

EDUCATION IN GENERAL

As education is, strictly speaking, the art of cultivating the minds and hearts of young people in knowledge, in good habits, or even in the ways of the world, and in civility of manners, it cannot come about naturally, or as a result of a number of instructions, poorly digested, or given without order and without skill. Time, care and method are necessary in the bringing up of young people. There is, it seems to me, no more universal or significant skill, since it also aims at everything which contributes to the formation of the honest man and the perfect christian.

The duties of religion are to be fulfilled, conventions to be safeguarded, knowledge to be acquired. However fine a nature, whatever good qualities a young might have, if he lacks education he will remain good but uncultivated ground, bearing only common flowers and wild fruits which will never lose their bitterness. The best mind will remain unpolished, impolite, hard, even primitive if it is not shown good principles: education must come to the aid of nature. Better an excellent education and a mediocre nature than the richest nature in the world and a mediocre education.

It is not only the minds of young people that must be cultivated - that would not be too difficult - but it should be said that the heart is the principal focus of education. Its errors must be discovered, its desires regulated, its outbursts moderated. The science of morality is more to do with the heart than with the mind.

A heart which begins to taste pleasure needs much more help to preserve it from danger. It needs to have been nourished in a pure atmosphere so that it may resist infection. A badly brought up young man gives in easily to moral dereliction. The world only has attractive and flowered avenues: how will a young man avoid its traps if he has not been made aware of its dangers from an early age?

Our passions are born with us, and they do not remain young long; they take advantage of any weakness of reason and of the indulgence with which the young are treated. Education must compensate for this lack of experience; it teaches one to conquer the passions even before one is old enough to fear them. If a horror of vice does not prejudice reason the best of lessons will always be too late. Knowledge of the world is less costly than knowledge of salvation. The rules of civility are more easily learned than those of the Gospel: nevertheless they serve each other. Politesse without civility never made an honest man; true merit is always founded on virtue and on religion.

How many fine personalities fade away into obscurity for having missed this early help! How many remain in a repulsive mediocrity through having never been taught good principles! Nature starts, education finishes. For the mind to be formed some intellectual capacity is necessary, but art and method are even more essential. Knowledge proceeds at a steady pace and does not wish to be hurried. Too much light damages still weak eyes. The mind is sometimes spoilt by a too rapid pace: overly accelerated study is destructive, it makes the mind confused and opaque rather than knowledgeable. On the other hand, a mediocre nature cultivated with great care and art progresses by leaps and bounds, One must find a way of instilling a taste for study so that study can be undertaken in a useful manner.

Knowledgeable people are not always the most civil: nevertheless it is a great fault to be unaware of the conventions and duties of civil life: a good mind must know how to think and live well. Nothing illuminates doctrine and virtue more than honesty, modesty and politesse: impolite manners repel, and a crude and primitive virtue displeases.

A good education, by cultivating the mind and morals, teaches at the same time all the duties of civil life: at the same time as forming the mind for knowledge, it also instructs it in the rules and conventions which each one should maintain according to his station in life. Truly this art calls for very able masters: it is not enough to have much zeal and piety it is not even enough to be well versed in the beaux-arts; one should know the art of making virtue and knowledge attractive to young people who naturally like neither; one should have studied young people in depth in order to know how to teach them: a good education does not limit itself to making a young man virtuous and knowledgeable; it teaches him to live. A singular talent and unusual degree of experience are necessary qualifications for inspiring in young people a love for piety and a taste for knowledge along with civility, politesse and dedication to study and to virtue.

What greater inheritance can a father leave to his children than an excellent education? What honour can badly brought up children bring to the richest inheritance? One should be more grateful to parents for one's good education than for any other treasure. In fact, even in the highest echelons of society one would find very few unhappy children who did not owe at least a part of their wretchedness to a bad education. This is why it is said that to give one's children a good education is to give them a second life. What madness, the wise man says, it is to prefer to see children badly educated than less well-off, and through a sordid and cruel avarice to refuse them that education which alone can make honest men of them, and without which they can only be wretched! "Veritatem eme", he might continue, spare nothing to give a good education to your children: parents have no more crucial obligation: and the Apostle does not hesitate to state

that a father who neglects his children's education is worse than an infidel.¹ A father and mother have no more solid consolation, according to Ecclesiasticus, than to see their children well brought up. "Qui docet filium suum, laudabitur in illo"²: he who takes pains over the education of his son will be joyful and glory in it. "Doce filium tuum et operare in illo, ne in turpitudine illius offendas"³: instruct your children and spare nothing to give them an excellent education, for fear that they might dishonour you by their shameful lives and that they might never reproach you in the future for any lack of effort on your part to bring them up well. "Confusio patris est de filio indisciplinato"⁴: nothing reflects so badly on a father than his child's ignorance and poor morals.

