PARENT AND CHILD

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A TREATISE ON THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

By

SIR OLIVER LODGE, D.Sc., F.R.S.

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I

CHILD NATURE

THE first thing to realize about children is that they are separate individuals, not merely chips of the old block. Chips of the old block they are too, no doubt, but what parents sometimes forget is that they are separate persons, each with a life and destiny of its own. It is therefore quite possible, not only that the child may not understand us, but that we may not understand the child.

The individuality thus isolated in a child is not always good! Certainly not. There can be, I presume, as many grades among children as among adults. The range seems to extend over the whole gamut, from something very like angels to something barely distinguishable from devils. The nearly angelic is fortunately the more common variety, and I shall assume,—what may be true,—that all children who are given a decent chance in life, both by ancestry and by nurture, will respond to judicious treatment and be a credit to their home and upbringing.

I think it more helpful to emphasize the essential goodness of human nature than its essential badness.

There must be phenomena which have led theologians to formulate the doctrine of original sin, but there must be at least equal and I think far greater truth in the more authoritative statement, applied to typical children, that of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

I have been astounded, occasionally even appalled, at the innate goodness of some children,—children who have come under my own observation. And, holding views which I have elsewhere expressed as to the nature of incarnation, it has sometimes struck me as an extraordinary privilege to be entrusted with the care of beings of so much interest and charm. They seem like guests

who have done us the honor of selecting our home and friendship for a momentous epoch in their lives. Such children are exceptional, however, and one does come across some whose behaviour arouses feelings of repulsion.

How comes it, I wonder, that children can occasionally be so objectionable? I think it is because they have never been taught any consideration for others.

In hotels, for instance, we sometimes encounter a family of children, or it may be a single child, that shouts and romps as if other people did not exist. The cosmopolitan child perhaps it is, who,—so to speak, for generations,—has never been to

school nor subjected to any sort of training. I have been told that on the South American boats there are family cabins, and that from these cabins the amount of shrill noise which arises, in the course apparently of normal family life, is more than perturbing to fellow travellers. With such bringing up, no wonder that people can be obnoxious.

How comes it, on the other hand, that children of the English aristocracy, while still barely out of the nursery, are often so admirably behaved? The few that I have known have been helpful and considerate and anxious to do little services for strangers and visitors. People say that such children are left largely to

nurses; if so, some of the nurses must be excellent women. I expect they are; and I think that the proverbial nagging of the ordinary nurse-maid, as heard in the parks for instance, is becoming much less pronounced than it used to be. All this is making in a right direction.

II

PARENTAL INFLUENCE

PARENTS who are strenuously busy or occupied in public work may comfort themselves by remembering that parental influence may be indirect, and that a life of vivid activity has before now affected children beneficially without specific effort,—sometimes with results even better than have been attained by constant attention specially directed to that end. Indeed, specially directed attention requires wisdom and self-mistrustful thought, lest occasionally it may do more harm than good. Over-attention may be destructive of

originality, and may tend to check healthy unconscious growth. The brooding and meditative moods of children should be respected; the stress of practical life terminates them quickly enough, for all save a few favoured persons. And the fact that they may be luxuriously cultivated, or indulged in to excess, should not be allowed to break them up altogether; nor should energetic supervisors feel justified in applying constant stimulus during any incubating and preparatory period; for those moods and periods have been proved ultimately to have productive value.

Nevertheless, however busy parents are, some direct parental influence should be exerted, for it may

be of incalculable value. Children have an instinctive sense for reality of conviction, they have a knack of penetrating to what people really *are*, so that mere convention and what are called pious opinions carry but little weight. Much can be accomplished by good nursery traditions; notably training in consideration for others, modesty, helpfulness, reverence for elders, and self-subordination; great things which no one now addressed is likely to overlook. A minor thing is tidiness,—not to the extent of not making a litter, but of not leaving it; especially the habit of putting things back where found, the automatic replacement of any object of common property,—clothes-brush,

ball of string, time-table, books of reference, or what not,—in its proper place, so that others can find it. Hunting about for such things is an entire waste of time. I attach considerable importance to this leaving things where you find them, and clearing up litter.

Adults, if busy, and school-children, sometimes may have to clear up by deputy; but if small children are too much waited on, and everything put away by others, it has, I believe, a demoralizing effect. It is one cause of the selfishness of the better-off classes that they are constantly making a mess and leaving it to others to put straight. Press of work often necessitates this; but it should

be recognized as a responsibility, and not merely a matter of course, that we daily leave a meal-room or a bedroom in a state in which we should be annoyed to find it on our return.

