The greatest defect in our programmes of education is entirely overlooked. While much is being done in the detailed improvement of our systems in respect both of matter and manner, the most pressing desideratum has not yet been even recognised as a desideratum. To prepare the young for the duties of life is tacitly admitted to be the end which parents and schoolmasters should have in view; and happily, the value of the things taught, and the goodness of the methods followed in teaching them, are now ostensibly judged by their fitness to this end. The propriety of substituting for an exclusively classical training, a training in which the modern languages shall have a share, is argued on this ground. The necessity of increasing the amount of science is urged for like reasons. But though some care is taken to fit youth of both sexes for society and citizenship, no care whatever is taken to fit them for the position of parents. While it is seen that for the purpose of gaining a livelihood, an elaborate preparation is needed, it appears to be thought that for the bringing up of children, no preparation whatever is needed. While many years are spent by a boy in gaining knowledge of which the chief value is that it constitutes "the education of a gentleman;" and while many years are spent by a girl in those decorative acquirements which fit her for evening parties; not an hour is spent by either in preparation for that gravest of all responsibilities—the management of a family. Is it that this responsibility is but a remote contingency? On the contrary, it is sure to devolve on nine out of ten. Is it that the discharge of it is easy? Certainly not: of all functions which the adult has to fulfil, this is the most difficult. Is it that each may be trusted by self-instruction to fit himself, or herself, for the office of parent? No: not only is the need for such self-instruction unrecognised, but the complexity of the subject renders it the one of all others in which self-instruction is least likely to succeed. No rational plea can be put forward for leaving the Art of Education out of our _curriculum_. Whether as bearing on the happiness of parents themselves, or whether as affecting the characters and lives of their children and remote descendants, we must admit that a knowledge of the right methods of juvenile culture, physical, intellectual, and moral, is a knowledge of extreme importance. This topic should be the final one in the course of instruction passed through by each man and woman. As physical maturity is marked by the ability to produce offspring, so mental maturity is marked by the ability to train those offspring. _The subject which involves all other subjects, and therefore the subject in which education should culminate, is the Theory and Practice of Education._

In the absence of this preparation, the management of children, and more especially the moral management, is lamentably bad. Parents either never think about the matter at all, or else their conclusions are crude and inconsistent. In most cases, and especially on the part of mothers, the treatment adopted on every occasion is that which the impulse of the moment prompts: it springs not from any reasoned-out conviction as to what will most benefit the child, but merely expresses the dominant parental feelings, whether good or ill; and varies from hour to hour as these feelings vary. Or if the dictates of passion are supplemented by any definite doctrines and methods, they are those handed down from the past, or those suggested by the remembrances of childhood, or those adopted from nurses and servants—methods devised not by the enlightenment, but by the ignorance, of the time. Commenting on the chaotic state of opinion and practice relative to family government, Richter writes:--
little, and this is only fit for grown-up people;' in the fifth, 'the chief matter is that you should succeed in the world, and become something in the state;' in the sixth, 'not the temporary, but the eternal, determines the worth of a man;' in the seventh, 'therefore rather suffer injustice, and be kind;' in the eighth, 'but defend yourself bravely if any one attack you;' in the ninth, 'do not make a noise, dear child;' in the tenth, 'a boy must not sit so quiet;' in the eleventh, 'you must obey your parents better;' in the twelfth, 'and educate yourself.' So by the hourly change of his principles, the father conceals their untenableness and onesidedness. As for his wife, she is neither like him, nor yet like that harlequin who came on to the stage with a bundle of papers under each arm, and answered to the inquiry, what he had under his right arm, 'orders,' and to what he had under his left arm, 'counter-orders.' But the mother might be much better compared to a giant Briareus, who had a hundred arms, and a bundle of papers under each."

This state of things is not to be readily changed. Generations must pass before a great amelioration of it can be expected. Like political constitutions, educational systems are not made, but grow; and within brief periods growth is insensible. Slow, however, as must be any improvement, even that improvement implies the use of means; and among the means is discussion.

We are not among those who believe in Lord Palmerston's dogma, that "all children are born good." On the whole, the opposite dogma, untenable as it is, seems to us less wide of the truth. Nor do we agree with those who think that, by skilful discipline, children may be made altogether what they should be. Contrariwise, we are satisfied that though imperfections of nature may be diminished by wise management, they cannot be removed by it. The notion that an ideal humanity might be forthwith produced by a perfect system of education, is near akin to that implied in the poems of Shelley, that would mankind give up their old institutions and prejudices, all the evils in the world would at once disappear: neither notion being acceptable to such as have dispassionately studied human affairs.

