

Moral Education of the Adolescent

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VI -- Ideals, Convictions, Interests, Purposes and Motives

As the youth comes to us hoping, planning, and dreaming, it is our high privilege and our bounden obligation to see to it that his aspirations grow into ideals that are worthy of his ancestry and his inheritance, and that will fully meet the daily needs for righteous living, and that eminently fit him for the friendly service of being his "brother's keeper."

As parents and teachers we should keep free from the deadening superstition and error that discounts the possibilities and worth of every, or any child. Rather let us imbue the boy and girl with a keen sense of the meaning and worth and obligation of life; encourage them in their ardent dreams; believe in them with a living trust. Let them know that every persistent longing and desire of their hearts to be and do are the promise of God written in their souls, and side by side with such passion for life is planted the power of achievement. For it is true that,

*"Never yet was pure Ideal
Too fair for them to make their Real."
"And God's eternal truth lies folded deep
In all man's lofty dreams."*

We may safely assure them this:

*"Thine early dreams, which come like 'shapes of light,'
Come bearing prophecy.
"And trust thyself unto thine inmost soul
In simple faith alway;
And God will make divinely Real
The brightest form of thine Ideal." ¹*

And as these ideals develop and take definite shape during the high school period, the boy or girl must find that his heart is being gripped and his mind and will set by the power of certain great convictions. Else he will have no assurance of meeting the great problems and crises, and the terrible temptations of youth, with the insight and strength to choose and decide aright.

The next step in the moral culture of the young is to make certain that they are possessed of deep and worthy interests that make them thrill and glow with life and noble, manly enthusiasms. A paragraph from Dr. Hodge, of Clarke University, must take care of this thought for the present purpose:

¹ Chief Justice David J. Brewer, American Citizenship, pp. 116, 117.

“‘Give children large interests and give them young.’ This motto..... may well be used in deciding whether a topic should be admitted to the nature study course. Will it form or help to form a life long interest -- an interest neither technical nor superficial, touching life only on the surface, here and there and at long intervals, but one that lies close to the heart, to the home, and to all that makes life worth living? The value of such an interest is inestimable. It may add a sparkle to the eye, elasticity to the step and a glow to every heart beat and be the most efficient safeguard against idleness and waste of time, evil, and temptation of every sort. The love of something worthy and ennobling is a passport the world over, for 'All the world loves a lover.' To find such an interest in some worthy nature – love -- is to discover the fountain of youth.' " ²

But let us never forget that, "*The heart of education, as of life itself, is purpose. For the boy or man without a purpose that literally possesses him, drifts and wanders about in the darkness of doubt and the whirlpools of temptation, without an anchor on which to pin his faith, or a cause to which he may pledge his loyalty, or an immovable rock on which to plant his feet. And far too often he is sucked into the eddying floods of vice and ruined for want of a purpose to which his heart and life are wedded.*"

The great crying need of our youth today is that they be fired with an all-absorbing interest, and wedded to a great purpose that calls for the gift of all their powers of brain and heart. Our young people are too largely purposeless. They have never been touched by the finger of necessity; nor awakened by the call of responsibility; nor fired by the glowing fires of severe struggle; nor absorbed by embarrassing failures; nor sweetened and mellowed by sorrow. Nor have their lives been enriched and hallowed by sharing in those sacred experiences of walking hand in hand with a friend or some near kinsman through travail and deep humiliation. Nor should they have had all of these experiences, for some of them are intended for the perfection of mature characters.

For the young man or young woman whose life is free from care, responsibility, and struggle can hardly take into his heart a worthy purpose. There is no way to make men and women with the hard task left out of our scheme of education, neither at home nor at school. No one can become strong without struggle; or sympathetic without sorrow. Just here lies one of our chief dangers in the era of prosperity with which we are now blessed. We are likely to keep our children, because of a blind tenderness for them, from the very experiences essential to life -- pure, noble, rich life. We must make them strong and responsible; have them bear and share the responsibilities, as well as the privileges, joys, and rewards of the home. At school they should shoulder many responsibilities that are now borne by over-worked and under-paid teachers.