Work is a sufficient excuse,—we have other things to do, and it constitutes a permissible division of labour; but if we have *not* other things to do, if we are idle habitually, as are some children and many adults, then I conceive that it would be a wholesomer and sounder discipline if we spent some time in clearing up after ourselves. The lounging and luxurious behaviour of some specimens of the overfed youthful male, as caricatured in the pages of *Punch*, for instance, is truly objectionable;

and it is melancholy to reflect that parental influence may enable such spoiled young reprobates to control affairs in some corner of the empire. Though, indeed, it is true that stress of circumstances does then make men of some of them; but it is stress and not laxity that does it. The laxity, so far as it went, was wholly bad.

Another valuable piece of nursery or home tradition is the delivery of messages in exact words. This is a matter to which I attach importance, —it is a sort of beginning of scientific training. A child sent on a message should not be allowed to paraphrase it and deliver something there or thereabouts. A message so

changed is nearly always misleading and frequently gives trouble. A child entrusted with a message, whether it be to the cook or the gardener or what not, should first have it delivered to him precisely and should repeat it before starting, and should then go and give it without attending to anything by the way. I have known servant troubles arise through the inaccurate delivery of messages, especially if a return message has to be brought; for the slightest alteration may easily convert a polite request or acknowledgment into something offensive,—and this without any hostile intention on the part of the messenger. In larger life the same sort of thing has before

now brought about wars. But, quite apart from consequences, the recollection and reproduction of exact words is an art in itself, and as every person of literary sensitiveness knows, is an eminently desirable aptitude, for it leads to accuracy in the quotation of poetry or prose later on.

Children like being made use of, and an errand is an opportunity to make them feel their responsibility and take trouble to execute a commission in an exact manner; first repeating, naturally and as a matter of course, what it is they have to do or say, so as to be sure that there is no mistake. I venture to maintain, moreover, that it is a training not un-

needed by many adults, to have to state accurately what is wanted, to describe the locality of a thing precisely, and to instruct a messenger clearly.

In the cases when a child really understands what is wanted to be said, it is excellent practice to let him try to put it clearly in his own words. To concoct a telegram, for instance, that will be clear and definite, not long-winded, and yet not capable of misconstruction; or to formulate his own message before delivering it.

III

IMPARTING OF KNOWLEDGE

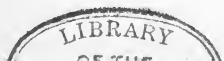
ANOTHER thing that is due to children is that they should be told as far as possible the exact truth, when they ask a serious question. It is not easy to do this, because the truth as they receive it will depend on their faculty of apprehension; but if they know enough to ask a question, an answer, so far as it can be received by them, should be true. The answerer should always try to put himself in the questioner's place, and look at things from his point of view: this is the essence of clear explanation. There may still be misun-

derstandings, but these can be detected and removed by a little conversation, and the original statement can be amended accordingly. I find that if children know that parents take pains to inform them with careful accuracy as to any little thing on which they ask a question, and if they are themselves never suspected of saying anything but what they believe to be true, so far as they can, then they will acquire instinctively a faculty for truthful statement, and the repulsive habit of lying need never even begin to form.

Telling the truth is largely a matter of culture and education. Ignorant people often tell something else, either because it is lazier and

easier to do so, or because they think it pleasanter, or simply because they have not accustomed their minds to consider what the "truth" of anything is.

A child, too, sometimes romances or exaggerates in an innocent manner through excess of imagination. This should not be taken too seriously, and sometimes the thing said may have a subjective truth of its own which an unsympathetic or hard-pressed senior can hardly appreciate. Instances of this sort are, I believe, not infrequent, and it is well to make large allowance; but in cases where there is no doubt, a child can gradually be brought to see that to say the thing that is not is to put itself



out of harmony with the universe. A statement which is contrary to fact should be non-existent. There is no sense in it.

It is true that adults often know too little to answer children's questions, or to give exact information. Parenthood needs training for, like everything else. But confessions of ignorance are wholesome: and at any rate deliberate falseness can be avoided. The worst kind of lies which children can be told are those that lead to fright and superstition. Children are newcomers to the planet, they cannot know by experience that it is, on the whole, a pleasant and friendly place; and if told that all sorts of horrors abound and are

lurking for them round the corner, what can they do but believe the statement? until experience shows that it was an abominable invention.

