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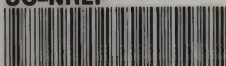

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.e Punishment of Children

BY
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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE material contained in this pamphlet wa originally delivered in three addresses before th Ethical Culture Society of New York City. Specia permission has been given to have it reprinted ir this form.

The ethical nurture of the child is a distinc responsibility which no parent can neglect wit impunity. When ignorant of the more elementar principles of punishment, parents easily fall into or of two serious errors. The use of harsh and severel arbitrary methods causes the child's fine ethic sensibilities to become dull. Through indifference o careless neglect, the child becomes willful, erratic or self-indulgent. In this study Dr. Adler, wit remarkable skill, guides the parent between the two extremes. He shows that it is possible to b consistent without being harsh, gentle without be ing vacillating.

The mastery of the art of punishment is also on of the most direct means of ethical self-culture It is to be hoped that a careful study of this sub ject may result in a refinement of the attitude c parents toward each other, as well as toward thei children.

NORMAN E. RICHARDSON.

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THE PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

I

IT is man's moral duty to act as the physician of his enemies and seek to cure them of their wrong-doing. How much more, then, should this attitude be taken toward those whom we love—toward our children, if we find their characters marred by serious faults?

In discussing the subject of punishment I do not for a moment think of covering the innumerable problems which it suggests. Many books have been written on this subject; prolonged study and the experience of a lifetime are barely sufficient for a mastery of its details. I shall content myself with suggesting a few simple rules and principles, and shall consider my object gained if I induce my hearers to enter upon a closer investigation of the delicate and manifold questions involved.

1. Never Administer Punishment in Anger

The first general rule to which I would refer is, *never administer punishment in anger.* A saying of Socrates deserves to be carefully borne in mind. Turning one day upon his insolent servant, Speucippus, who had subjected him to great annoyance, he exclaimed, "I should beat you now, sirrah, were I not so angry with you." The practice of most men is the very opposite; they beat and punish because they *are* angry.

But it is clear that we cannot trust ourselves to correct another while we are enraged. The intensity of our anger is proportional to the degree of annoyance which we have experienced, but it happens quite frequently that a great annoyance may be caused by a slight fault, just as, conversely,

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the greatest fault may cause us only slight annoyance, or may even contribute to our pleasure. We should administer serious punishment where the fault is serious, and slight punishment where the fault is slight. But, as I have just said, a slight fault may sometimes cause serious annoyance, just as a slight spark thrown into a powder magazine may cause a destructive explosion. And we do often resemble a powder magazine, being filled with suppressed inflammable irritations, so that a trivial naughtiness on the part of a child may cause a most absurd display of temper.

But is it the child's fault that we are in this irascible condition? To show how a slight fault may sometimes cause a most serious annoyance, let me remind you of the story of Vedius Pollio, the Roman. He was one day entertaining the Emperor Augustus at dinner. During the banquet a slave who was carrying one of the crystal goblets by which his master set great store, in his nervousness suffered the goblet to fall from his hand so that it broke into a thousand pieces on the floor. Pollio was so infuriated that he ordered the slave to be bound and thrown into a neighboring fishpond, to be devoured by the lampreys. The Emperor interfered to save the slave's life, but Pollio was too much enraged to defer even to the Emperor's wish. Thereupon Augustus ordered that every crystal goblet in the house should be broken in his presence, that the slave should be set free, and that the obnoxious fishpond should be closed.

The breaking of a goblet or vase is a good instance of how a slight fault, a mere inadvertency, may cause serious damage and great chagrin. In the same way an unseasonable word, loud conversation, a bit of pardonable mischief, which we should overlook under ordinary circumstances, may throw us into a fury when we are out of sorts. When we have urgent business and are kept waiting, we are apt, unless we keep a curb on our tempers, to

break forth into violent complaints, which indeed are quite proportional to the amount of annoyance we experience, but not necessarily to the fault of the person who occasions it.

Our business is to cure faults, and in order to accomplish this end the punishment should be meted out in due proportion to the fault. Instead of following this principle, the great majority of men when they punish are not like reasonable beings, selecting right means toward a true end, but like hot springs which boil over because they cannot contain themselves.

We ought never to punish in anger. No one can trust himself when in that state; an angry man is always liable to overshoot the mark; we must wait until our angry feeling has had time to cool.

Do I then advise that we administer punishment in cold blood? No, we ought to correct the faults of others with a certain moral warmth expressed in our words and manner, a warmth which is produced by our reprehension of the fault, not by the annoyance which it causes us. This, then, is the first rule: *Never punish in anger.*

2. Distinguish Between the Child and the Fault

The second rule is that in correcting a child we should be careful to distinguish between the child and its fault; we should not allow the shadow of the fault to darken the whole nature of the child. We should treat the fault as something accidental which can be removed. Vulgar persons, when a child has told a falsehood, say, "You liar." They identify the child with the fault of lying, and thereby imply that this vice is ingrained in its nature. They do not say or imply, "You have told a falsehood, but you will surely not do so again; hereafter you will tell the truth"; they say, "You are a liar"; which is equivalent to saying, "Lying has become part and parcel of your nature." In the same way

when a child has proved itself incapable of mastering a certain task, the thoughtless parent or teacher may exclaim, impatiently, "You are a dunce"; that is to say, "You are a hopeless case; nothing but stupidity is to be expected of you." All opprobrious epithets of this sort are to be most scrupulously avoided. Even to the worst offender one should say: "You have acted thus in one case, perhaps in many cases, but you can act otherwise; the evil has not eaten into the core of your nature. There is still a sound part in you; there is good at the bottom of your soul, and if you will only assert your better nature, you can do well." We are bound to show confidence in the transgressor. Our confidence may be disappointed a hundred times, but it must never be wholly destroyed, for it is the crutch on which the weak lean in their feeble efforts to walk.

Now, such language as "You are a dunce," "You are a liar," is, to be sure, used only by the vulgar; but many parents who would not use such words imply as much by their attitude toward their child; they indicate by their manner, "Well, nothing good is to be expected of you." This attitude of the parents is born of selfishness; the child has disappointed their expectations, and the disappointment, instead of making them more tender toward the child, makes them impatient. But this is not the attitude of the physician whose business it is to cure evil. We must give the child to understand that we still have hope of his amendment; *the slightest improvement should be welcomed with an expression of satisfaction.*

We should never attach absolute blame to a child, never overwhelm it with a general condemnation. And in like manner we should never give absolute praise, never injure a child by unlimited approbation. The words, "*excellent,*" "*perfect,*" *which are sometimes used in school reports, are inexcusable.* I have seen the object of education thwarted in the case of particularly promising pupils by such

unqualified admiration. No human being is ethically perfect, and to tell a child that he is perfect is to encourage a superficial way of looking upon life and to pamper his conceit.

