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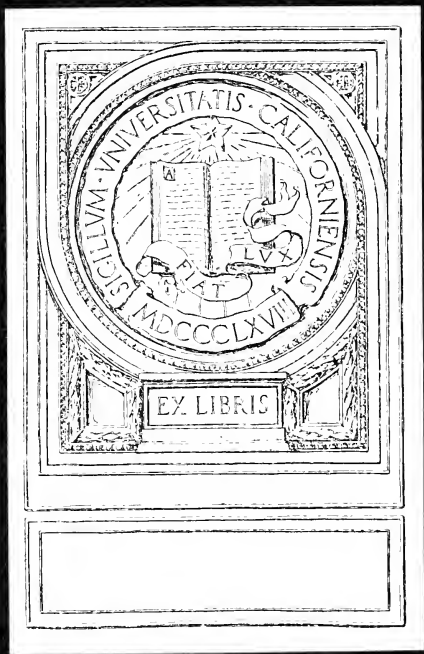
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The Moral Damage of War to the School Child.

BY REV. WALTER WALSH.

English was the poet who wrote, but universal is the principle contained in, the couplet,

"T is education forms the common mind ;
Just as the twig is bent, the tree 's inclined."

Speaking from an experience as an administrator of various educational bodies, extending over many years, recalling the sufferings of my own children as pupils in the public schools of Scotland during the period of the Boer war, and after careful and minute collection of facts and incidents thoroughly authenticated, the present speaker undertakes to make good before this important congress of educationists the proposition that the war-spirit is displayed in its most unnatural and revolting characteristics by the moral damage it inflicts upon the school child. Hideous as is the bodily slaughter of our young manhood demanded by the military Moloch upon the field of battle, more abominable still is the sacrifice of the soul of childhood in the school-room. Indeed, it is the demoralization of the scholar that makes possible the destruction of the soldier and the devastation of the field. Therefore the wounds of battle can be staunch only in the school-room. Salvation must begin with the A B C. Judgment must begin at the schoolhouse.

In his mysterious "Dream Fugue," which, like the vision of a later Ezekiel, ecstatically pictures the thunderous announcement of the victory of Waterloo, the rapt De Quincey perceives a baby in the path, threatened

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by the furious Jehu who shakes the earth in his zeal to break the news of battle, and the terrified seer cries aloud, "O baby! shalt thou be the ransom for Waterloo? Must we, that carry tidings of great joy to every people, be messengers of ruin to thee?"

We know that the vision was a reality. The soul of the child is the price we pay for our Waterloos.

The modern spirit is increasingly offended by a dual morality which prescribes one law for the individual and another for the community, one doctrine for the church and another for the senate, one set of principles for a time of peace and quite a different set for a time of war. It is with growing discomfort that the citizen is carrying around the modern world two Sinais, two sets of commandments, or perhaps, more correctly, a Sinai in one part of his mind and a Calvary in another, this inculcating hostility and that prescribing benevolence, to-day feeling that it is his duty to die for, and to-morrow that it is right to kill, his enemy. It is with growing uneasiness that he dedicates one-half of his life to Christ and the other half to Cain, printing the Golden Rule upon one lobe of his brain and the *lex talionis* upon the other. He is Dr. Jekyll, the pacifist, and Mr. Hyde, the militarist, in one skin; but the pacifist is steadily absorbing the militarist, involving him more and more in the pains of death and the terrors of judgment.

The demand for a harmonious and coherent ethic would become more and more importunate if the public mind could be brought to realize the disastrous effect of dualism upon child nature,—how it splits childhood into halves, giving one-half to the true mother, Humanity, and another half to the false mother, Militarism; how it forces the half-conscious soul of innocence into an uneasy feeling that it has to choose between the "gentle Jesus" of its hymnology, and the teacher who prescribes such a battle-song as:

" We talk of night surprises,
 Of sudden fierce attacks,
 Of shooting Indian rebels,
 Of bayoneting blacks."