Superstitions again, — children would hardly invent them, and they might die a natural death, were it not that they are handed down by each generation to the next. I do beg people to be satisfied with having had the incubus of meaningless rubbish transmitted to them; let them now cut off the entail.

What frightens some children is loneliness. Their loneliness can be a severe ordeal. Real loneliness, loneliness in the universe, such as none of us have ever experienced, would be perhaps the most alarming and

desperate sensation that man could have. The providential arrangement of parents and guardians keeps the loneliness of infancy far from that, but nevertheless it is real and alarming at times; it is the loneliness of incarnation, it is the isolation of the body. Mind unites, body separates, or individualizes. Infants are beginning to be partitioned off from the surrounding mental and spiritual whole, and encased in a body; they are undergoing the process of individualization; they may well feel as if no one here understood them, and they are necessarily lonely. They seldom confess to it, nor are they capable of putting the idea into words. Persons cannot prevent this

feeling from cropping up at times, nor is it desirable that they should prevent it, but they can understand and be sympathetic and not blatant and superficial and bullying about it.

If a child for a time dislikes going to sleep in the dark, or wishes its door ajar,—yield to it. The dread will soon pass, if not artificially fostered or made much of. A child ought not to have to confess in words to his fear,—that only tends to make it more real and lasting. He will grow out of it. And, after all, this feeling of helplessness in an unknown and mysterious universe is very natural. The universe *is* big and mysterious and most alarming. Custom gradually makes its ordinary

friendly aspects familiar, while its more portentous manifestations are found to be exceptional; but they are there, behind the scenes, and it is just the exceptional and the portentous of which we are instinctively afraid.

Children's terrors are just as real as the horrible dread sometimes experienced by grown-up people,—dread which they, too, learn to overcome, and of which they are ashamed, but to which the necessity of yielding, in some sudden emergency, is found even by heroes at times to be irresistible.

IV

PREPARATION FOR LIFE

AND now to enter upon larger topics:

Preparation of the child for individual life,—this is the main object of education. And its chief aim must surely be the formation of a personal character, a will, the separate individuality of a free being. The faculty of acquiring and worthily utilizing real freedom,—that is the object of education. And to this end self-discipline, self-control, is the

main factor. The child arrives, a fragment of undifferentiated mind-stuff, with potentialities and inherited powers, to begin an individual existence. Not to begin existence,—that nothing that we know of ever does,—but to begin an individual existence, to begin as a separate unit of life and mind, to grow a character and reap a destiny.

Control of attention is the first step toward this end. Not to be distracted by every passing sight and sound. To concentrate the mind on one object, without regard to every butterfly distraction that flits across the field of view.

The task is difficult, and adults must be patient. Some of them

have not learned concentration themselves.

But control of attention can be cultivated,—its entire absence is a well-known medical criterion of feeble-mindedness,—many things need not be attended to, side issues and deflecting suggestions must be ignored. It is not necessary to do or to utter everything that crops up in the mind. It is not necessary to do everything that occurs to you to do. Quite a small effort of attention will show that the suggestion is very likely a mere device of distraction. Though there are cases,—as when a question arises whether a letter ought to be written or not,—when the unpleasant path is the wisest,—the course which

best fits our total scheme. The motive power ebbs and flows, as Matthew Arnold says:

> We cannot kindle when we will
> The fire which in the heart resides;
> The spirit bloweth and is still,
> In mystery our soul abides.
> But tasks in hours of insight will'd
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

All this is part of the creation of a will. It is the essence of self-determination to carry through a purpose, undeterred by the golden apples that a competitor or a spectator may throw beside your path. This power of self-determination is essential to freedom. Fulfilment of a definite and prescribed task,—at first, indeed, pre-

scribed by others, but later by yourself; prescribed, that is, by the whole intelligence and purpose of your being,—this is what is meant by a dependable trustworthy character, one that can be counted on to do what it decides to do, one that is not at the mercy of whims and random impulses, one that has overcome caprice and is able to reject temptation and is not a creature of impulses nor the slave of anything but its own will.

That is freedom, when you act in accordance with your own will, and are not driven hither and thither by every passing impulse. The evil-doer, as Plato in the "Gorgias" lays down, the evil-doer is a slave,—a

slave it may be of his own vices, which he has allowed to get the upper hand.