The right attitude is to say or to imply by our manner, "You have done well thus far; go on as you have begun and try hereafter to do still better." Such words as these fall like sunshine into the soul, warming and fructifying every good seed.

On the other hand, to tell a child that he is perfect may induce him to relax his effort, for having reached the summit he does not feel the need of further exertion. We should correct faults in such a way as to imply that not everything is lost. And we should praise merit in such a way as to imply that not everything is yet achieved; that, on the contrary, the goal is still far, far in the distance.

Everything, as I have said, depends upon the attitude of the parent or instructor. Those who possess educational tact—a very rare and precious quality—adopt the right attitude by a sort of instinct. But those who do not possess it naturally can acquire it, at least to a certain degree, by reflecting upon the underlying principles of punishment.

3. Do Not Lecture Children

The third rule is, *Do not lecture children*. One feels tempted to say to some parents: "You do not succeed as well as you might in the training of your children because you talk too much. The less you say the more effective will your discipline be. Let your measures speak for you."

When punishment is necessary let it come upon the child like the action of a natural law—calm, unswerving, inevitable. Do not attempt to give reasons or to argue with the child concerning the punishment you are about to inflict. If the child is in danger of thinking your punishment unjust, it may be expedient to explain the reasons of your

action, but do so after the punishment has been inflicted.

There are parents who are perpetually scolding their children. The fact that they scold so much is proof of their educational helplessness. They do not know what measures of discipline to apply, hence they scold. Often their scolding is due to momentary passion, and the child intuitively detects that this is so. If the parent is in ill humor, a mischievous prank, a naughty word, an act of disobedience sometimes puts him into a towering passion; at other times the same offense may be lightly considered, or even worse offenses passed over with meaningless "Don't do that again." The child perceives this vacillation, and learns to look upon a scolding as a mere passing shower, hiding its head under shelter until the storm has blown over.

Other parents are given to delivering lengthy homilies to their children, and then often express surprise that all their sound doctrine, all their beautiful sermons, have no effect whatever. If they would pause to consider for a moment, they could easily see why their lectures have no effect, why they pass "in at one ear and out at the other." Their lectures on right and wrong are generally too abstract for the child's comprehension, and often do not touch its case at all. Moreover, the iteration of the same dingdong has the effect of blunting the child's apprehension. A stern rebuke is occasionally necessary and does good, but it should be short, clear, incisive.

A moralizing talk with an older child sometimes does good. The parent should not, however, indulge in generalities, but, looking over the record of the child for the past weeks or months, should pick out the definite points in which it has transgressed, thus holding up a picture of the child's life to its own eyes to reenforce the memory of its faults and stimulate its conscience. In general, it may be said that the less the parent talks about

moral delinquencies the better. On this rule of parsimony in respect to words particular stress is to be laid.

4. Undeviating Consistency

The next rule is quite as important as the preceding ones. It is that of *undeviating consistency.* Were not the subject altogether too painful, it would be amusing to observe how weak mothers—and weak fathers too—constantly eat their own words. "How often have I told you not to do this thing, but now you have done it again." "Well, what is to follow?" secretly asks the child. "The next time you do it I shall surely punish you." The next time the story repeats itself; and so it is always "the next time." Very often foolish threats are made, which the parents know they cannot and will not carry out; and do you suppose that the children do not know as well as you that the threat you have been uttering is an idle one?

We should be extremely careful in deciding what to demand of a child. Our demands should be determined by a scrupulous regard for the child's own good, but when the word has gone forth, especially in the case of young children, we should insist on unquestioning obedience. Our will must be recognized by the child as its law; it must not suspect that we are governed by passion or caprice. There are those that protest that this is too stern a method, that gentle treatment, persuasion, and love ought to suffice to induce the child to obey. Love and persuasion do suffice in many cases, but they do not answer in all; and, besides, I hold it to be important that the child should sometimes be brought face to face with a law which is superior to the law of its own will, and should be compelled to bend to the higher law, as expressed in its parent's wishes, merely because it is a higher law.

And so far from believing this is to be a cruel

method, I believe that the opposite method of always wheedling and coaxing children into obedience is really cruel. Many a time later on in life its self-love will beat in vain against the immutable barriers of law, and if the child has not learned to yield to rightful authority in youth, the necessity of doing so later on will only be the more bitterly felt. The child should sometimes be compelled to yield to the parent's authority simply because the parental authority expresses a higher law than that of its own will.

And this leads me to speak incidentally of a subject which is nearly allied to the one we are now discussing.

It is a well-known trick of the nursery to divert the child from some object which it is not to have by quickly directing its attention to another object. If a child cries for the moon, amuse it with the light of a candle; if it insists upon handling a fragile vase, attract its attention to the doll; if it demands a knife with which it might injure itself, call in the rattle to the rescue.

This method is quite proper for baby children, but it is often continued to a much later age with harmful results. As soon as the self-consciousness of the child is fairly developed, that is, about the third year, this method should no longer be employed. It is important that the will power of the young be strengthened. Now, the more the will is accustomed to fasten upon the objects of desire the stronger does it become, while, by rapidly introducing new objects the will is distracted and a certain shiftlessness is induced, the will being made to glide from one object to another without fixing itself definitely upon any one. It is far better to allow a child to develop a will of its own, but to make it understand that it must at times yield this will to the will of the parent, than thus to distract its attention. If it wants a knife which it ought not to have, make it understand firmly, though never harshly, that it cannot have what

it wants, that it must yield its wish to the parent's wish. Nor is it at all necessary every time to give the reasons why. The fact that the parent commands is a sufficient reason.

The rules thus far mentioned are, that we shall not punish in anger, that we shall not identify the child with its fault, that we shall be sparing with admonitions and let positive discipline speak for itself, and that, while demanding nothing which is unreasonable, we should insist on implicit obedience.

5. Physical Pleasure as a Reward of Virtue

There is one question that touches the general subject of punishment and reward which is in some sense the most important and vital of all the questions we are considering. It throws a bright light or a deep shadow on the whole theory of life, according to the point of view we take.