Nevertheless, we may fitly sympathise with those who entertain these too sanguine hopes. Enthusiasm, pushed even to fanaticism, is a useful motive-power--perhaps an indispensable one. It is clear that the ardent politician would never undergo the labours and make the sacrifices he does, did he not believe that the reform he fights for is the one thing needful. But for his conviction that drunkenness is the root of all social evils, the teetotaler would agitate far less energetically. In philanthropy, as in other things, great advantage results from division of labour; and that there may be division of labour, each class of philanthropists must be more or less subordinated to its function--must have an exaggerated faith in its work. Hence, of those who regard education, intellectual or moral, as the panacea, we may say that their undue expectations are not without use; and that perhaps it is part of the beneficent order of things that their confidence cannot be shaken.

Even were it true, however, that by some possible system of moral control, children could be moulded into the desired form; and even could every parent be indoctrinated with this system, we should still be far from achieving the object in view. It is forgotten that the carrying out of any such system presupposes, on the part of adults, a degree of intelligence, of goodness, of self-control, possessed by no one. The error made by those who discuss questions of domestic discipline, lies in ascribing all the faults and difficulties to the children, and none to the parents. The current assumption respecting family government, as respecting national government, is, that the virtues are with the rulers and the vices with the ruled. Judging by educational theories, men and women are entirely transfigured in their relations to offspring. The citizens we do business with, the people we meet in the world, we know to be very imperfect creatures. In the daily scandals, in the quarrels of friends, in bankruptcy disclosures, in lawsuits, in police reports, we have constantly thrust before us the pervading selfishness, dishonesty, brutality. Yet when we criticise nursery-management and canvass the misbehaviour of juveniles, we habitually take for granted that these culpable persons are free from moral delinquency in the treatment of their boys and girls! So far is this from the truth, that we do not hesitate to blame parental misconduct for a great part of the domestic disorder commonly ascribed to the perversity of children. We do not assert this of the more sympathetic and self-restrained, among whom we hope most of our readers may be classed; but we assert it of the mass. What kind of moral culture is to be expected from a mother who, time after time, angrily shakes her infant because it will not suck; which we once saw a mother do? How much sense of justice is likely to be instilled by a father who, on having his attention drawn by a scream to the fact that his child's finger is jammed between the window-sash and sill, begins to beat the child instead of releasing it? Yet that there are such fathers is testified to us by
an eye-witness. Or, to take a still stronger case, also vouched for by direct testimony—what are the educational prospects of the boy who, on being taken home with a dislocated thigh, is saluted with a castigation? It is true that these are extreme instances—instances exhibiting in human beings that blind instinct which impels brutes to destroy the weakly and injured of their own race. But extreme though they are, they typify feelings and conduct daily observable in many families. Who has not repeatedly seen a child slapped by nurse or parent for a fretfulness probably resulting from bodily derangement? Who, when watching a mother snatch up a fallen little one, has not often traced, both in the rough manner and in the sharply-uttered exclamation—"You stupid little thing!"—an irascibility foretelling endless future squabbles? Is there not in the harsh tones in which a father bids his children be quiet, evidence of a deficient fellow-feeling with them? Are not the constant, and often quite needless, thwartings that the young experience—the injunctions to sit still, which an active child cannot obey without suffering great nervous irritation, the commands not to look out of the window when travelling by railway, which on a child of any intelligence entails serious deprivation—are not these thwartings, we ask, signs of a terrible lack of sympathy? The truth is, that the difficulties of moral education are necessarily of dual origin—necessarily result from the combined faults of parents and children. If hereditary transmission is a law of nature, as every naturalist knows it to be, and as our daily remarks and current proverbs admit it to be; then, on the average of cases, the defects of children mirror the defects of their parents;—on the average of cases, we say, because, complicated as the results are by the transmitted traits of remoter ancestors, the correspondence is not special but only general. And if, on the average of cases, this inheritance of defects exists, then the evil passions which parents have to check in their children, imply like evil passions in themselves: hidden, it may be, from the public eye, or perhaps obscured by other feelings, but still there. Evidently, therefore, the general practice of any ideal system of discipline is hopeless: parents are not good enough.