For liberty is a very different thing from license,—and it is only when the nature has risen to a certain height of development that it can be trusted with the reins. Until that stage is reached it must be controlled from outside. But when that stage is really reached the whole being responds joyously to the demands upon its powers, and act and will run harmoniously together.

This is the flower of self-control, this is the service that is perfect freedom. Few are the happy dispositions who attain the state without effort, but in some children it is found,—

"glad hearts," as Wordsworth says in the "Ode to Duty,"

> Glad hearts! without reproach or blot;
> Who do thy work and know it not.

But for the most part we have to learn through effort how to be

> No sport of every random gust.

and only after error and remorse do we attain to the state

> When love is an unerring light,
> And joy its own security.

But in so far as the happy docile child-spirit can from the first be encouraged and prolonged,—in so far as it can be assumed, and assumed with truth, that the child-will is right, and that only the flesh is oc-

casionally weak,—so far shall we be able to recognize in childhood, and ultimately in the now too scarred face of humanity, that which we are assured is really there, though hidden:

The Godhead's most benignant grace.

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy." Yes, truly, but why only in our infancy? Verily, I believe, because we have effectually prevented anything like "heaven" from surrounding the infancy of so many of the human race to-day.

The earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations.

So our vision is darkened, too, and the ministry of benevolence is hidden from our gaze.

V

PREPARATION FOR SCIENCE

BUT I must check an incipient digression and now say a word or two on more technical teaching,—what has been called "the preparation of the child for science."

The inquisitiveness of children should be utilized as an opportunity for providing them with information. When they are hungry, then they should be fed,—if possible by teachers who are informed themselves. It is easier to answer questions badly than to answer them well; the appetite for information is most valuable,

but it is sometimes supplied with wretched food. Every effort should be made to get the facts right, to understand them properly; but how great a demand this is, only those who have had some training in science can be aware.

The next best thing is to confess ignorance and offer to try and worry out an answer together. The discovery that adults, too, are ignorant, and that there are ways of hunting up information,—especially the way by experiment and first-hand observation,—is stimulating, and abundantly wholesome.

In teaching a new subject, I would that parents could distinguish between essential features and sub-

sidiary details. A bad kind of instruction overloads the mind with detail before the main features have been grasped; *i.e.,* before there is any framework into which to pack the details. This is most discouraging. It is the kind of thing that gradually generates a dislike of being taught,—a dislike unnatural to a healthy child. Grammar and arithmetic, in the hands of an incompetent teacher, are familiar instruments for generating this dislike.

Every subject can be presented in such a way as to be received with enthusiasm by an intelligent child whose mind has not already been clogged or warped.

Instruction should not be arti-

ficially systematic. System is excellent in its proper place; but the bare facts must be approached first; the learner must be immersed in them to begin with, in a real practical way, without rules and conventions. Nothing but practice will make a subject familiar; and during the practice a "rule" here and there,—that is a convenient summing up of the results of experience,—may be thrown in; if possible at a moment when it will be welcomed and assimilated.

The same method should govern preliminary instruction in nature. Eschew what is called systematic science-teaching till a later stage; utilize at first children's natural interest in phenomena. Immerse them

in phenomena, and let them find their way through; assisted, but not carried. Let them observe and think, and themselves try to explain. The effort to explain even the simplest thing is wholly good, both for teachers and taught. And, for taught, a self-devised incomplete explanation is better than a more elaborate one which they do not perceive the need for. For a time the incomplete explanation can be left; then holes can be picked in it,—if possible by things themselves,—and so it can be gradually improved, until ultimately a more perfect model of an explanation may be told them; but not before its merits can be to some extent appreciated.

Occasionally there are legitimate exceptions, and carefully worded formula may be learned, of which the full meaning will only gradually dawn. No one method should exclude others. Teaching is an art well worthy of study. To some few it is an instinct,—to others an acquired art; but alas! to many who profess to be teachers, the skill is, or used to be, conspicuous by its absence; the children suffer, and all who have subsequently to do with them have to suffer too,—right away up to the university, and beyond it, in life.

A quantity of things can be taught rather by way of questions than by direct instruction. Questions can be

propounded, with time allowed for brooding and thinking over them,—not minutes, I mean, but days.

In geometry, for instance, constructions can be invented by a pupil; the subject can be begun as a game, a series of interesting puzzles,—a very few at a time, even if easy, so as not to be wearisome. Spencer's "Inventional Geometry" is a little book that is of assistance to elementary teachers. Things self-discovered are enshrined, and hold a place in the mind far more secure than things merely hooked on outside.