I allude to the question whether the pleasures of the senses should be treated as a reward for the performance of duty. A parent says to his child: "You have been good to-day; you have studied your lessons; your deportment has been satisfactory: I will reward you by giving you sweetmeats, or by taking you on a holiday into the country." But what connection can there possibly be between the performance of duty and the physical pleasure enjoyed in eating sweetmeats? Is not the connection a purely arbitrary one? Does it not depend upon the notion that there is no intrinsic satisfaction in a moral act? We ought to see that it is radically wrong to make such enjoyments the reward of virtue; we ought to have the courage to make application of our better theories to the education of our children if we would develop in them the germs of a nobler, freer manhood and womanhood. I admit, indeed, that a child is not yet sufficiently developed to stand on its own feet morally, and that its virtuous inclinations need

to be supported and assisted; but we can give it this assistance by means of our approbation or disapprobation.

To be in disgrace with its parents ought to be for a child the heaviest penalty. To have their favor should be its highest reward. But simply because a child is most easily taken on the side of its animal instincts, are we to appeal to it on that side? Should it not be our aim to raise the young child above the mere desire for physical gratification, to prevent it from attaching too much importance to such pleasures?

The conduct of many parents, however, I fear, tends to foster artificially that lower nature in their offspring which it should rather be their aim to repress. By their method of bestowing extraneous rewards, parents contribute to pervert the character of their children in earliest infancy, giving it a wrong direction from the start.

But, it may be objected, is there not a wholesome truth contained in Saint Paul's saying that "he who will not work, neither shall he eat"? Is not our conscience offended when we see a person enjoying the pleasures of life who will perform none of its more serious duties? And should we not all agree that, in a certain sense, virtue entitles one to pleasure, and the absence of virtue ought to preclude one from pleasure?

To meet this point let us dwell for a moment on the following considerations. Man is endowed with a variety of faculties, and a different type of pleasure or satisfaction arises from the exercise of each. Pleasure, in general, may be defined as the feeling which results from successful exercise of any of our faculties—physical, mental or moral. A successful rider takes pleasure in horsemanship, an athlete in the lifting of weights. The greater an artist's mastery over his art, the greater the pleasure he derives from it. The more complex and difficult the problems which a scholar is able to resolve, the more delight does he find in study.

The same is true of the moral nature. The more a man succeeds in harmonizing his inner life, and in helping to make the principles of social harmony prevail in the world about him, the more satisfaction will he derive from the exercise of virtue.

But the main fact which we are bound to remember is that it is impossible to pay for the exercise of any one faculty by the pleasure derived from the exercise of another; that each faculty is legitimately paid only in its own coin. If you ask a horseman who has just returned from an exhilarating ride what compensation he expects to receive for the exercise he has taken, he will probably look at you in blank amazement, with grave misgivings as to your sanity. If you ask a scientist what reward he expects to receive for the pursuit of knowledge, he will answer you, if he is an expert in the use of his intellect, that he expects no ulterior reward of any kind; that not positive knowledge so much as the sense of growth in the attainment of knowledge is the highest reward which he can imagine. And the same answer you will get from a person who is expert in the use of his moral faculty, namely, that not virtue so much as growth in virtue, not the results achieved by the exercise of the faculty, but the successful exercise itself is the supreme compensation.

I have used the word "expert" in all these cases, and precisely "there's the rub." The reason why many persons cannot get themselves to believe that the exercise of the mental and moral faculties is a sufficient reward is because they are not expert, because they have not penetrated far enough along the lines of knowledge and virtue to obtain the satisfactions of them. But the same applies to the tyro in any pursuit. A rider who has not yet acquired a firm seat in the saddle will hardly derive much pleasure from horseback exercise. An awkward, clumsy dancer, who cannot keep step, will get no pleasure from dancing. There is no help for the tyro, no matter in what direction he aims

at excellence, except to go on trying until he becomes expert.

I have said that each faculty is sovereign in its own sphere, that each provides its proper satisfactions within itself and does not borrow them from the domain of any of the others. Nevertheless we are constrained to admit the important truth that is contained in the saying of Saint Paul. And this truth, it seems to me, may be formulated in the words that, while physical pleasure is not the reward of virtue, virtue ought to be regarded as the condition *sine qua non* of the enjoyment of physical pleasures—at least, so far as the distribution of such pleasures is within the power of the educator or of society.

This proposition depends on the difference in rank that subsists between our faculties, of which some are superior and others inferior, the moral and intellectual faculties rightfully occupying the top of the scale. We inwardly rebel when we see the indolent and self-indulgent living in luxury and affluence. And this not because the enjoyments which such persons command are the proper compensations of virtue, or because physical pain would be the proper punishment of their moral faults, but because we demand that the lower faculties shall not be exercised at the expense and to the neglect of the higher, that the legitimate rank and order of our faculties shall not be subverted.

Applying this idea to the case of children, I think it would be perfectly proper to deny a child that has failed to study its lessons or has given other occasion for serious displeasure, the privilege of going on a holiday to the country or enjoying its favorite sports. Everything, however, will depend—as so much in education does depend—on the manner; in this instance on what we imply in our denial rather than on what we expressly state.

The denial, it seems to me, should be made on the ground that there is a proper order in which the faculties are to be exercised; that the higher,

the mental, faculties should be exercised first, and that he who will not aim at the higher satisfactions, neither shall he, so far as we can prevent, enjoy the lower. On the other hand, by making physical pleasures—sports, games and the like—the reward of study, we exalt these satisfactions so as to make *them* seem the higher, so as to make the satisfactions of knowledge appear of lesser value compared with the satisfactions of the senses.

In an ideal community every one of our faculties would be brought into play in turn, without our ever being tempted to regard the pleasures of the one as compensation for the exercise of the other. The human soul has often been compared to an instrument with many strings. Perhaps it may not be amiss to compare it to an orchestra. In this orchestra the violins represent the intellectual faculties. They lead the rest. Then there are the flute-notes of love, the trumpet tones of ambition, the rattling drums and cymbals of the passions and appetites. Each of these instruments is to come in its proper place, while the moral plan of life is the musical composition which they all assist in rendering.

What we should try to banish is the vicious idea of extraneous reward, the notion that man is an animal whose object in life is to eat and drink, to possess gold and fine garments, and to gratify every lower desire, and that he can be brought to labor only on condition that he may obtain such pleasures. What we should impress instead is the notion that labor itself is satisfying—manual labor, mental labor, moral labor—and that the more difficult the labor, the higher the compensating satisfactions.