But if this duty is so essential to parents, is it no less a duty for children to profit from this assistance which happiness in life, and often even everlasting happiness, depend?

The assistance that children receive through education is even more precious if it is not limited to the time of their schooling; if the lessons they are given there are adapted to their age and their station in life they become nothing less than rules of conduct for every moment of their lives. The aim here is to provide them with the means of formation in morals, in knowledge and in the duties of civil life: it is not a question of a passing exercise lasting only a few days. Those christian sentiments which one tries to inculcate, the practices of piety which they are taught, and the rules of civility which they are given are as much to the point for a lawyer, a soldier or a businessman as they are for a young man in the classroom. They are equally principles which remain fully alive for all ages and for all conditions.

This is the reason for this work. Such a book will serve as a life-long instruction, the more useful because it is aimed at all stations in life and can serve as a rule of morals for every age. By providing a means of having these rules permanently available one is rendering an essential service to education. Rendering that service is the primary aim of this "Manuel de Jeunesse".

It would be a great joy if it were to contribute to the safeguarding and growth of those precious seeds of virtue planted by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those for whom it is written. May it help to preserve them from the seduction of lies and errors; to keep them safe from the spirit of pride and irreligion; may it direct their path by the light of Faith; may it remind them always that only God is great, only virtue is loveable, only that which is everlasting is solid; the only heroism is the conquering of self, and nothing is more glorious than to be and to appear christian.

CONCERNING PIETY

CHAPTER ONE

The Need to Inspire Piety in Young People During Their Education.

The fear of the Lord, says the prophet, is beginning and the basis of wisdom. There is no good education if it is not christian; religion is always the finest trait of the honest man: in vain is intelligence, ability and politesse if one does not have piety.

People are surprised that after having taken so much care, and spared nothing to bring a child up well, they meet with little success. The spirit of the world, a light gloss of knowledge, much vanity, a few chosen morsels of history or poetry, a superficial knowledge of the language of the savants; these are frequently the fruit of a carefully chosen and expensive education. There is no docility and no modesty in the pupils; no submission, no deference for those who have the most right to expect it. A hard and haughty nature, vicious and opinionated opinions, a permanent disdain for one's duties and for work, a vain and dissolute spirit, a fickle heart: this is often a description of young people at the end of their schooling. Where does such a pernicious disorder, which distresses parents so much, come from? It comes from the fact that efforts are only made to cultivate a young man's mind and memory, and morals are usually ignored.

Provided that the children make progress in knowledge, little attention is paid to the fact that they might be ignorant in the practice of virtue. Those whose job it is to educate them often think only of teaching them belles lettres; the parents are charmed by hearing a child reciting the finest passages from a celebrated author and do not worry whether he has learned his religion. In fact piety should be the principal aim and fruit of education: without it all the finest of qualities come to nothing, and serve only to make the young people more licentious and more impious. One cannot complain if children displease after an unchristian education which is the usual source of the unruliness of young people: only virtue has the power and the will to conquer the passions and to civilise all sorts of natures.

Religion, as the cornerstone of the building that we work on, must be the principal object of the care that one dedicates to young people. If it is right that one should forget nothing in making young people able in all the fine arts, that one should take such trouble to instruct them in all the conventions and duties of civil life, then one should take even greater

¹ 1. Timothy: 5

² Ecc.:3

³ Ecc: 3

⁴ Ecc: 3

care to teach them the knowledge of salvation; all these fine qualities would be as nothing if they are not accompanied by christian piety which alone can lead to true merit.

This is why truly Christian teachers are at such pains to give their pupils the joy of attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass every day.

It also explains their zeal in often showing them what they should avoid or practice in order to follow their own true interests and to respond to what God, their parents and society expect of them.

It is why they take care to give them weekly familial instruction to teach them their religion in depth, and the duties which it imposes on them.

It is why they so often speak individually to their children so as to remind them of any obligations which they have missed, or to encourage and animate them to fulfil them better so as to be blameless.

Finally, it also why they pay attention to the smallest faults with gentle and effective correction, salutary reminders, frequent instruction, daily reading from some book of piety, prayer in common, frequentation of the Sacraments, avoidance of the slightest danger, good example and that holy competition which they attempt to establish in their houses etc. Happy those parents who find such teachers for their children! Even happier the children who have such teachers!

CHAPTER TWO

The Characteristics Which Young People's Piety Should Have.

Young people are subject to fickleness in the matter of devotion. The false ideas that they form of devotion contributes in no small degree to the sudden waywardness which so often follows their initial fervour.