Interest may be killed by premature systematic instruction. Information concerning things of no interest is valueless information. Curios-

ity should first be aroused. The preparation of the mind for acquiring or cultivating knowledge is far more valuable than packing it with facts. The process of education,—as I have elsewhere said,—is not like packing things into a portmanteau, but like stocking a pond with fish. The healthy mind is itself alive and active; and if time be given, the produce of the pond, as tested by fisherman or examiner, may far exceed the original supply.

Another thing the teacher should realize is the difference between the real and the conventional. Names are conventional, weights and measures are conventional, many of the

devices of language are conventional. To test convention, one has only to bethink oneself whether a statement is applicable only to England or to every country in the world. Some things are true throughout the universe, some things true only for the planet. Things that are true everywhere and for all time are clearly worthy of thorough apprehension. Some things are true both here and hereafter, — beyond these present bounds of time and place,—these are the most vital of all.

It would surely interest a child to bethink himself whether a fact is true in one of these senses or in the other, —valid here and now, or valid *sem-*

per ubique et ab omnibus. It is an educative idea, too, in after life, and one not too common. It tends automatically to arrange things in some sort of order of importance.

VI

PREPARATION FOR LITERATURE

SO far I have emphasized one side of training,—what may be called the more scientific side. If I leave it without balance, I shall be conveying an exceedingly false impression of what I intend. Any unbalanced and one-sided system will have untoward results, but because I emphasize one side, I am not intending to advocate exclusive attention to that side; there are plenty of others. And now I come to the more literary side.

Let it never be thought that I advocate the curbing and correcting of

childish grammar and infantile language. On the contrary, I regard untutored modes of expression as of interest and value. Here is scope for originality and self-manifestation.

Grammar is a conventional mould into which we must fit in due time, but into which we are by no means born. Some initial freedom in this respect is essential to character. Precision of intention is one thing, grammatical correctness another. The latter comes with years, the former may begin in infancy. A child with a stomach-ache will not say the pain is in its toe, however little language it may possess.

To correct childish grammatical errors prematurely is worrying and

most unwise; it deprives a child of naturalness, and adults of some pleasure. If small twins, for instance, having a joint birthday, are asked whose birthday it is; and if after looking at each other for a moment they simultaneously respond "we's," any one who would attempt to correct the statement into accordance with the rules of English grammar would be guilty of a minor kind of blasphemy. This parable summarizes all I have to say on that head.

So again, in emphasizing truth of statement in its due time and place, it may be thought that I am against fairy tales. It is possible, I think, to cultivate them to excess; but to ex-

clude them and forbid children to hear the old immortal stories,—part of the tradition of the race,—would be a literary crime. Appropriate dealing with different categories of things is largely an affair of *moods*. I want to emphasize this. What is suitable for one mood is not suitable in another. The mood and the subject should agree.

Children are not always in a working mood, sometimes they are in a playing mood, sometimes in an imaginative or make-believe mood, sometimes in a serious or inquiring mood. These moods should none of them be repressed, nor should they be treated all alike. The right mood should be induced, when necessary,

before instruction; otherwise no progress will be made. In the inquiring mood they should be supplied with fact, *i.e.,* with something that may be called the beginnings of science. In the imaginative mood with fairy tales; *i.e.,* with something that can be called the beginnings of literature. The habit of constantly asking whether a thing is *true* is an uncultured and inappropriate habit; it means that the wrong mood is uppermost. Some things are better than true. You do not call a sunset, or the Sistine Madonna, or St. Mark's, Venice, or the fifth Symphony, "true." A cloud, moreover, is not what it seems; and, going up into it, you find it merely a wet

drizzle. A rainbow is in many ways deceptive; it is only depicted in the eye. A mirage can be treated scientifically enough, but as observed it is a phantasm. Even the image in a looking-glass is not really *there*. Children must learn that things are not what they seem, and that works of imagination and beauty have a truth of their own which can be felt but not stated. They will know this instinctively, they will not require to be taught it, if they have not been first taught wrong. True to nature, a great poem,—yea, any reasonable poem,—must be. True to historical fact, certainly not. To take a simple case, Enoch Arden need not have lived. Macbeth is Macbeth without

any aid from Scottish history. Robinson Crusoe is independent of Alexander Selkirk. Hamlet and Othello are alive in their own magnificent way. It is the scholar's way; but it is also the unsophisticated child's way. So are Red Riding-Hood, and Jack the Giant-Killer, and Don Quixote, and all the other heroes,—they live in the memory of generations.