Moreover, even were there methods by which the desired end could be at once effected; and even had fathers and mothers sufficient insight, sympathy, and self-command to employ these methods consistently; it might still be contended that it would be of no use to reform family-government faster than other things are reformed. What is it that we aim to do? Is it not that education of whatever kind has for its proximate end to prepare a child for the business of life—to produce a citizen who, while he is well conducted, is also able to make his way in the world? And does not making his way in the world (by which we mean, not the acquirement of wealth, but of the funds requisite for bringing up a family)—does not this imply a certain fitness for the world as it now is? And if by any system of culture an ideal human being could be produced, is it not doubtful whether he would be fit for the world as it now is? May we not, on the contrary, suspect that his too keen sense of rectitude, and too elevated standard of conduct, would make life intolerable or even impossible? And however admirable the result might be, considered individually, would it not be self-defeating in so far as society and posterity are concerned? There is much reason for thinking that as in a nation so in a family, the kind of government is, on the whole, about as good as the general state of human nature permits it to be. We may argue that in the one case, as in the other, the average character of the people determines the quality of the control exercised. In both cases it may be inferred that amelioration of the average character leads to an amelioration of system; and further, that were it possible to ameliorate the system without the average character being first ameliorated, evil rather than good would follow. Such degree of harshness as children now experience from their parents and teachers, may be regarded as but a preparation for that greater harshness which they will meet on entering the world. And it may be urged that were it possible for parents and teachers to treat them with perfect equity and entire sympathy, it would but intensify the sufferings which the selfishness of men must, in after life, inflict on them.(1)

"But does not this prove too much?" some one will ask. "If no system of moral training can forthwith make children what they should be; if, even were there a system that would do this, existing parents are too imperfect to carry it out; and if even could such a system be successfully carried out, its results would be disastrously incongruous with the present state of society; does it not follow that to reform the system now in use is neither practicable nor desirable?" No. It merely follows that reform in domestic government must go on, _pari passu_, with other reforms. It merely follows that methods of discipline neither can nor should be ameliorated, except by instalments. It merely follows that the dictates of abstract rectitude will, in practice, inevitably be subordinated by the present state of human nature—by the imperfections alike of children, of parents, and of society; and can only be better fulfilled as the general character becomes better.
"At any rate, then," may rejoin our critic, "it is clearly useless to set up any ideal standard of family discipline. There
can be no advantage in elaborating and recommending methods that are in advance of the time." Again we contend for
the contrary. Just as in the case of political government, though pure rectitude may be at present impracticable, it is
requisite to know where the right lies, in order that the changes we make may be _towards_ the right instead of _away_
from it; so, in the case of domestic government, an ideal must be upheld, that there may be gradual approximations to
it. We need fear no evil consequences from the maintenance of such an ideal. On the average the constitutional
conservatism of mankind is strong enough to prevent too rapid a change. Things are so organised that until men have
grown up to the level of a higher belief, they cannot receive it: nominally, they may hold it, but not virtually. And even
when the truth gets recognised, the obstacles to conformity with it are so persistent as to outlive the patience of
philanthropists and even of philosophers. We may be sure, therefore, that the difficulties in the way of a normal
government of children, will always put an adequate check upon the efforts to realise it.

With these preliminary explanations, let us go on to consider the true aims and methods of moral education. After a few
pages devoted to the settlement of general principles, during the perusal of which we bespeak the reader's patience, we
shall aim by illustrations to make clear the right methods of parental behaviour in the hourly occurring difficulties of
family government.

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When a child falls, or runs its head against the table, it suffers a pain, the remembrance of which tends to make it more
careful; and by repetition of such experiences, it is eventually disciplined into proper guidance of its movements. If it
lays hold of the fire-bars, thrusts its hand into a candle-flame, or spills boiling water on any part of its skin, the resulting
burn or scald is a lesson not easily forgotten. So deep an impression is produced by one or two events of this kind, that
no persuasion will afterwards induce it thus to disregard the laws of its constitution.

Now in these cases, Nature illustrates to us in the simplest way, the true theory and practice of moral discipline--a
theory and practice which, however much they may seem to the superficial like those commonly received, we shall find
on examination to differ from them very widely.

Observe, first, that in bodily injuries and their penalties we have misconduct and its consequences reduced to their
simplest forms. Though, according to their popular acceptations, _right_ and _wrong_ are words scarcely applicable to
actions that have none but direct bodily effects; yet whoever considers the matter will see that such actions must be as
much classifiable under these heads as any other actions. From whatever assumption they start, all theories of morality
agree that conduct whose total results, immediate and remote, are beneficial, is good conduct; while conduct whose
total results, immediate and remote, are injurious, is bad conduct. The _ultimate_ standards by which all men judge of
behaviour, are the resulting happiness or misery. We consider drunkenness wrong because of the physical degeneracy
and accompanying moral evils entailed on the drunkard and his dependents. Did theft give pleasure both to taker and
loser, we should not find it in our catalogue of sins. Were it conceivable that kind actions multiplied human sufferings,
we should condemn them--should not consider them kind. It needs but to read the first newspaper-leader, or listen to
any conversation on social affairs, to see that acts of parliament, political movements, philanthropic agitations, in
common with the doings of individuals are judged by their anticipated results in augmenting the pleasures or pains of
men. And if on analysing all secondary superinduced ideas, we find these to be our final tests of right and wrong, we
cannot refuse to class bodily conduct as right or wrong according to the beneficial or detrimental results produced.