II

I have thus far endeavored to combat the notion that physical pleasure should be offered as a reward for virtue, and physical pain inflicted as a punishment for moral faults. Now we are in a position to apply this conclusion to some special questions which it is proposed to take up for consideration. The first of these relates to corporal punishment.

1. Corporal Punishment

It was in that period of history which is so justly called the Dark Ages that the lurid doctrine of hell as a place for the eternal bodily torture of the wicked haunted men's minds, and the same mediæval period witnessed the most horrible examples of corporal punishment in the schools and in the homes.

This was no mere coincidence. As the manners of the people are so will their religion be. Savage parents who treat their children in a cruel, passionate way naturally entertain the idea of a god who treats his human children in the same way. If we wish to purify the religious beliefs of men, we must first ameliorate their daily life.

There was once a schoolmaster who boasted that during his long and interesting career he had inflicted corporal punishment more than a million times. In modern days the tide of public opinion has set strongly against corporal punishment. It is being abolished in many of our public institutions, and the majority of cultivated parents have a decided feeling against availing themselves of this method of discipline.

But the mere sentiment against it is not sufficient. Is the opposition to it the result possibly of that increased sensitiveness to pain which we observe in the modern man, of the indisposition to inflict or to witness suffering? Then some stern teacher

might tell us that to inflict suffering is sometimes necessary, that it is a sign of weakness to shrink from it, that as the surgeon must sometimes apply the knife in order to effect a radical cure, so the conscientious parent should sometimes inflict physical pain in order to eradicate grievous faults. The stern teacher might warn us against "sparing the rod and spoiling the child."

We must not, therefore, base our opposition to corporal punishment merely on sentimental grounds. And there is no need for doing so, for there are sound principles on which the argument may be made to rest. Corporal punishment does not merely conflict with our tenderer sympathies, it thwarts and defeats the purpose of moral reformation. In the first place it brutalizes the child; secondly, in many cases it breaks the child's spirit, making it a moral coward; and, thirdly, it tends to weaken the sense of shame, on which the hope of moral improvement depends.

Corporal punishment brutalizes the child. We may be justified in beating a brute, though, of course, never in a cruel, merciless way. A lazy beast of burden may be stirred up to work; an obstinate mule must feel the touch of the whip. Corporal punishment implies that a rational human being is on the level of an animal.[1] Its underlying thought is: you can be controlled only through your animal instincts; you can be moved only by an appeal to your bodily feelings. It is a practical denial of that higher nature which exists in every human being, and this is a degrading view of human character. A child which is accustomed to be treated like an animal is apt to behave like an animal. Thus corporal punishment instead of moralizing serves to demoralize the character.

In the next place *corporal punishment often breaks*

[1]It is an open question whether light corporal punishment should not occasionally be permitted in the case of very young children who have not yet arrived at the age of reason. In this case, at all events, there is no danger that the permission will be abused. No one would think of seriously hurting a very young child.

the spirit of a child. Have you ever observed how some children that have been often whipped will whine and beg off when the angry parent is about to take out the rattan: "O, I will never do it again; O, let me off this time." What an abject sight it is—a child fawning and entreating and groveling like a dog! And must not the parent too feel humiliated in such a situation! Courage is one of the noblest of the manly virtues. We should train our children to bear unavoidable pain without flinching, but sensitive natures can only be slowly accustomed to endure suffering; and chastisement, when it is frequent and severe, results in making a sensitive child more and more cowardly, more and more afraid of the blows. In such cases it is the parents themselves, by their barbarous discipline, who stamp the ugly vice of cowardice upon their children.

Even more disastrous is the third effect of corporal punishment, that of *blunting the sense of shame.* Some children quail before a blow, but others, of a more obstinate disposition, assume an attitude of dogged indifference. They hold out the hand, they take the stinging blows, they utter no cry, they never wince; they will not let the teacher or father triumph over them to that extent; they walk off in stolid indifference.

Now, a blow is an invasion of personal liberty. Every one who receives a blow feels a natural impulse to resent it. But boys who are compelled by those in authority over them to submit often to such humiliation are liable to lose the finer feeling for what is humiliating. They become, as the popular phrase puts it, "hardened." Their sense of shame is deadened.

But sensitiveness to shame is that quality of our nature on which, above all others, moral progress depends. The stigma of public disgrace is one of the most potent safeguards of virtue. The world cries "Shame" upon the thief, and the dread of the disgrace which is implied in being called a

thief acts as one of the strongest preventives upon those whom hunger and poverty might tempt to steal. The world cries "Shame" upon the lawbreaker in general, but those who in their youth are accustomed to be put to shame by corporal punishment are likely to become obtuse to other forms of disgrace as well. The same criticism applies to those means of publicly disgracing children which have been in vogue so long—the fool's cap, the awkward squad, the bad boy's bench, and the like. When a child finds itself frequently exposed to ignominy it becomes indifferent to ignominy, and thus the door is opened for the entrance of the worst vices.

There is one excellence, indeed, which I perceive in corporal punishment; it is an excellent means of breeding criminals. Parents who inflict frequent corporal punishment, I make bold to say, are helping to prepare their children for a life of crime; they put them on a level with the brute, break their spirit and weaken their sense of shame.

2. The Evil of the Mark System

The second special question which we have to consider relates to the mark system. As this system is applied to hundreds of thousands of school children, the question whether that influence is good or evil concerns us closely. I am of the opinion that it is evil. The true aim of every school should be to lead the pupils to pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and to preserve a correct deportment in order to gain the approbation of conscience and of the teacher whose judgment represents the verdict of conscience.

I object to the mark system because it introduces a kind of outward payment for progress in study and good conduct. The marks which the pupil receives stand for the dollars and cents which the man will receive later on for his work. So much school work performed, so many marks in return.

But a child should be taught to study for the pleasure which study gives, and for the improvement of the mind which is its happy result.

I know of a school where the forfeiture of twelve marks was made the penalty for a certain misdemeanor. One day a pupil, being detected in a forbidden act, turned to the teacher and said, "I agree to the forfeit, you can strike off my twelve marks," and then went on openly transgressing the rule, as if he had paid out so many shillings for an enjoyment which he was determined to have; as if the outward forfeit could atone for the antimoral spirit by which the act was inspired. But how is it possible by any external system of marks to change the antimoral spirit of an offender?

I object, furthermore, to the marking system because the discrimination to which it leads can never be really just. One boy receives an average of ninety-seven and one half per cent, and another of ninety-five. The one who receives ninety-seven and one half thinks himself superior to, and is ranked as the superior of the one who has received only ninety-five. But is it possible to rate mental and moral differences between children in this arithmetical fashion?