And in what way need it be different with other legendary characters of more historical import? King Arthur, for instance, and Hector, and William Tell. Historical they are in a sense,—they have not been gratuitously invented, but their importance does not rest upon his-

torical fact. So it may be in more serious cases. Every incident in the lives of Noah, Daniel, and Job, need not be historically true. The book of Job never pretended to be history; it has a superior reality of its own.

In some of these cases there is a genuine historical basis, which it is interesting and it may be important to ascertain. Historical reality is in *some* cases of the essence of the matter. It is so in connection with the founding of Christianity. I fully admit, and indeed urge, this. There are cases where it is vital, but I am not referring to those now. In ordinary historical cases the evidence must be dealt with according to the canons of scientific criticism, but this

is no work for children. They must first take their history from authority, and on trust.

Meanwhile, if for a time they take unquestioningly as history narratives which belong to a different category, no harm is done. The youth of the race doubtless did the same, or rather did not ask or worry about the difference. Evolutionally children should in such matters go through the phases of the past, and their course need not be hurried. To confuse them with rationalistic interpretation and criticism, to superpose modern explanatory conceptions on the plain tale of a mythology, at least to insist on such explanations prematurely, may be iconoclastic and

rather stupid. There is plenty of the only truth of value in ancient and long surviving legends,—else they would not have survived.

The histories of the Creation and the Fall of Man, properly understood, are legends of profound truth, —truth to human nature,—and it is only a shallow sciolism that has tried to place them in the region of things that must be questioned. Works of art are not to be scrutinized in terms of a rigid literalness; in these matters it is preeminently true that the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life. The whole truth in such matters is far beyond us, even yet. We are still developing, still only in the morning of the times. Read in the

light of Evolution, and with a developed historical sense, the literature of the growth of humanity toward a worthy conception of Deity, —a conception always growing but still infinitely and forever below reality,—the record of its early struggles and mistakes and well-meant gropings after truth, especially the history of the religious development of that people whose instinct for religion blossomed and bore fruit even in the darkest ages of mankind, is full of interest and instruction. Read as an infallible theological treatise concerning the varying ways of God to man,—it is confusing, puzzling, and immoral. Read as a history of the developing

response of man to God,—its misconceptions are pathetic, its inspirations are sublime. Here we have utterances of the wise and illuminated among mankind, embedded in a most human document, and preserved for us in splendid language by the devoted labours of scholars of many periods; a rich inheritance which we owe to the loving care of our fathers, and which it is our duty to hand down to our children as a birthright of which no trivial bickerings, no sectarian differences and illiteracy, should be allowed to deprive them.

How much can children understand of all this? How far can they grasp the evolutionary aspect of ancient human documents?

I believe they can grasp it very well. Only let their teachers get the right point of view, and the children will experience no difficulty. The difficulties which now they genuinely experience are quite other than that, and are the necessary outcome of mistaken modes of regarding the documents as one literal and mechanical scientific treatise, an infallible record of physical truth. Thus regarded, there are indeed things that puzzle, and things that repel. Orders are put into the mouth of Jehovah which emanate quite naturally from a priesthood, and find in that origin an ample explanation.

Neither the book of Nature nor

the book of human History can be taken at its face value; they both require for their full apprehension a trained mind and a favorable point of view. Seen from the right aspect, however, both are luminous, and full of the energising action of the Divine Spirit.

If still the behaviour of the Tribes in the Desert, or after their entry into the Promised Land,—if still the behaviour of the patriarchs or of the best among the kings,—is puzzling and inferior to what we might have expected, we have only to try to realize the condition of the average world at that epoch. Mankind emerging from savagery must for long have been an unlovely spectacle,

—fighting and tearing and sunk in bestial practices,—its nascent intelligence only serving to bring into greater prominence the surviving elements of ape and tiger, to make the lusts and cruelties more awful. Infinite, indeed, must have been the patience and long-suffering of the Deity. Out of such a world the patriarchs rise as majestic figures, earnestly striving after some beginnings of an approach to the divine. An Abraham to-day offering up his son would be a fanatic. In his place and time it was an act of faith. Agamemnon similarly offered up his daughter Iphigenia. It was an act of worship,—the nascent idea of sacrifice. "Other times, other man-

ners"; and if we read those histories of twenty centuries B.C., as if they took place in the twentieth century A.D., we shall hopelessly misread.