The motive back of an act largely determines the moral quality of the act, as a factor of character-making. We must see to it that our work is so motivated that the child does it for worthy ends. Just here I feel that our schools are sinning greatly against the moral education of our children. Too many of the incentives used to get children to do school work are cheap and artificial, low and common, and sometimes even selfish and immoral. Our system of using percents and rewards as an incentive to study is not a high nor an

² Prof. Clifton F. Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, pp. 23, 24.

abiding source of motive for work. They are only paralleled by our inadequate and unfair means of examining our students to determine their standing among their fellows in their school work. There is not time here to go into these questions, but let us say that many of our leading educators condemn in unmeasured terms these practices. And I suppose every thoughtful man who has seen their failure to move the students to honest effort and abiding interest agrees with Prof. Judd, of the University of Chicago, that they are wholly unfair and inadequate. I wish to point out further that all these methods encourage the spirit of competition, which is already too strong both in the business world and in the school life. Cooperation and not competition ought to be the keynote of our work. On this point Dr. Frank M. McMurry well says, "*The cooperative spirit is the kind that the school should cultivate, and heated competition does not readily lead to cooperation.*"

We cannot stop here to say more against these evils but to add our testimony that they are harmful and to declare our intention of doing all we can to bring about their death.

VII -- Moral Value in School Subjects

Nor can we stop here to discuss at any length the subject of the curriculum as a means of moral culture. But we say that each subject may be so taught as to be an effective tool for the building of character. The one vital thing is to be whole-soleed in our work and to socialize these subjects and make them lead to helpful service of others. We do wish, however, to mention the importance of giving the child the insight reason to make him keenly appreciative of our literature, our history, and the glorious opportunities of his dawning citizenship in our wonderful country. Then, too, we must win and bind his affections about the home life; he must be able to appreciate something of art and of the common beauties of nature about him; and must be in love with the art of song; he must both love to hear and sing the songs of home and country and church. Further we want to emphasize our belief in the thought that the studies of home economics and manual training and agriculture may be more moral than manual or industrial, and in fact must be to play their full part in the education of the child.

VIII -- Honor and Athletics

We feel that much greater attention should be given to appealing to the honor of our youth during the high school period of their lives. G. Stanley Hall says in speaking of honor: "*Perhaps its destiny is to provide for and be loyal to the future of our race, to keep love high, true, and wedded to religion as it always should be, for only each can keep the other pure. To the honor of us today is committed the interests of all who come after us.*"³

Dr. Hall claims that honor is the strongest and most deeply rooted of all the instincts or tendencies of youth excepting possibly, love and the sex-nature. If this is true, how necessary that we make frequent appeal by heroic challenge to the honor of the adolescent youth and maiden.

³ G. S. Hall, Educational Problems, p. 281

The possibilities of athletics as a means of training for honor have hardly been touched; in fact, one is sometimes forced to believe that by many of our coaches and educators that this phase -- which should be the breath of life in all our athletic work -- has hardly been thought of. We fear that far too often our athletics prove a positive menace and danger to moral culture rather than one of its strongest allies. Too often our school sports are used to create an extreme and bitter rivalry where friendly courtesy or cooperation should be the spirit prevailing between schools. Sometimes our desire to win makes us forget the obligations of being hosts or guests to those with whom we play. Courtesy is not a shallow or artificial custom but a root virtue of life.