The piety which they should have is not a superficial and transitory devotion, without a solid basis, and existing only through pretence and fear. This type of devotion is lost with any change of mentor or state.

The virtue which one should inspire in them and which they themselves should strive to acquire is an immovable foundation of religion, a gentle fear of God, a horror of sin which grows with reason and age; an unreserved love of God, a most exact observation of all His commandments; a persevering dedication to fulfilling all the duties of their state, and an unwavering respect, submission and tenderness towards their parents.

They should unceasingly have before their eyes, and even more profoundly engraved in their hearts, these words of Scripture: "quasi a facie colubri fuge peccatum"; flee from sin as you would from a terrible serpent.⁵ They should have a horror of suspect company, subversive books, impolite words, impure thoughts; everything which might sully their souls. Those charged with their education must approach this matter with extreme delicacy; they should ignore nothing; they should rigorously punish the slightest faults against good morals, and vigorously remove from their pupils' company anyone who might be a cause of scandal to them.

To a horror of sin one should add the desire to please God: "qui timent Dominum inquirent quae placita sunt ei"⁶. It is never too difficult to know what God demands, whatever one's state, and it is particularly easy for young people at the time of their schooling: study, docility, application, progress in knowledge, and particularly in the knowledge of salvation; all these must be indispensable duties for them. God wishes them to apply themselves carefully to these duties.

VIRTUES WHICH GUIDE OUR DUTIES WITH REGARD TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

"DOUCEUR"⁷ - GENTLENESS

The gentleness which Jesus Christ recognises when he says "Beati mites", happy those who are gentle⁸, is not that weak and affected gentleness whose external appearance the world often adopts, in a purely mechanical fashion, in order to disguise personal feelings and to achieve one's ends more easily; it is not a simply quality of temperament or expression; neither is it that weakness of soul which fear makes one take on an appearance of goodness and gentleness, and which permits the very evil against which it should be striving. It is a virtue based on christian charity: governed by moderation, perfected by patience, sanctified by grace. It is an attitude of heart acquired and polished by hard work which, through virtue, prevents us from harming our neighbour and which leads us to seek every possible benefit for

⁵ Ecc: 21

⁶ Ecc: 2

⁷ Taken from Page 112 in the original.

⁸ Matt 4: 5

him. It is a positive disposition of the soul, which makes us find our happiness in that of others, which inspires us to bring joy to all hearts, to banish their sadness, and, if one cannot succeed totally, at least to bring comfort and to share the sadness. This is the true gentleness of which Jesus Christ made himself the model on earth. It is this gentleness which he promised to reward: "Happy are the gentle for they will inherit the earth"; by "earth" he means;

1) the Heavenly Kingdom, which is "the land of the living, the promised land, flowing with milk and honey", those natural symbols of christian gentleness; the land conquered by the Lamb of God, who will put his elect there like so many gentle and innocent lambs. He also means:

2) the people with whom we live presently, since the reward of our gentleness will be their affection and their hearts: "My son", says the Holy Spirit, "make gentleness appear in all things, and you will have the glory of being loved by all".

Gentleness also makes us masters of our own hearts: "by your patience you will possess your souls". Is there a more desirable and happy situation on this earth than to be master of every action of one's heart, to be able to regulate at will its inclinations, its desires, and be able to keep one's self in an unchanging peace and tranquillity? The peace of the Blessed in Heaven consists of having nothing more to suffer; ours consists of suffering, at least gently, everything which we cannot prevent. Most of our unhappiness has its root in our own hearts; It is neither the things which we have to suffer, nor the people with whom we have to deal, that are too painful: the fact is that if we are not masters of our own hearts we become too delicate and sensitive. Our happiness, like our unhappiness, depends on ourselves and is not controlled by others.

The prophet Isaiah, in order to describe the character of the Messiah, or at least to indicate the most important points, makes an effort to show us the charm of his admirable gentleness: he says "He does not cry out or shout aloud, or make his voice heard in the streets. He does not break the crushed reed nor quench the wavering flame."⁹ The simplicity and indiscreet zeal of his Disciples, and the importunity of the people often stretched His patience; never did his gentleness waver for an instant; he made allowances for their weakness with an extreme sympathy; he suffered their weakness with patience. He always instructed them with the same goodness, without allowing their inability to understand his teachings to discourage Him and without showing any sign of sadness or anger. Look at how much he had to suffer the intrigues and the open attacks of the Pharisees. Yet they never made him lose anything of his customary gentleness; as long as they were only attacking him he treated them with admirable moderation, and when he was obliged to caution the people for their hypocrisy he still treated their authority and their individuals with respect. Jesus Christ's horror of sin was, without doubt, very great; it was infinite; nevertheless he treated sinners with great kindness. He hasten to meet them, welcomed them tenderly and never repulsed a single one. But it is in His Passion that his gentleness is especially admirable; already weakened through loss of blood he found in the fire of his goodness a strength to combat his weakness, to cry aloud, not to demand vengeance for the injustice of his enemies and the cruelty of his executioners; but rather to ask pardon for them, and to excuse an apparently inexcusable crime.