Note, in the second place, the character of the punishments by which these physical transgressions are prevented.
Punishments, we call them, in the absence of a better word; for they are not punishments in the literal sense. They are
not artificial and unnecessary inflictions of pain; but are simply the beneficent checks to actions that are essentially at
variance with bodily welfare--checks in the absence of which life would be quickly destroyed by bodily injuries. It is
the peculiarity of these penalties, if we must so call them, that they are simply the _unavoidable consequences_ of the
deeds which they follow: they are nothing more than the _inevitable reactions_ entailed by the child's actions.

Let it be further borne in mind that these painful reactions are proportionate to the transgressions. A slight accident
brings a slight pain; a more serious one, a severer pain. It is not ordained that an urchin who tumbles over the doorstep,
shall suffer in excess of the amount necessary; with the view of making it still more cautious than the necessary
suffering will make it. But from its daily experience it is left to learn the greater or less penalties of greater or less
errors; and to behave accordingly.

And then mark, lastly, that these natural reactions which follow the child's wrong actions, are constant, direct,
unhesitating, and not to be escaped. No threats; but a silent, rigorous performance. If a child runs a pin into its finger,
pain follows. If it does it again, there is again the same result: and so on perpetually. In all its dealing with inorganic
Nature it finds this unswerving persistence, which listens to no excuse, and from which there is no appeal; and very
soon recognising this stern though beneficent discipline, it becomes extremely careful not to transgress.

Still more significant will these general truths appear, when we remember that they hold throughout adult life as well as
throughout infantine life. It is by an experimentally-gained knowledge of the natural consequences, that men and
women are checked when they go wrong. After home-education has ceased, and when there are no longer parents and
teachers to forbid this or that kind of conduct, there comes into play a discipline like that by which the young child is
trained to self-guidance. If the youth entering on the business of life idles away his time and fulfils slowly or unskilfully
the duties entrusted to him, there by and by follows the natural penalty: he is discharged, and left to suffer for awhile
the evils of a relative poverty. On the unpunctual man, ever missing his appointments of business and pleasure, there
continually fall the consequent inconveniences, losses, and deprivations. The tradesmen who charges too high a rate of
profit, loses his customers, and so is checked in his greediness. Diminishing practice teaches the inattentive doctor to
bestow more trouble on his patients. The too credulous creditor and the over-sanguine speculator, alike learn by the
difficulties which rashness entails on them, the necessity of being more cautious in their engagements. And so
throughout the life of every citizen. In the quotation so often made _apropos_ of such cases--"The burnt child dreads
the fire"--we see not only that the analogy between this social discipline and Nature's early discipline of infants is
universally recognised; but we also see an implied conviction that this discipline is of the most efficient kind. Nay
indeed, this conviction is more than implied; it is distinctly stated. Every one has heard others confess that only by
"dearly bought experience" had they been induced to give up some bad or foolish course of conduct formerly pursued.
Every one has heard, in the criticism passed on the doings of this spendthrift or the other schemer, the remark that
advice was useless, and that nothing but "bitter experience" would produce any effect: nothing, that is, but suffering the
unavoidable consequences. And if further proof be needed that the natural reaction is not only the most efficient
penalty, but that no humanly-devised penalty can replace it, we have such further proof in the notorious ill-success of
our various penal systems. Out of the many methods of criminal discipline that have been proposed and legally
enforced, none have answered the expectations of their advocates. Artificial punishments have failed to produce
reformation; and have in many cases increased the criminality. The only successful reformatories are those privately-
established ones which approximate their regime to the method of Nature--which do little more than administer the
natural consequences of criminal conduct: diminishing the criminal's liberty of action as much as is needful for the
safety of society, and requiring him to maintain himself while living under this restraint. Thus we see, both that the
discipline by which the young child is taught to regulate its movements is the discipline by which the great mass of
adults are kept in order, and more or less improved; and that the discipline humanly-devised for the worst adults, fails
when it diverges from this divinely-ordained discipline, and begins to succeed on approximating to it.