Above all, I object to this system because it appeals to a low spirit of competition among the young in order to incite them to study. "Ambition is avarice on stilts," as Landor puts it. Of course it is better to try to outshine others in what is excellent than in what is vicious; but if the object be that of outshining others at all, of gaining superiority over others, no matter how high the faculties may be which are called into exercise, the motive is impure and ought to be condemned. There is a general impression abroad that men are not yet good enough to make it practicable to appeal to their better nature. But it is forgotten that by constantly appealing to the baser impulses we give these undue prominence, and starve out and weaken the nobler instincts. Whatever the

truth may be in regard to later life, it seems to me culpable to foster this sort of competition in young children.

Now, the mark spirit does foster such a spirit in our schools. It teaches the pupils to work for distinction rather than for the solid satisfaction of growth in intelligence and mental power. Doubtless, where the method of instruction is mechanical, where the atmosphere of the classroom is dull and lifeless, and the tasks are uninteresting, it is necessary to use artificial means in order to keep the pupils to their work; it is necessary to give them the sweet waters of flattered self-esteem in order to induce them to swallow the dry-as-dust contents of a barren school learning.

But is it not possible to have schools in which every subject taught shall be made interesting to the scholars, in which the ways of knowledge shall become the ways of pleasantness, in which there shall be sufficient variety in the program of lessons to keep the minds of the pupils constantly fresh and vigorous, in which the pupils shall not be rewarded by being dismissed at an earlier hour than usual from the school, but in which possibly they shall consider it reward to be allowed to remain longer than usual? And, indeed, requests of this sort are often made in schools of the better kind, and in such schools there is no need of an artificial mark system, no need to stimulate the unwholesome ambition of the pupils, no need to bribe them to perform their tasks. Rather do such pupils look with affection upon their school; and the daily task itself is a delight and a sufficient reward.

I do not, of course, oppose the giving of reports to children. Such expressions as "good," "fair" and "poor," which formulate the teacher's opinion of the pupil from time to time, are indispensable, inasmuch as they acquaint the parents and the pupil himself with the instructor's general approval or disapprobation. I only oppose the numerical calculation of merit and demerit, and the vulgar

method of determining the pupil's rank in the class according to percentages. Under that method the pupils, having pursued knowledge only as a means to the end of satisfying their pride and vanity, relax their efforts when they have gained this ambitious aim. They cease to take any deeper interest in the pursuit of knowledge the moment they have achieved their purpose. The notorious failure of the system, despite all its artificial stimulants, to create lasting attachment and devotion to intellectual pursuits condemns the whole idea of marks, to my mind, beyond appeal.

3. "Natural Penalties"

We pass next to the method for correcting the faults of children which has been proposed by Herbert Spencer in his collected essays on education. These essays have attracted great attention, as anything would be sure to do which comes from so distinguished a source. I have heard people who are ardent admirers of Spencer say, "We base the education of our children entirely on Mr. Spencer's book." All the more necessary is it to examine whether the recommendations of his book will wholly bear criticism.

I cannot help feeling that if Mr. Spencer had been more thoroughly at home in the best educational literature he would not have presented to us an old method as if it were new, and would not have described that which is at best but a second- or third-rate help in moral education as the central principle of it all, the keynote of the whole theory of the moral training of the young.

The method which he advises us to adopt is that of *visiting upon the child the natural penalties of its transgression*, of causing it to experience the inevitable consequences of evil acts in order that it may avoid evil, of building up the moral nature of the child, by leading it to observe the outward results of its acts. Mr. Spencer points out that

when a child puts its finger into the flame, or when it incautiously touches a hot stove, it is burned; "a burnt child shuns the fire." When a child carelessly handles a sharp knife it is apt to cut its fingers. This is a salutary lesson; it will be more careful thereafter; this is the method of nature, namely, of teaching by experience. And this is a kind of cure-all which he offers for general application. He does, indeed, admit at the close of his essay, that, in certain cases, where the evil consequences are out of all proportion to the fault, some other method than that of experience must be adopted. But, in general, he recommends this method of nature, as he calls it.

For instance, a child in the nursery has littered the floor with its toys, and after finishing its play refuses to put them away. When next the child asks for its toy box the reply of its mother should be: "The last time you had your toys you left them lying on the floor and Jane had to pick them up. Jane is too busy to pick up every time the things you leave about, and I cannot do it myself, so that, as you will not put away your toys when you have done with them, I cannot let you have them." This is obviously a natural consequence and must be so recognized by the child.

Or a little girl, Constance by name, is scarcely ever ready in time for the daily walk. The governess and the other children are almost invariably compelled to wait. In the world the penalty of being behind time is the loss of some advantage that one would otherwise have gained. The train is gone, or the steamboat is just leaving its moorings, or the good seats in the concert room are filled; and every one may see that it is the prospective deprivation entailed by being late which prevents people from being unpunctual. Should not this prospective deprivation control the child's conduct also? If Constance is not ready at the appointed time the natural result should be that she is left behind and loses her walk.

Or, again, a boy is in the habit of recklessly soiling and tearing his clothes. He should be compelled to clean them and to mend the tear as well as he can. And if having no decent clothes to wear, the boy is ever prevented from joining the rest of the family on a holiday excursion and the like, it is manifest that he will keenly feel the punishment and perceive that his own carelessness is the cause of it.

But I think it can easily be made clear that this method of moral discipline should be an exceptional and not a general one, and that there are not a few but many occasions when it becomes simply impossible to visit upon children the natural penalties of their transgressions. In these cases the evil consequences are too great or too remote for us to allow the child to learn from experience.

A boy is leaning too far out of the window; shall we let him take the natural penalty of his folly? The natural penalty would be to fall and break his neck. Or a child is about to rush from a heated room into the cold street with insufficient covering; shall we let the child take the natural penalty of its heedlessness? The natural penalty might be an attack of pneumonia. Or, again, in certain parts of the country it is imprudent to be out on the water after nightfall owing to the danger of malaria. A boy who is fond of rowing insists upon going out in his boat after dark; shall we allow him to learn by experience the evil consequences of his act and gain wisdom by suffering the natural penalty? The natural penalty might be that he would come home in a violent fever.