Detailed proofs of the moral damage inflicted upon the school child by the war-spirit become visible the moment

we turn our eyes to the sanctuary of the class-room. Take the case of two nations actually at war with one another. What is the nature of the instruction imparted respectively to the children of those nations? Almost universally, they are dosed with biased comments upon past history and excited diatribes on contemporary combats. If we could take seats in such a class-room, we should not unseldom hear a narrow provincialism propounded in the name of patriotism by instructors who were really partisans masquerading as patriots. Honorable exceptions, to be sure, there would be; but the prevailing temper would certainly be that indicated by Herbert Spencer in his "Bias of Patriotism." At such times the usual subjects are neglected for declamation on the passing incidents of the campaign; the settled findings of history are forsaken for dilations upon the distorted and ephemeral bulletins from the front; studies of historical characters are displaced by newspaper sketches of the generals in the field. Essays that were formerly prescribed upon the nobler themes of literature now turn upon the respective characters of the belligerent peoples, the enemy being represented in the darkest and most slanderous colors, while the aggressive people are painted as the bravest and most virtuous imaginable. Sometimes the school song is turned into a hymn of battle; the drawing lesson is a caricature of the enemy. An inspector regales a public meeting with the pitiful spite he has taught an innocent child to set down in its essay.

Lower still is the deep in which the school child is taught that it is base to think his country to be in the wrong, treacherous to disagree with his country's quarrels, cowardly to grieve when a large number of the enemy's men are killed in defending their own. Lowest of all is the deep in which the infant non-juror, the non-conforming pupil, the child of pacifist parents, is insulted in the class, persecuted in the playground, and terrorized by the agents of a militarized government, which controls both the school and the army, and is fast learning to bless the day it was driven by zealous educationists to drill the scholar as well as the soldier.

When this stage has been reached, the children will begin to understand that they are not expected to apply

to international relationships, or to periods of war, the ethical principles they have been taught in the Sunday school, the moral instruction class, the young citizen-class and the home. They will know that these principles relate only to personal affairs and to times of peace. They will recognize that the arts of war — “legitimate warfare” is the phrase — include all the mean, false, cowardly and unchivalrous actions they have been taught to despise in their own behalf, such as stratagems, ambushes, spying, eaves-dropping, hitting from behind or when a fellow is down, lying, forging letters, telegrams, signals to mislead the enemy, following up a beaten enemy and hammering at him with cavalry and artillery so as to annihilate him; insisting upon the severest possible terms of surrender, or refusing all offers of surrender with the order, “Take no prisoners.” They may perhaps learn the explicit declaration of a British commander-in-chief, that while “Truth always wins in the long run” and “Honesty is the best policy” did very well for their school copy-books, they are not to be acted upon in wartime; and they will rightly conclude that the same actions which are counted vicious, cruel and disgusting in personal affairs, become virtuous, lawful and praiseworthy when perpetrated upon a national foe.

Who can wonder if they not unseldom conclude that all they wrote in their copy-books is open to the same repudiation; that chastity, justice, truth-speaking, magnanimity, commercial integrity, a fair day’s work for a fair day’s wage, are equally, under special conditions, subject to suspension or repeal? Who can blame them that, being taught that it is permissible to suspend the decalogue for their country’s sake, they afterwards repeal the Ten Commandments for their own? As a matter of fact, is it not certain that projection of the fighting ethic into the domestic and industrial realm is the principal cause of poverty, injustice, disorder and the principal hindrance to the general elevation and advance of civilized affairs?

Why are we so foolish as to think we can gather grapes from thorns or make silk purses from sows’ ears? If we systematically inculcate two contradictory codes of morality, how are our children to decide which code to

follow, or when to follow one rather than the other? Will they not naturally do just as their fathers have done before them, choose the "line of least resistance," and follow the code which is more convenient and profitable? Will not they put expediency before principle? Will they not infer that the religious principle can be detached from whole segments of life? What can be more confounding to the moral sense of a very young child than to hear a teacher commend those military operations his father has taught him to abhor, or even insult the sentiments his mother has commanded him to reverence? What can be more perplexing than this collision between home and school, parent and teacher, nay, between teacher and teacher, class and class, book and book, subject and subject? Those who have seen the pained look upon a child's face, the excitement, the resentment, the flush of injury, and noted the hardening effect upon the child mind, will understand. To tear a child limb from limb would hardly be more cruel than to ravage his tender soul with this clash of ideals, this conflict of authorities, and would certainly be less wicked. The spectacle of the war demon assiduously poisoning the well-heads of humanity is one of the most distressing that can afflict the thoughtful mind. To instill the principles of intellectual atheism into his pupils would be considered a thing monstrous and unnatural in a pedagogue, but is it any nobler to sap a child's faith in morality, truthfulness, consistency? Are not the very bases of human nature shaken when we teach childhood that, under certain conditions, it is lawful, even laudable, to kill, lie, steal, boast, slander, glory in slaughter, trample down harvests, burn up houses, make other children fatherless and the mothers of other children widows? is not this to filter the very quintessence of immorality into the inner soul of childhood? Sang William Blake, the gentle author of the "Songs of Innocence":

"He who mocks the infant's faith
 Shall be mocked in age and death ;
 He who shall teach the child to doubt,
 The rotten grave shall ne'er get out."