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Have we not here, then, the guiding principle of moral education? Must we not infer that the system so beneficent in its
effects during infancy and maturity, will be equally beneficent throughout youth? Can any one believe that the method
which answers so well in the first and the last divisions of life, will not answer in the intermediate division? Is it not
manifest that as "ministers and interpreters of Nature" it is the function of parents to see that their children habitually
experience the true consequences of their conduct--the natural reactions: neither warding them off, nor intensifying
them, nor putting artificial consequences in place of them? No unprejudiced reader will hesitate in his assent.

Probably, however, not a few will contend that already most parents do this--that the punishments they inflict are, in the
majority of cases, the true consequences of ill-conduct--that parental anger, venting itself in harsh words and deeds, is
the result of a child's transgression—and that, in the suffering, physical or moral, which the child is subject to, it experiences the natural reaction of its misbehaviour. Along with much error this assertion contains some truth. It is unquestionable that the displeasure of fathers and mothers is a true consequence of juvenile delinquency; and that the manifestation of it is a normal check upon such delinquency. The scoldings, and threats, and blows, which a passionate parent visits on offending little ones, are doubtless effects actually drawn from such a parent by their offences; and so are, in some sort, to be considered as among the natural reactions of their wrong actions. Nor are we prepared to say that these modes of treatment are not relatively right—right, that is, in relation to the uncontrollable children of ill-controlled adults; and right in relation to a state of society in which such ill-controlled adults make up the mass of the people. As already suggested, educational systems, like political and other institutions, are generally as good as the state of human nature permits. The barbarous children of barbarous parents are probably only to be restrained by the barbarous methods which such parents spontaneously employ; while submission to these barbarous methods is perhaps the best preparation such children can have for the barbarous society in which they are presently to play a part.

Conversely, the civilised members of a civilised society will spontaneously manifest their displeasure in less violent ways—will spontaneously use milder measures—measures strong enough for their better-natured children. Thus it is true that, in so far as the expression of parental feeling is concerned, the principle of the natural reaction is always more or less followed. The system of domestic government ever gravitates towards its right form.

But now observe two important facts. The first fact is that, in states of rapid transition like ours, which witness a continuous battle between old and new theories and old and new practices, the educational methods in use are apt to be considerably out of harmony with the times. In deference to dogmas fit only for the ages that uttered them, many parents inflict punishments that do violence to their own feelings, and so visit on their children un_natural reactions; while other parents, enthusiastic in their hopes of immediate perfection, rush to the opposite extreme. The second fact is, that the discipline of chief value is not the experience of parental approbation or disapprobation; but it is the experience of those results which would ultimately flow from the conduct in the absence of parental opinion or interference. The truly instructive and salutary consequences are not those inflicted by parents when they take upon themselves to be Nature's proxies; but they are those inflicted by Nature herself. We will endeavour to make this distinction clear by a few illustrations, which, while they show what we mean by natural reactions as contrasted with artificial ones, will afford some practical suggestions.

In every family where there are young children there daily occur cases of what mothers and servants call "making a litter." A child has had out its box of toys, and leaves them scattered about the floor. Or a handful of flowers, brought in from a morning walk, is presently seen dispersed over tables and chairs. Or a little girl, making doll's-clothes, disfigures the room with shreds. In most cases the trouble of rectifying this disorder falls anywhere but where it should. Occurring in the nursery, the nurse herself, with many grumblings about "tiresome little things," undertakes the task; if below-stairs, the task usually devolves either on one of the elder children or on the housemaid: the transgressor being visited with nothing more than a scolding. In this very simple case, however, there are many parents wise enough to follow out, more or less consistently, the normal course—that of making the child itself collect the toys or shreds. The labour of putting things in order is the true consequence of having put them in disorder. Every trader in his office, every wife in her household, has daily experience of this fact. And if education be a preparation for the business of life, then every child should also, from the beginning, have daily experience of this fact. If the natural penalty be met by refractory behaviour (which it may perhaps be where the system of moral discipline previously pursued has been bad), then the proper course is to let the child feel the ulterior reaction caused by its disobedience. Having refused or neglected to pick up and put away the things it has scattered about, and having thereby entailed the trouble of doing this on some one else, the child should, on subsequent occasions, be denied the means of giving this trouble. When next it petitions for its toy-box, the reply of its mamma 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 day 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, neither increased nor lessened; and must be so recognised by a child. The penalty comes, too, at the moment when it is most keenly felt. A new-born desire is balked at the moment of anticipated gratification; and the strong impression so produced can scarcely fail to have an effect on the future conduct: an effect which, by consistent repetition, will do whatever can be done in curing the fault. Add to which, that, by this method, a
child is early taught the lesson which cannot be learnt too soon, that in this world of ours pleasures are rightly to be obtained only by labour.