But the chief danger here lies in a passion to win that sullies honor and tempts the young to unfair means of victory. Nor are the students alone in danger or at fault here; for frequently we find coaches, teachers, principals and superintendents, citizens and parents, clamoring for and demanding that our teams win. While on the other hand there is very little emphasis placed upon honor and fair play. We will close this discussion with a quotation from Prof. Royce of Harvard. In his splendid book, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, he turns aside from the philosophic theme in hand to say:

*"Fair play in sport is a peculiarly good instance of loyalty. And in insisting upon the spirit of fair play, the elders who lead and organize our youthful sports can do a great work for the nation. The coach, or other leader in college sports, to whom fair play is not a first concern, is simply a traitor to our youth and to our nation. If the doctrines of these lectures are right, we can see with what stupendous human interests he is trifling."*⁴

IX -- Love and the Sex-Nature

But perhaps the greatest possibilities and the dangers to the youth lie in the pathway of his newly awakened sex-nature and love. We have been too ready to accept as the whole truth the statement that love is blind. Love, to be pure, has the keenest and truest vision. Love is creative as well as procreative, and perhaps most all of the world's great ones who have given original contributions or gifts to the culture of their people have been great lovers. Love sharpens, brightens, enlarges, and enriches every faculty of the mind and spirit. It also magnifies bodily beauty and adds to physical strength and courage. It is of first importance that those who have to do with leading the adolescent boy or girl should be able to guide with sympathy and wisdom this love that is the most impelling power in the heart. We must never treat the boy's or girl's declaration of love with scorn or ridicule. To us it may be "puppy love," but to him it is a sacred passion of his soul, even though it may change tomorrow or die next week.

Sometimes this interest in and love for the opposite sex comes as a sudden and mighty flood carrying the boy or girl into strange and unknown wildernesses of sentiment and desire and passion. I have seen cases where almost in a single night a boy or girl was so carried away with the surging currents of interest in or love for his *friend* of the opposite sex, that he was entirely unbalanced and bewildered. Often in these extreme cases, especially if the sex-nature awakens young, before other capacities and faculties have

⁴ Josiah Royce, *Philosophy of Loyalty*, p. 267.

been developed for its control, these boys or girls forget all else and are swallowed up by the interests of the sex instinct alone. And in such cases there are the gravest dangers.

First let us quote something of the magic beauty and possibility of love and the sex instinct as well of its dangers in the nurture of the youth. The age of love, in the full sense of the word, slowly supervenes when body and soul are mature, and on this we must dwell longer and seek to analyze and describe its elements. The world has long waited for an adequate treatment of this vast and vital theme, but that modern psychology is now approaching it from so many sides is one of the most hopeful facts of the present age.

*"The development of the sex function is normally perhaps the greatest of all stimuli to mental growth. The new curiosity and interests bring the alert soul into rapport with very many facts and laws of life heretofore unseen. Each of its phenomena supplies the key to a new mystery. Sex is the most potent and magic and open sesame to the deepest mysteries of life, death, religion, and love. It is, therefore, one of the cardinal sins against youth to repress healthy thoughts of sex at the proper age, because thus the mind itself is darkened and its wings are clipped for many of the higher intuitions, which the supreme muse of common sense at this psychological moment ought to give. If youth are left to themselves and the contagion of most environments, this mental stimulus takes a low turn toward lewd imaginations and vile conceptions, which undermine the strength of virtue, and instead of helping upward and making invulnerable against all temptation, it makes virtue safe only in its absence and prepares the way for a fall when its full stress is felt."*⁵

*"The dangers of this period are great and manifest. The chief of these, far greater even than the dangers of intemperance, is the sexual elements of soul and body, especially if they be developed prematurely and disproportionately.....If it occurs before other compensating and controlling powers are unfolded, this element absorbs and dwarfs their energy and is then more likely to be uninstructed and to suck up all that is vile in the environment. Far more than we realize the thoughts and feelings of youth center about this factor of his nature..... The premature or excessive development of this instinct tends to dwarf every part of soul and body."*⁶

Have you noticed that the excessive development of this instinct usually accompanies its too early awakening? My experience inclines me to believe that. Oh, how many lives have I seen marred and poisoned beyond entire recovery for the want of safe and sympathetic guidance at this period! At no other time of life should the parent and teacher be so much a sympathetic comrade and friend with the boy and girl. No wonder that Prof. Hall, the dean of our writers on adolescence, says that the teachers of boys and girls of this age should be men and women whose souls are full of fatherhood and motherhood. But let me add to this that they should also be perfectly attuned to the spirit of boyhood and girlhood.

