have only stated the problem. The solution depends upon the moral quality of the teacher. Earth's greatest religion was made so by the example of its founder. At the end of its long, historical vista stands his great personality and dissolves all moral questions into a personal relation. * * * * Moral enthusiasm is the leaven of the school as well as of society. Children are the first to recognize both disinterested service and its opposite. A teacher who has her hat and gloves on when the dismissal bell rings cannot give moral training."*²

While Prof. Starbuck has this to say:

"Thus it is that every thing that is going on in the life of a teacher, which finds its expression in the quality of her personality, is filtering and seeping into the lives of her pupils. She can in reality hide nothing. Whatever she is in the depths of her life is forming a part of the atmosphere of the school, and this atmosphere is in turn forming unconsciously the lives of her pupils, in the same way that the air, sunshine, moisture and elements of the soil are feeding the life of the plant.

"Thus it is becoming to be demonstrably true that out of the heart are the issues of life. There is nothing more pervasive than character. Morality is as catching as wild fire; it is as contagious as disease, or as sin. We know all this, after a fashion, but shall not have appreciated it at its full worth until the best, maturest, and largest spirited men and women are secured and retained in the teaching profession.

¹ H. C. King, *Religion as Life*, p. 62.

² Frank Cramer, *Moral Training in Public Schools*, p. 161.

*"It is impossible for a teacher to teach what she hasn't got down deep within her heart. It is as impossible for her to have a devout nature and keep it hidden beneath the routine of the school day as it is to pollute a spring of pure water, or quench a fire by throwing fagots upon it."*³

We must constantly be conscious, fellow teachers, that by the appointment of our calling we are put in the company of sages, prophets, and seers -- we become comrades of the world's great ones, the teachers and leaders, with Jesus as the Captain of the host.

XI -- Our High Callings

Both as parents and teachers we must keep ourselves so pure in heart that we may have true visions of God and his glory. This will enable us to see in each child that he is the offspring of God; thus, seeing the streaks of divine gold in his nature in the midst of the common dust of human weakness, we will be able to appeal to the good, thereby winning him to the best. We must feel deeply the Savior's estimate of the worth of the child. He sets each child above the whole material world.

Let us gird ourselves for the crises through which we are passing. And though the fight be a hard one, even a fight to the death, let us rejoice in our opportunities to help redeem the world. We must feel deeply the poet's conviction when he said:

*"We are living, we are dwelling
In a grand and awful time;
In an age on ages telling;
To be living is sublime."*

Let us realize "that the worth of a man is determined by what comes out of him. by the service he renders, rather than by what enters in. * * * * * There are those who conceive that culture -- if it is more than veneer -- is a refinement that can be obtained only by direct participation in social life. Such contact with the world may bring embarrassment, temptation, and failure, as well as their opposites; but all of these, instead of debasing, are the very experiences which purify and make gentle; they are the fire without which the refining process could not take place. Culture means to these people the ennobling effect of such actual struggle upon a person's whole outlook on life, and upon his way in general of conducting himself; and the cultured man is pictured by them as in action, even with his sleeves rolled up, engaged in the accomplishment of high purposes."⁴

In spite of our poor pay and uncertain length of service, and overwork, let us feel that if we are fit at all for our high calling, that our worth cannot be measured in money, one's salaries cannot be his reward, if so he is not worth even the little he gets. We are paid for our time that we may live; not for our service or worth. For our reward we must look

³ E. D. Starbuck, Moral Training in Public Schools, pp. 97, 98

⁴ Frank M. McMurry, How to Study, pp. 198-202.

among the spiritual and eternal blessings of our calling; and the reward is ample and certain if the service be true and loving.

Henry Suzzallo says:

*"The teacher is, in short, a minister to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual crises of childhood."*⁵

*"Oh, it is great to be a teacher. It is wonderful to be a teacher. A true teacher can never grow old. A true teacher can never die except the death be within. Think what it means! Your whole life is spent with Youth: aggressive, progressive, suggestive Youth. Think what it means to throw your greatness around their incompleteness, round their restlessness, your rest! It is a divine privilege to be a teacher! A perpetual benediction of Youth to be a teacher!"*⁶

XII -- Religion in the Schools

By wise provision our country has ruled that religious doctrines cannot be taught in the schools. I agree with this provision and heartily support it. Yet we must recognize that the necessity for this ruling is fraught with grave danger. Every attempt in the world's history to keep a people morally upright without religious motives and convictions has met with failure and ruin. Many of our educators see this danger. Prof. Hall says: that belief in immortality and in God during the latter period of youth gives stronger and better training to the will than any other belief or instruction can do. He says that even if we should find that belief was false we should still have to teach God and a future life as the only means of making a righteous people. Of course, I take it that the only thing that gives this belief power over the hearts of men is that it is true. He further says that the schools to be successful must keep the young from crime.