Take another case. Not long since we had frequently to hear the reprimands visited on a little girl who was scarcely ever ready in time for the daily walk. Of eager disposition, and apt to become absorbed in the occupation of the moment, Constance never thought of putting on her things till the rest were ready. The governess and the other children had almost invariably to wait; and from the mamma there almost invariably came the same scolding. Utterly as this system failed, it never occurred to the mamma to let Constance experience the natural penalty. Nor, indeed, would she try it when it was suggested to her. In the world, unreadyness entails the loss of some advantage that would else have been gained: the train is gone; or the steam-boat is just leaving its moorings; or the best things in the market are sold; or all the good seats in the concert-room are filled. And every one, in cases perpetually occurring, may see that it is the prospective deprivations which prevent people from being too late. Is not the inference obvious? Should not the prospective deprivations control a child's conduct also? If Constance is not ready at the appointed time, the natural result is that of being left behind, and losing her walk. And after having once or twice remained at home while the rest were enjoying themselves in the fields—after having felt that this loss of a much-prized gratification was solely due to want of promptitude; amendment would in all probability take place. At any rate, the measure would be more effective than that perpetual scolding which ends only in producing callousness.

Again, when children, with more than usual carelessness, break or lose the things given to them, the natural penalty—the penalty which makes grown-up persons more careful—is the consequent inconvenience. The lack of the lost or damaged article, and the cost of replacing it, are the experiences by which men and women are disciplined in these matters; and the experiences of children should be as much as possible assimilated to theirs. We do not refer to that early period at which toys are pulled to pieces in the process of learning their physical properties, and at which the results of carelessness cannot be understood; but to a later period, when the meaning and advantages of property are perceived. When a boy, old enough to possess a penknife, uses it so roughly as to snap the blade, or leaves it in the grass by some hedge-side where he was cutting a stick, a thoughtless parent, or some indulgent relative, will commonly forthwith buy him another, not seeing that, by doing this, a valuable lesson is prevented. In such a case, a father may properly explain that penknives cost money, and that to get money requires labour; that he cannot afford to purchase new penknives for one who loses or breaks them; and that until he sees evidence of greater carefulness he must decline to make good the loss. A parallel discipline will serve to check extravagance.

These few familiar instances, here chosen because of the simplicity with which they illustrate our point, will make clear to every one the distinction between those natural penalties which we contend are the truly efficient ones, and those artificial penalties commonly substituted for them. Before going on to exhibit the higher and subtler applications of the principle exemplified, let us note its many and great superiorities over the principle, or rather the empirical practice, which prevails in most families.

One superiority is that the pursuance of it generates right conceptions of cause and effect; which by frequent and consistent experience are eventually rendered definite and complete. Proper conduct in life is much better guaranteed when the good and evil consequences of actions are understood, than when they are merely believed on authority. A child who finds that disorderliness entails the trouble of putting things in order, or who misses a gratification from dilatoriness, or whose carelessness is followed by the want of some much-prized possession, not only suffers a keenly-felt consequence, but gains a knowledge of causation: both the one and the other being just like those which adult life will bring. Whereas a child who in such cases receives a reprimand, or some factitious penalty, not only experiences a consequence for which it often cares very little, but misses that instruction respecting the essential natures of good and evil conduct, which it would else have gathered. It is a vice of the common system of artificial rewards and punishments, long since noticed by the clear-sighted, that by substituting for the natural results of misbehaviour certain tasks or castigations, it produces a radically wrong moral standard. Having throughout infancy and boyhood always regarded parental or tutorial displeasure as the chief result of a forbidden action, the youth has gained an established association of ideas between such action and such displeasure, as cause and effect. Hence when parents and tutors have abdicated, and their displeasure is not to be feared, the restraints on forbidden actions are in great measure removed: the true restraints, the natural reactions, having yet to be learnt by sad experience. As writes one who has had personal
knowledge of this short-sighted system:--"Young men let loose from school, particularly those whose parents have neglected to exert their influence, plunge into every description of extravagance; they know no rule of action--they are ignorant of the reasons for moral conduct--they have no foundation to rest upon--and until they have been severely disciplined by the world are extremely dangerous members of society."