VII

PREPARATION FOR RELIGION

BUT it does not follow that our condition now is so very much better. Better it is; but, looked back upon from thirty or forty centuries hence, how will it appear? What will posterity think of our violent social inequalities, of our squalor and destitution, of our slums, workhouses, and prisons,—especially of our prisons? I believe that with all our motors and *Dreadnoughts* and flying-machines, we shall be regarded for the most part, even now, as still sunk in barbarism.

To us, too, have been accorded

brilliant inspirations. Prophets and poets have been vouchsafed to us. We, too, are a chosen people, and we look forward to a world-wide federation of the English-speaking race; but in spite of all that manifest guidance and enlightenment,—guidance as by pillar of cloud and of fire,—our national conduct is still dark, still are we too much influenced by a surviving savage creed, still are we essentially thoughtless and cruel, still far from the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. Let not children suppose that in detecting the faults of a bygone generation we may with impunity be blind to our own.

But the leaven is working, and in the future dawns a great hope. The

evils and ugliness of the present time have in them all a note of *preparation,* the nineteenth century was a period of strenuous activity of which we have not yet begun to reap the fruit. The old placid times have given place to a restless period of materialistic activity,—to the despair and lamentation of some of our prophets,—but the end is not yet.

Even so a country-side, defaced and bemired by the litter of a builder's yard, looks hopelessly spoiled, and may fill the onlooker of that day with regret. And yet in due season, when the building shall have been erected,—the palace, the cathedral, the structure of use and beauty,—the note of preparation in

the previous ugliness will be clear, and wisdom will be justified of all her children. The key-note sounding through the history of the human race is preparation,—preparation for the race that shall be, for the advent of the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

A child can realize this, in some sort, for he himself is likewise a preparation for the future. The very universe is not a Being, but a Becoming; and in this pregnant saying of antiquity,—which may be regarded as the first inspired glimpse of the doctrine of evolution,—is to be found the clue to much Divine working, the justification of the ways of God to men.

Creation is not a momentary but a

perennial act. Each stage in it is "good," has a goodness of its own; no stage is perfect. Perfection is always ahead, improvement is always possible; and it has at length become the conscious privilege of creatures to assist in this work of improvement. Nothing can be so inspiring to a human being as the idea that he is of value, that his help is really wanted. Nothing can so enforce the doctrine of responsibility as the realization that it rests with us to choose whether we shall mend or mar, shall beautify or deface, some portion of the work.

I venture to say that the creation of free and responsible, and at the same time noble and worthy, beings,

who go right not because they are compelled, but because they choose,—not because they must, but because they will,—is a task far from easy, even to omnipotence. The assistance of every agent who can realize his place in the scheme is desired. Else were it blasphemous to maintain that there was ever imperfection; else the struggle of existence were a fiction and a sham.

This, therefore, at bottom accounts for all the pain and sorrow and suffering that is not man-made. Most of our troubles are avoidable, and are due to human selfishness and unwisdom; but some are not, some are inevitable,—brought about, as the ancients used to say, by the gods.

Even so it is with all great works: the end when fully realized is seen to justify the intermediate stages. In human creations, too, the element of pain is not absent, its presence rescues them from insipidity. In any noble tragedy the suffering is felt to be worth while. "King Lear," for instance, is a work of pain and sorrow and beauty. To achieve the beauty, the pain was necessary, and its creator thought it worth while; he would not have it otherwise, nor would we.

Seen from the point of view of the Creator, all the pain and trouble in the world is either remediable by human agents, or is justified and necessary; it is worth going through,

in view of the glory that shall be revealed. This long drama of human history, the countless æons of previous preparation of the planet, must have been all *worth while*. And thus the bitter cry of humanity is really a message of hope. The beauty and the joy that now we realize only in moments must be *there* all the time, but it needs all the preparation for its perception.

Dark is the world to thee: thyself art the reason why.

Revelation through development,—that is the message. A divine revelation *must* be gradual, it can only be given to man as he can receive it. It is the blindness of man that hin-

ders the revelation of God; there is no other hindrance. We live in the blinding splendour of it, even now. Human history is the slow and gradual preparation of man for the divine vision, the divine message. The message is sounding all the time, —it is the sense that is wanting: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

And the ear of man can not hear, and the eye of man can not see;
But if we could see and hear, this Vision,— were it not He?

THE END.