Prof. Thompson says this:

*"I am disposed to believe, therefore, and because I believe I therefore declare, that the nation at large will never lose its moral quality until it loses its vision of God. This vision will interpret all of human beauty, and measure all bonds of obligation."*⁷

The above words were spoken at one of the sessions of our N. E. A., in 1914. During one of the sessions of the meeting of the superintendents of the N. E. A., in 1913, Supt. Schaeffer, one of the great and venerable educators of our land, spoke these words: *"Occasionally I find a high school teacher who delights to poke fun at the religious faith of his pupils, or the pupil's parents. A worse service no teacher can render. Destroy faith in things unseen and eternal and you have robbed the people of the strongest support in the midst of the trials and disappointments and sorrows of this life. When you stand at the open grave that is to swallow and close over the remains of a departed child, or friend, faith and heavenly recognition means more than all the bushels of corn which can be raised in the Mississippi valley.*

⁵ Henry Suzzallo, N. E. A. Proceedings, 1913, p. 368

⁶ F. E. Raymond, N. E. A. Proceedings, 1913, p. 626.

⁷ Thompson, N. E. A. Proceedings, 1914, pp. 110. 111.

*"There is a higher life of thought, faith, hope, and love, which can be promoted or destroyed by the teacher and his teaching, a life which turns on the unmeasurable and the immeasurable in teachers and teaching, and which in the end must determine whether failure or success shall be written over the doors of our public schools."*⁸

While I agree that no man should be allowed to teach the tenets of his own faith or creed, I protest against the partial way in which this ruling is carried out. While men of faith, whose words are words of life, are bridled and their mouths are closed against the great immortal hopes of Christian faith, there is one creed, the advocates of which are permitted free rein to prate their wares in our schools from ocean to ocean. These people preach their doctrines in all the schools from the kindergarten to the university without check or hindrance. Yet the words they teach are words of death -- for they kill the *"mighty hopes that make us men."*

They resent the declaration that their opinions form a creed, but I declare them to be the narrowest of all the sects, and the shallowest and cheapest, too. I take it that you are all ready to name this creed without my needing to do so. I refer to the "free thinkers," the skeptics of the land. By freedom to think they mean freedom for all men to think as they do. All others they meet with boastful mockery and ridicule. Yet to the young and thoughtless they appeal with pretty phrases about independence and freedom with a power that is especially dangerous to the boy of high school age. For the immature mind fails to see that their pretense of freedom and independence is a shallow mockery; that while they chatter about breadth of view and freedom of life they are the narrowest of all the sects, and the slaves of folly and doubt. While they claim to believe only that which may be demonstrated they are really the blindest followers of the blind; that while they sneer at the religious man as a bigot their very attitude of boastful ridicule at the faith of another brands them as the greatest bigots of all. Should freedom of belief mean the right to believe little or much? In the name of the Christian fathers and mothers of this glorious land of America, and especially of those of our mountain valleys here, I protest against the freedom that these fellows enjoy as they destroy the very life and hope of life of the young.

If we close the mouth of the man of faith, I insist that we must gag the skeptic and the doubter. Whether or not the manhood and womanhood of the nation shall be preserved in purity and strength depends much upon our staying the hand and stopping the mouth of this fellow who goes about sowing the seeds of sin and death in our schools. It is time that we speak out loud about this vital matter.

XIII -- Conclusion

In conclusion I suggest an affirmative answer to the following as fitting tests for high school and college students before graduation: "Have you any visions of your own? Have you moral and spiritual insight that means anything to you? Have you God-given

⁸ Supt. Nathan C. Schaeffer, N. E. A. Proceedings, pp. 171, 172.

convictions wrought into the very fiber of your own life? Have you any message that is yours and that you feel you must utter? Have you any indignations and enthusiasms that shake you to the center of your being?" Do you feel that you were sent into the world, divinely called to do your life's work? Do you realize that "great achievement is possible only to him who goes to his daily work feeling that he is divinely called to it?"

Let us impress each child with the fact that he is to live his own life. That he has an individuality to develop that is different from every other life that has been or will be in the world. He has a flavor, a message to give, and a work to do that are peculiarly his own. Make him feel that he is born to be big, great and good. Help him to see that he is endangered hourly by the temptation of the good as it calls for him to stay in the valley below, the valley of the good, when he should be struggling toward the mountain peaks above -- living on the heights of the best.

Let us face each day's work with faith and love and courage that knows no failure and admits no defeat. We must go to each day's work in whatever little nitch or corner we are called to labor in the spirit with which the little woman who had left a home of culture, comfort, and all that gladdens the heart, faced each day in her little homestead shanty in North Dakota. She had the heart, in writing back home to her mother and sisters, to pen these lines:

*"And I the priestess? Ah, I would
The gifts and grace were mine
To be the priestess that I should
In a house thirteen by nine."*

(The End)

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