Another great advantage of this natural discipline is, that it is a discipline of pure justice; and will be recognised as such by every child. Whoso suffers nothing more than the evil which in the order of nature results from his own misbehaviour, is much less likely to think himself wrongly treated than if he suffers an artificially inflicted evil; and this will hold of children as of men. Take the case of a boy who is habitually reckless of his clothes--scrambles through hedges without caution, or is utterly regardless of mud. If he is beaten, or sent to bed, he is apt to consider himself ill-used; and is more likely to brood over his injuries than to repent of his transgressions. But suppose he is required to rectify as far as possible the harm he has done--to clean off the mud with which he has covered himself, or to mend the tear as well as he can. Will he not feel that the evil is one of his own producing? Will he not while paying this penalty be continuously conscious of the connection between it and its cause? And will he not, spite his irritation, recognise more or less clearly the justice of the arrangement? If several lessons of this kind fail to produce amendment--if suits of clothes are prematurely spoiled--if the father, pursuing this same system of discipline, declines to spend money for new ones until the ordinary time has elapsed--and if meanwhile, there occur occasions on which, having no decent clothes to go in, the boy is debarred from joining the rest of the family on holiday excursions and _fete_ days, it is manifest that while he will keenly feel the punishment, he can scarcely fail to trace the chain of causation, and to perceive that his own carelessness is the origin of it. And seeing this, he will not have any such sense of injustice as if there were no obvious connection between the transgression and its penalty.

Again, the tempers both of parents and children are much less liable to be ruffled under this system than under the ordinary system. When instead of letting children experience the painful results which naturally follow from wrong conduct, parents themselves inflict certain other painful results, they produce double mischief. Making, as they do, multiplied family laws; and identifying their own supremacy and dignity with the maintenance of these laws; every transgression is regarded as an offence against themselves, and a cause of anger on their part. And then come the further vexations which result from taking upon themselves, in the shape of extra labour or cost, those evil consequences which should have been allowed to fall on the wrong-doers. Similarly with the children. Penalties which the necessary reaction of things brings round upon them--penalties which are inflicted by impersonal agency, produce an irritation that is comparatively slight and transient; whereas, penalties voluntarily inflicted by a parent, and afterwards thought of as caused by him or her, produce an irritation both greater and more continued. Just consider how disastrous would be the result if this empirical method were pursued from the beginning. Suppose it were possible for parents to take upon themselves the physical sufferings entailed on their children by ignorance and awkwardness; and that while bearing these evil consequences they visited on their children certain other evil consequences, with the view of teaching them the impropriety of their conduct. Suppose that when a child, who had been forbidden to meddle with the kettle, spilt boiling water on its foot, the mother vicariously assumed the scald and gave a blow in place of it; and similarly in all other cases. Would not the daily mishaps be sources of far more anger than now? Would there not be chronic ill-temper on both sides? Yet an exactly parallel policy is pursued in after-years. A father who beats his boy for carelessly or wilfully breaking a sister's toy, and then himself pays for a new toy, does substantially this same thing--inflicts an artificial penalty on the transgressor, and takes the natural penalty on himself: his own feelings and those of the transgressor being alike needlessly irritated. Did he simply require restitution to be made, he would produce far less heart-burning. If he told the boy that a new toy must be bought at his, the boy's, cost; and that his supply of pocket-money must be withheld to the needful extent; there would be much less disturbance of temper on either side: while in the deprivation afterwards felt, the boy would experience the equitable and salutary consequence. In brief, the system of discipline by natural reactions is less injurious to temper, both because it is perceived to be nothing more than pure justice, and because it in great part substitutes the impersonal agency of Nature for the personal agency of parents.

Whence also follows the manifest corollary, that under this system the parental and filial relation, being a more friendly, will be a more influential one. Whether in parent or child, anger, however caused, and to whomsoever directed, is detrimental. But anger in a parent towards a child, and in a child towards a parent, is especially detrimental;
because it weakens that bond of sympathy which is essential to beneficent control. From the law of association of ideas, it inevitably results, both in young and old, that dislike is contracted towards things which in experience are habitually connected with disagreeable feelings. Or where attachment originally existed, it is diminished, or turned into repugnance, according to the quantity of painful impressions received. Parental wrath, venting itself in reprimands and castigations, cannot fail, if often repeated, to produce filial alienation; while the resentment and sulkiness of children cannot fail to weaken the affection felt for them, and may even end in destroying it. Hence the numerous cases in which parents (and especially fathers, who are commonly deputed to inflict the punishment) are regarded with indifference, if not with aversion; and hence the equally numerous cases in which children are looked upon as inflictions. Seeing then, as all must do, that estrangement of this kind is fatal to a salutary moral culture, it follows that parents cannot be too solicitous in avoiding occasions of direct antagonism with their children. And therefore they cannot too anxiously avail themselves of this discipline of natural consequences; which, by relieving them from penal functions, prevents mutual exasperations and estrangements.