To show how much mischief the application of the Spencerian method might work, let me mention a case which came under my observation. A certain teacher had been studying Herbert Spencer and was much impressed with his ideas. One wet, rainy day a number of children came to school without overshoes. The teacher had often told them that they must wear their overshoes when

it rained; having neglected to do so, their feet were wet. Now came the application of the natural penalty theory. Instead of keeping the children near the fire while their shoes were being dried in the kitchen, they were allowed to run about in their stocking feet in the large school hall in order to fix in their minds the idea that, as they had made their shoes unfit to wear, they must now go without them. This was in truth moral discipline with a vengeance.

It is, in many instances, impossible to let the natural penalties of their transgressions fall upon children; it would be dangerous to health, to life and limb, and also to character, to do so.

Let me be perfectly understood just here: I do not deny that the method of natural penalties is capable of being applied to advantage in the moral training of children. It is a philosophic conclusion that it can be used as a means of building up the confidence of children in the authority of their parents and educators.

The father says to his child: "You must not touch the stove or you will be burned." The child disobeys his command and is burned. "Did I not warn you?" says the father. "Do you not see that I was right? Hereafter believe my words and do not wait to test them in your experience." The comparatively few cases in which the child may without injury be made to experience the consequences of his acts should be utilized to strengthen its belief in the wisdom and goodness of its parents, so that in an infinitely greater number of cases their authority will act upon the mind of the child almost as powerfully as the actual experience of the evil consequences would act.

Mr. Spencer himself admits, as I have said, that there are what he calls extreme cases to which the system he recommends does not apply. In these he falls back upon parental displeasure as the proper penalty. But parental displeasure, according to his view, is an indirect and not a direct

penalty, and to use his own words, "the error which we have been combating is that of substituting parental displeasure for the penalties which nature has established." Yet he himself in regard to the graver offenses does substitute parental displeasure, and thus abandons his own position.

There is, moreover, a second ground on which I would rest my criticism. The art of the educator sometimes consists in *deliberately warding off* the natural penalties, though the child knows what they are and perhaps expects to pay them. So far is the method of Spencer from bearing the test of application that the very opposite of what he recommends is right in some of the most important instances.

Take the case of lying, for instance. The natural penalty for telling a falsehood is not to be believed the next time, but the real secret of moral redemption consists in not inflicting this penalty. We emphasize our belief in the offender despite the fact that he has told a falsehood, we show that we expect him never to tell a falsehood again, we seek to drive the spirit of untruthfulness out of him—by believing in him we strengthen him to overcome temptation. And so in many other instances we rescue, we redeem, by not inflicting the natural penalty.

The task of moral education is laid upon us. It is not a task that can be learned by reading a few scattered essays; it is often a heavy burden and involves a constant responsibility. I know it is not right *always* to make parents responsible for the faults which appear in their children. I am well aware that the worst fruit sometimes comes from the best stock, and that black sheep are sometimes to be found in the best families. But I cannot help thinking that if these black sheep were taken charge of in the right way in early childhood, the results might turn out differently from what they often do. The picture of Jesus on which the early church loved to dwell is the picture of

the good shepherd who follows after the lamb that has strayed from the fold, and, carrying it tenderly in his arms, brings it back. I think if parents were more faithful shepherds, and cared for their wayward children with deeper solicitude and tenderness, they might often succeed in winning them back.

But even apart from these exceptional cases the task of training children morally is one of immense gravity and difficulty. And how are most parents prepared for the discharge of this task? Why, they are not at all prepared. They rely merely upon impulse, and upon traditions which often are altogether wrong and harmful. They do as they have seen other fathers and mothers do, and thus the same mistakes are perpetuated from generation to generation. Such parents, if they were asked to repair a clock, would say, "No, we must first learn about the mechanism of a clock before we undertake to repair it." But the delicate and complex mechanism of a child's soul they undertake to repair without any adequate knowledge of the springs by which it is moved, or of the system of adjustments by which it is enabled to perform its highest work. They thrust their crude hands into the mechanism and often damage or break it altogether.

I do not pretend for a moment that education is as yet a perfect science; I know it is not. I do not pretend that it can give us a great deal of light; but such light as it can give we ought to be all the more anxious to obtain on account of the prevailing darkness. The time will doubtless come when the science of education will be acknowledged to be, in some sense, the greatest of all the sciences; when, among the benefactors of the race, the great statesmen, the great inventors, and even the great reformers will not be ranked as high as the great educators.

III

In order that a parent shall properly influence a child's character, it is necessary for him to know what that character is, and what the nature is of each fault with which he is dealing. I feel almost like asking pardon for saying anything so self-evident. It seems like saying that a physician who is called to a sick-bed, before beginning to prescribe, should know the nature of the disease for which he is prescribing, should not prescribe for one disease when he is dealing with another.

I do not know enough about physicians to say whether such mistakes ever happen among them; but that such egregious mistakes do occur among parents all the time, I am sure. There are many parents who never stop to ask before they punish—that is, before they prescribe their moral remedies—what the nature of the disease is with which their child is afflicted. They never take the trouble to make a diagnosis of the case in order to treat it correctly. There is perhaps not one parent in a thousand who has a clear idea of the character of his child, or to whom it even so much as occurs that he ought to have a clear conception of that character, a map of it, a chart of it, laid out, as it were, in his mind. The trouble is that attention is not usually called to this important matter, and I purpose to make it the special subject of this address.

1. Obstinacy

I am prepared at the outset for the objection that the case against parents has been overstated. There are parents who freely acknowledge, "My child is obstinate; I know it has an obstinate character." Others say, "My child, alas! is untruthful." Others again declare, "My child is indolent."

But these symptoms are far too indeterminate to base upon them a correct reformatory treat-

ment. Such symptoms may be due to a variety of causes, and not until we have discovered the underlying cause in any given case can we be sure that we are following the right method.

Take the case, for instance, of obstinacy; a child is told to do a certain thing and it refuses. Now, here is a dilemma. How shall we act? There are those who say: In such cases a child must be chastised until it does what it is told. A gentleman who was present here last Sunday had the kindness to send me during the week an edition of John Wesley's sermons, and in this volume, in the sermon on "Obedience to Parents," I read the following words: "Break the will if you would not damn the child. I conjure you not to neglect, not to delay this! Therefore (1) Let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly. In order to do this (2) Let him have nothing he cries for, absolutely nothing, great or small, else you undo your own work. At all events, from that age make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it. Let none persuade you it is cruelty to do this: it is cruelty not to do it. Break his will now, and his soul will live, and he will probably bless you to all eternity."