Means of Acquiring and Keeping Gentleness

1. Keep a guard on one's self so that indignation and anger never trouble the heart or the mind to the extent that one loses gentleness in one's manner.
2. Conquer one's natural austerity of mood and study one's self in order to rid one's self of anything which might appear rude, proud and imperious.
3. Never maintain a spirit of bitterness against those who might have offended us, and scrupulously avoid any thought of vengeance or aversion.
4. Regard the faults of others with sincere compassion; be always ready to accept their excuses and to forgive their weakness.
5. Do not argue in a heated or opinionated manner; rather remain always ready to renounce your own opinion when good reasons are put forward and when, without ignoring the demands of Religion or of truth, you can sacrifice your own point of view in the interests of harmony.
5. Treat everyone with humanity, civility and gentleness.

POLITESSE (p. 166)

True politesse is based on a love of neighbour: it help us to express at all times and in the most apt fashion that we are totally suffused with the sentiment of christian charity. It consists, therefore, of maintaining a certain honest, gentle and

⁹ Jsa 5: 2

polite manner of acting towards all sorts of people. It is a certain awareness of convention in one's gestures and in one's words so that one can demonstrate the respect one has for others. It is a mixture of discretion and amenability which leads us to render to each one that which they have the right to expect from us. Finally it is a permanent disposition of the soul which results in that open and sincere air which makes us immediately likeable; it is that decent tone, those manners and that respect which prejudice others in our favour and ensures that all those with whom we come into contact will leave us happy with both themselves and with us.

The rules of politesse are rather complex, and one needs to know how to discern the correct use of conventions: age, merit and character make different demands, and if one is not aware of these distinctions one risks being regarded as impolite. According to Rollin, a lack of politesse detracts from even the greatest merit, to the extent that even virtue itself seems less virtuous. One should, therefore, become familiar with all the rules of civility, and make one's self so at ease with them that one never omits a single one; one should know how to distribute one's politesse with liberality but not with prodigality: and excess of politesse is often a wearisome incivility.

One should have an easy manner; the work that one puts into politesse should not be apparent. One should know how to applaud appropriately, defer with modesty, cede with wisdom and grace, and deftly respond to all kindnesses. A compliment which lacks ingenuity and grace is frivolous and is displeasing. It is not enough to speak correctly; one should know when to speak and when to remain silent. It is not only in conversation that one seeks politesse; indeed it is more sought after in our manner: our gestures, our facial expression and even our silence - all these are subject to the rules of convention. All these are faults against politesse: an overly foppish posture; a overly rapid or overly slow pace; a too brusque greeting; an overly slow or hurried response; and overly familiar or discourteous demand; too melancholy or too frivolous a manner; dry or injudiciously chosen repartee; an ungracious or permanently negative expression; an uncontrolled laugh; an expressionless speaking style; a distracted or preoccupied manner. Friendship permits some latitude, but never unbridled familiarity. One wins over one's inferiors by a gentle and obliging manner. One must always avoid any air of haughtiness, and make one's self loved by the goodness and straightforwardness with which one deals with those whom one directs.

Scripture tells us enough about Jesus Christ's manner to allow us to conclude that he wished to serve as a model in this: he had "nothing sombre in his face", and he conformed to everyday conventions so as to win the heart of mankind. That is why he had such a straightforward and attractive manner that we see the crowd gathering round him, and children, naturally timid, approaching him with a freedom and confidence inspired by his air of goodness and gentleness. "Let the little children come to me", he said to his Apostles who wished to keep them at bay, "let them come to me as they will share everlasting happiness with me".

Means of Acquiring and Maintaining True Politesse.

1. Become familiar with the rules of civility, and observe them even with your classmates, your closest friends, and even with your inferiors; at games, in your conversation, at home and everywhere and in all circumstances.
2. Always listen politely to whoever is speaking, and never interrupt rudely or inappropriately. Avoid a spirit of contradiction, but give your opinion with much simplicity, modesty and clarity. You do not need to speak loudly in a conversation to make yourself heard.
3. Never forget that you make yourself more attractive through the heart that through the mind; that knowing when to keep silent is wisdom; that speaking more than necessary is imprudence; that rushing to interrupt others is often arrogance and pride.