Is it not possible to have Blake's seer's vision, and discern the very closest connection between our systematic demoralization of the child's mind and the hideous, abominable and unnatural conditions which prevail between the families of the nations? For the sake of some imagined national good, we are plainly consigning the childhood of the nation to a moral hell of hopeless inconsistency; we are prolonging the noxious habit of double-mindedness into an age which at the same time in every department of its affairs cries aloud for conciliation, reconciliation, at-one-ment, and confesses that it can find happiness and universal peace only in unity of thought, of motive and of purpose.

The process of debauching the child soul in order to degrade the scholar into a conscript is well understood by the evil power that sways the militarized governments of the world, whose purposes would be ill served by the abolition of the dual code of ethics, and the reign of the one law of reason, justice and love over the political as over the personal affairs of life. The governments that own both the army and the school find free, universal, tax-supported education a new opportunity for developing their military resources. Hence the encouragement given to rifle brigades, shooting clubs, cadet corps, and military drill of various kinds. The school-room is a recruiting ground for the army. The teacher prepares the way of the recruiting agent and the drill sergeant.

The friends of democracy and popular education have good reason to bewail this unexpected result of their splendid struggle for universal, state-aided and state-directed schools; for while the pioneers aimed at making a broad road from the school to the university, the militarist is striving more and more to transform it into a highway to the army. Particularly unhappy would it be if the wistful militarist could compass his end in the public schools of the United States. The very fact that your schools are international in the truest and largest and most literal sense gives the American teacher an opportunity unequalled in any other country in the world. Into your seminaries are gathered the plastic minds of the youth of all nations, first of all, no doubt, that you may show them how generous and hospitable is the ideal

of American citizenship, but also that you may further show how American citizenship itself leads up to a citizenship of the world yet more ample and fraternal.

The inevitable result of our dual standard of ethics is not wholly a matter of speculation, but is attested by facts tabulated by the statistician, and which the ethicist finds explicable in no truer way than has been indicated. It is noted that every outburst of military energy is followed by an increase of crimes of violence, though the limits of the present address forbid any attempt to exhibit the connection of warlike operations with "juvenile crime" committed by "young offenders." Even in the prison cell another queer paradox must puzzle the ex-scholar, if he has really acquired powers of reflection — the paradox, namely, that a government should clap a lad into jail as a criminal for doing in his own person that which in the school-room is praised as patriotism when done in the name of his country.

The purification of public ethics, the sweetening of international ethics must proceed from the school-room. The angel of mercy must smile down upon guileless childhood from the wall of the schoolhouse without any suggestion of brazen Mars or burning Moloch behind the picture. The foul vapors from the field of carnage must be excluded from childhood's temples, that the flowers of innocence and pity may acquire a heavenlier lustre than when they drooped in the abodes of prejudice and revenge. The old-time brute must no longer be permitted to raven the evolving angel. The future humanism must not longer be sacrificed to the "patriotism" of an hour. The voice of childhood must be universally raised only to the music of home and nature, of joy and faith, of love and peace, of innocent delights by stream and meadow, of manly enterprise and womanly grace. Schools and schoolmasters must busy themselves to substitute the principles of justice for the prejudices of patriotism; to exalt reason, moral suasion, magnanimity over aggression, intolerance and force. The history book must not regild the faded exploits of the military conqueror, but proclaim the peaceful heroisms of the explorer, philanthropist, inventor, savior and martyr. The manslayer must become the villain, not the hero, of the

human tragedy. It must be made an infamous offense to teach a child to despise life when it is incarnate in a so-called "enemy." No longer must childhood be called upon to admire "hell" and "the sum of all villainies," but to put the virtuous who retain their virtue amid every inducement to vice far above him who merely displays brute courage against odds. Their attention must be diverted from the fighter who saves his life by taking the life of another, to the worker who cheerfully dies to save a mate from danger, or manfully plies his tool to minister to the well-being of society.

The teacher, particularly the woman teacher, will be the savior of the child, the apostle of the higher civilization. In proportion as unity of mind and motive are produced in the school-rooms of the world, the unity of peoples will organically follow. If, as has been said, the battles of England were won in the playground of Eton, the war against war will be won in the school-rooms of America.

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