But by following this line of treatment we may obtain a result the very opposite of that which we intended. Obstinacy in many cases is due to sensitiveness. There are some children as sensitive to impressions as is that well-known flower which closes its quivering leaves at the slightest touch. These sensitive children retreat into themselves at the first sign of unfriendliness or aggression from without. The reason why such a child does not obey its father's command is not, perhaps, because it is unwilling to do as it is told, but because of the stern face, the impatient gesture, the raised voice with which the parent accompanies the command, and which jars upon the child's feelings.

If such a parent, incensed at the child's disobedience, becomes still more severe, raises his

voice still more, he will only make matters worse. The child will shrink from him still more and continue its passive resistance. In this manner obstinacy, which was at first only a passing spell, may become a fixed trait in the child's character.

To be sure, we should not, on the other hand, treat these sensitive children only with caresses. In this way we encourage their sensitiveness, whereas we should regard it as a weakness that requires to be gradually but steadily overcome.

The middle way seems the best. Let the parent exact obedience from the child by gentle firmness, by a firmness in which there shall be no trace of passion, no heightened feeling, and with a gentleness which, gentle as it may be, shall be at the same time unyielding. But while obstinacy is sometimes due to softness of nature, it is at other times due to the opposite—to hardness of nature, and according to the case we should vary our treatment.

There are persons who, having once made up their minds to do a thing, cannot be moved from their resolution by any amount of persuasion. These hard natures, these concentrated wills, are bound to have their way, no matter whom they injure, no matter what stands in the way. Such persons—and we notice the beginnings of this trait in children—need to be taught to respect the rights of others. Their wills should occasionally be allowed to collide with the wills of others, in order that they may discover that there are other wills limiting theirs, and may learn the necessary lesson of submission.

In yet other cases obstinacy is due to stupidity. Persons of weak intelligence are apt to be suspicious. Not understanding the motives of others, they distrust them; unwilling to follow the guidance of others, they cling with a sort of desperation to their own purpose. These cases may be treated by removing the cause of suspicion, by patiently explaining one's motives where it is possible to do so, by awakening confidence.

2. Untruthfulness

Again, let us take the fault of untruthfulness. One cannot sufficiently commend the watchfulness of those parents who take alarm at the slightest sign of falsehood in a child. A lie should always put us on our guard. The arch fiend is justly called "the father of lies." The habit of falsehood, when it has become settled, is the sure inlet to worse vices.

At the same time not all falsehoods are equally culpable or equally indicative of evil tendency, and we should have a care to discriminate between the different causes of falsehood in the young child, in order that we may pursue the proper treatment. Sometimes falsehood is due to redundant imagination, especially in young children who have not yet learned to distinguish between fact and fancy. In such cases we may restrain the child's imagination by directing its attention to the world of fact, by trying to interest it in natural history and the like.

We should especially set the example of strict accuracy ourselves in all our statements, no matter how unimportant they may be. For instance, if we narrate certain occurrences in the presence of the child, we should be careful to observe the exact order in which the events occurred, and if we have made a mistake we should take pains to correct ourselves, though the order of occurrence is really immaterial. Precisely because it is immaterial we show by this means how much we value accuracy even in little things.

Then, again, falsehood is often due to the desire for gain. Or it may be due to fear. The child is afraid of the severity of the parent's discipline. In that case we are to blame; we must relax our discipline. We have no business to tempt the child into falsehood. Again, untruthfulness is often due to mistaken sympathy, as we see in the case of pupils in school, who will tell a falsehood to shield

a fellow pupil. In the worst cases falsehood is inspired by malice.

It may be said that the proper positive treatment for this fault is to set the example of the strictest truthfulness ourselves, to avoid the little falsehoods which we sometimes allow ourselves without compunction, to show our disgust at a lie, to fill the child with a sense of the baseness of lying, and above all to find out the direct cause which has tempted the child in any given case. As a rule, falsehood is only a means to an end; children do not tell untruths because they like to tell them, but because they have some ulterior end in view. Find out what that ulterior end is, and instead of directing your attention only to the lie, penetrate to the motive that has led the child into falsehood, and try to divert it from the bad end. Thus you may extract the cause of its wrongdoing.

3. Laziness

Thirdly, let us consider the fault of laziness. Laziness is sometimes due to physical causes. Nothing may be necessary but a change of diet, exercise in the fresh air, etc., to cure the evil. Sometimes it is the sign of a certain slow growth of the mind. There are fruits in the garden of the gods that ripen slowly, and these fruits are often not the least precious or the least beautiful when they finally have matured. Sir Isaac Newton's mind was one of these slowly ripening fruits. In school he was regarded as a dullard and his teachers had small hopes of him.

Laziness, like other faults of character, sometimes disappears in the process of growth. Just as at a certain period in the life of a youth or maiden new faculties seem to develop, new passions arise, a new life begins to stir in the heart, so at a certain period qualities with which we had long been familiar, disappear of themselves.

We have very little light upon this subject, but the fact that a great transformation of character sometimes does take place in children without any perceptible cause is quite certain, and it may be offered as a comforting reflection to those parents who are over-anxious on account of the faults they detect in their children. But again, on the other hand, laziness or untruthfulness or obstinacy may be a black streak, coming to the surface out of the nethermost strata of moral depravity, and, taken in connection with other traits, may justify the most serious apprehension, and should then be a signal for immediate measures of the most stringent sort.

4. Discovering Causes

I am thus led to the second branch of my subject. I have tried to meet the objection of the parent who says, "I know the character of my child; I know my child is obstinate," by replying, "If you only know that your child is obstinate you know very little; you need to know what are the causes of his obstinacy, and vary your treatment accordingly." Or if any one says, "My child is untruthful," I reply, "You need to find out what the cause is of this untruthfulness and vary your treatment accordingly." Or again, in the case which we have just considered, I have pointed out that laziness in a child may have no serious meaning whatever or may give just cause for the most serious alarm, according to the group of characteristic traits of which it is one. On this point I wish to lay stress. If you desire to obtain a correct impression of a human face, you do not look at the eye by itself, then at the nose, then fix your attention on the cheeks and the chin and the brow, but you regard all these features together and view them in their relations to one another. Or let us recur to the simile of the physician. What would you think of the doctor who should judge

the nature of a disease by some one symptom which happened to obtrude itself, or should treat each symptom as it appears separately, without endeavoring to reach the occult cause which has given rise to the symptoms, of which they are all but the outward manifestation?