⁵ G. S. Hall, Educational Problems, p. 231.

⁶ G. S. Hall, Youth, p. 261.

I well remember a case of a girl who was the very apple of her teacher's eye; she was in the sixth grade and was twelve years of age. The next year she started to school soon after her thirteenth birthday. The previous year she had been wholly absorbed with her lessons and her entire desire seemed to be to please her teachers and help her parents. This first year I was principal of the school and her teacher was constantly referring her to me as a model student. I was away the next year but returned during the school term; the girl was still with the same teacher. He called my attention to his model student of the previous year and said that he couldn't understand her at all. She had no interest in her studies, and was constantly making a disturbance during class recitation or study period with her incessant interference or prattle with the boys. Not only in school but at home and in the community she was a sore trial to her parents, and the people of the neighborhood. It was boys, boys, boys; she thought of nothing but boys. Her parents were constantly scolding and complaining at her conduct; the neighbors criticized her; and the teacher had labored with her during the whole year; but all in vain. He said, "We don't understand her and we don't know what to do." I asked him if they had ever thought that she was as much bewildered and lost as they were, calling his attention to the fact that she was in the grip of a great maze of strange and surging interests and passions without any experience to prepare her to meet the situation. This impelling interest in boys had taken hold of her with mighty hands that were not to be resisted. She couldn't understand that it was wrong, and the only hope for this girl's salvation lay in a sympathetic, confidential, comradeship of someone with the eye to see and the heart to feel the dangers, and at the same time the glorious promise of her life. Only such a one could share with her the beauty of her newly awakened affections and in tender understanding point out to her that the extreme expression or manifestation of these feelings would poison her soul and subtract from her joys in life. Poor soul, she didn't know herself, and was without another soul to understand her, and to guide her through this stormy period of girlhood into the safe and quiet waters of pure, virtuous womanhood.

Never before in our country have there been such grave dangers, on this very point, to the youth of the nation. Without attempting to point out all the causes let us call attention to the fact that the cheap literature, the sensational attractions of the picture show, the low and sensual plays of the theatre, the vile and vulgar tendencies of the modern dance, make a united and well-nigh irresistible appeal to the sex instinct of the young. Along with this there is an inclination, almost a passion, within youth generally for unrestrained and unguided liberty to come and go and do as they please. Except we rise to meet these dangers and evils, the chastity and purity -- yes, the very moral life -- of the coming generation is threatened at the heart.

The devil's choicest weapon for the destruction of young men and young women is the temptation to enjoy the privileges of love without assuming its burdens and responsibilities. In fact, irresponsible love and loose courtship is the damning curse of the day; besides the dangers against chastity it cheapens love and leads to untimely and unholy marriages, which again provide irresponsible parenthood for the children of such unions. Can we not as parents and teachers take hold of this problem with such faith and love so as to exalt the whole question of love and courtship and marriage? By so doing we will have accomplished a mighty saving work for the future of the race.

In short, I charge us that we are not giving the children a fair deal by permitting so many severe and terrible temptations to surround their path at every step. We must clean the social atmosphere and check the inviting and ever-present suggestion of wrong.

The school can do more than any other public agency to divert the attention of the young from this element of their nature by interesting them in study and other activities -- athletics, plays and games, music, school dramas, debates, mechanical and fine arts, etc. But it is hardly touching the question. We must take hold of this problem with an unyielding purpose and continue to plow a straight furrow until it is solved, if we would avoid disaster to our children. Even in the dance we must find some means of largely eliminating the appeal to the sex-nature.

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