And yet that is precisely the incredible mistake which every one of us, I venture to say, is apt to make in the treatment of children's characters. We judge of them by some one trait, as obstinacy, which happens to obtrude itself on our attention, and we prescribe for each symptom as it arises; we treat obstinacy by itself, and untruthfulness and indolence separately, without endeavoring to get at the underlying cause of all these symptoms. The point I desire to make is that in the education of our children it is necessary not only to study individual traits, but *each trait in connection with the group to which it belongs.*

Take for an illustration the case last mentioned —that of laziness. There is a well-known type group or group of characteristic traits, of which laziness is one. The chief components of this group are the following: The sense of shame is wanting, that is one trait. The will is under the control of random impulses, good impulses mingle helter-skelter with bad. There is an indisposition on the part of such a child to prolonged exertion in any direction, even in the direction of pleasure. That is perhaps the most dangerous trait of all.

If you try to deal, as people actually do, with each of these traits separately, you will fail. If you try to influence the sense of shame, you will meet with no response; if you disgrace such a child, you will make it worse; if you whip it, you will harden it. If you attempt to overcome indolence by the promise of rewards, that will be useless. The child forgets promised rewards just as quickly as it forgets threatened punishment.

This forgetfulness, this lack of coherency in its ideas, is particularly characteristic. The ideas of

such a child are imperfectly connected. The ties between causes and their effects are feeble. The contents of the child's mind are in a state of unstable equilibrium. There is no point of fixity in its mental realm. And the cure for such a condition is to establish fixity in the thoughts, to induce habits of industry and application by steady, unrelaxing discipline, and especially by means of manual training.

The immense value of mechanical labor as a means of moral improvement has been appreciated until now only to a very imperfect extent. Mechanical labor wisely directed secures mental fixity because it concentrates the child's attention for days and often for weeks upon a single task. Mechanical labor stimulates moral pride by enabling the pupil to produce articles of value and giving him in this way the sense of achievement. Mechanical labor also overcomes indolence by compelling settled habits of industry, whereby the random impulses of the will are brought under control.

The type group which we have just considered is one of the most clearly marked and easily recognized. It is a type which we often meet with among the so-called criminal classes, where its characteristic features can be seen in exaggerated proportions. Without attempting to analyze any additional types (a task of great delicacy and difficulty), the truth that the underlying fault of character is often unlike the symptoms which appear most conspicuously on the surface may be further illustrated by the following example. I have known of a person who made himself obnoxious to his friends by his overbearing manners and apparent arrogance. Casual observers condemned him on account of what they believed to be his overweening self-confidence, and expressed the opinion that his self-conceit ought to be broken down. But the real trouble with him was not that he was too self-confident, but that he had not self-confidence enough. His self-confidence needed to be built up. He was overbearing

in society because he did not trust himself, because he was always afraid of not being able to hold his own, and hence he exaggerated on the other side. Those who take such a person to be in reality what he seems to be will never be able to influence him. If we find such a trait in a child, and simply treat it as if it were arrogant, we shall miss the mark entirely. We must find the underlying principle of the character the occult cause of which the surface symptoms are the effects.

Our knowledge of the great type groups is as yet extremely meager. Psychology has yet to do its work in this direction, and books on education give us but little help. But there are certain means by which the task of investigation may possibly be assisted. One means is the study of the plays of Shakespeare. That master mind has created certain types of character which repay the closest analysis. The study of the best biographies is a second means. The study of the moral characteristics of the primitive races—a study which has been begun by Herbert Spencer in his work on Descriptive Sociology, and by Waitz in his Anthropologie der Naturvölker—is perhaps another means; and honest introspection, when it shall have become the rule among intelligent persons, instead of being the exception, will probably be the best means.

I am afraid that some of my hearers, from having been over-confident as educators in the beginning, may now have become over-timid; from having said to themselves, "Why, of course we know the characteristics of our children," may now, since the difficulties of studying character have been explained, be disposed to exclaim in a kind of despair, "Who can ever understand the character of a single human being?" A perfect understanding of any human being is indeed impossible. We do not perfectly know even those who are nearest and dearest to us. But there are means of reaching at least approximate results, so far as children are concerned, and a few of these permit me to briefly summarize.

Try to win the confidence of the child so that it may disclose its inner life to you. Children accept the benefactions of their parents as unthinkingly as they breathe the air around them. Show them that your care and untiring devotion must be deserved, not taken as a matter of course. In this way you will deepen their attachment and lead them to willingly open their hearts to you. At the same time enter into the lesser concerns of their life. Be their comrades, their counselors; stoop to them, let them cling to you.

Observe your children when they are at play, for it is then that they throw off their reserve and show themselves as they are. Some children, for instance, will not join a game unless they can be leaders; is not that a sign of character? Some children will take an unfair advantage at play, and justify themselves by saying, "It is only in play." Some are persistent in a game while others tire of any game after a little while. Others are sticklers for a strict observance of the rules. Observe how your sons or daughters are regarded by their companions; children are often wonderfully quick to detect one another's faults.

Try to find out what the favorite pursuits and studies of your child are, by what it is repelled, by what attracted, and to what it is indifferent. Above all, keep a record of your child's development. Do not shun the labor involved in this. You know very well that nothing worth having can be obtained without labor, yet most parents are unwilling to give sufficient time and attention to the education of their children. Keep a record of the most significant words and acts of the child. Thus after a while you may have a picture of the child's inward condition before you, an assemblage of characteristic traits, and by comparing one trait with another, you may find the clue to a deeper understanding of its nature.

What I have said about children applies equally to ourselves. I started out by saying that not

one parent in a thousand knows his child's character. I conclude by saying that not one man or woman in a thousand knows his or her own character. We go through life cherishing an unreal conception of ourselves which is often inspired by vanity.

I am well aware that it is difficult to know oneself, but there are helps in this direction also. We can look over our own past record, we can honestly examine how we have acted in the leading crises of our lives, we can summon our own characteristic traits before our minds—the things that we like to dwell upon, and the things which we would gladly blot out of our memories if we could—and by comparing this trait with that, we may discover the springs by which we have been moved. It is difficult to attain self-knowledge, but it is imperative that we should try to attain it. The aim of our existence is to improve our characters, and clearly we cannot improve them unless we know them.

I have undertaken to grapple with a most difficult subject, but I shall have accomplished the purpose which I had in mind if I have awakened in you a deeper desire to ask yourselves, first, "What is the character of my child?" and, second, "What is my own character?" The most serious business of our lives is to try to find the answers to these two questions.

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