The method of moral culture by experience of the normal reactions, which is the divinely-ordained method alike for infancy and for adult life, we thus find to be equally applicable during the intermediate childhood and youth. Among the advantages of this method we see:--First: that it gives that rational knowledge of right and wrong conduct which results from personal experience of their good and bad consequences. Second: that the child, suffering nothing more than the painful effects of its own wrong actions, must recognise more or less clearly the justice of the penalties. Third: that recognising the justice of the penalties, and receiving them through the working of things rather than at the hands of an individual, its temper is less disturbed; while the parent fulfilling the comparatively passive duty of letting the natural penalties be felt, preserves a comparative equanimity. Fourth: that mutual exasperations being thus prevented, a much happier, and a more influential relation, will exist between parent and child.

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"But what is to be done in cases of more serious misconduct?" some will ask. "How is this plan to be carried out when a petty theft has been committed? or when a lie has been told? or when some younger brother or sister has been ill-used?"

Before replying to these questions, let us consider the bearings of a few illustrative facts.

Living in the family of his brother-in-law, a friend of ours had undertaken the education of his little nephew and niece. This he had conducted, more perhaps from natural sympathy than from reasoned-out conclusions, in the spirit of the method above set forth. The two children were in doors his pupils and out of doors his companions. They daily joined him in walks and botanising excursions, eagerly sought plants for him, looked on while he examined and identified them, and in this and other ways were ever gaining pleasure and instruction in his society. In short, morally considered, he stood to them much more in the position of parent than either their father or mother did. Describing to us the results of this policy, he gave, among other instances, the following. One evening, having need for some article lying in another part of the house, he asked his nephew to fetch it. Interested as the boy was in some amusement of the moment, he, contrary to his wont, either exhibited great reluctance or refused, we forget which. His uncle, disapproving of a coercive course, went himself for that which he wanted: merely exhibiting by his manner the annoyance this ill-behaviour gave him. And when, later in the evening, the boy made overtures for the usual play, they were gravely repelled--the uncle manifested just that coldness naturally produced in him; and so let the boy feel the necessary consequences of his conduct. Next morning at the usual time for rising, our friend heard a new voice outside the door, and in walked his little nephew with the hot water. Peering about the room to see what else could be done, the boy then exclaimed, "Oh! you want your boots;" and forthwith rushed downstairs to fetch them. In this and other ways he showed a true penitence for his misconduct. He endeavoured by unusual services to make up for the service he had refused. His better feelings had made a real conquest over his lower ones; and acquired strength by the victory. And having felt what it was to be without it, he valued more than before the friendship he thus regained.

This gentleman is now himself a father; acts on the same system; and finds it answer completely. He makes himself thoroughly his children's friend. The evening is longed for by them because he will be at home; and they especially
enjoy Sunday because he is with them all day. Thus possessing their perfect confidence and affection, he finds that the simple display of his approbation or disapprobation gives him abundant power of control. If, on his return home, he hears that one of his boys has been naughty, he behaves towards him with that coolness which the consciousness of the boy's misconduct naturally produces; and he finds this a most efficient punishment. The mere withholding of the usual caresses, is a source of much distress--produces a more prolonged fit of crying than a beating would do. And the dread of this purely moral penalty is, he says, ever present during his absence: so much so, that frequently during the day his children ask their mamma how they have behaved, and whether the report will be good. Recently, the eldest, an active urchin of five, in one of those bursts of animal spirits common in healthy children, committed sundry extravagances during his mamma's absence--cut off part of his brother's hair and wounded himself with a razor taken from his father's dressing-case. Hearing of these occurrences on his return, the father did not speak to the boy either that night or next morning. Besides the immediate tribulation the effect was, that when, a few days after, the mamma was about to go out, she was entreated by the boy not to do so; and on inquiry, it appeared his fear was that he might again transgress in her absence.

We have introduced these facts before replying to the question--"What is to be done with the graver offences?" for the purpose of first exhibiting the relation that may and ought to be established between parents and children; for on the existence of this relation depends the successful treatment of these graver offences. And as a further preliminary, we must now point out that the establishment of this relation will result from adopting the system here advocated. Already we have shown that by simply letting a child experience the painful reactions of its own wrong actions, a parent avoids antagonism and escapes being regarded as an enemy; but it remains to be shown that where this course has been consistently pursued from the beginning, a feeling of active friendship will be generated.

At present, mothers and fathers are mostly considered by their offspring as friend enemies. Determined as the impressions of children inevitably are by the treatment they receive; and oscillating as that treatment does between bribery and thwarting, between petting and scolding, between gentleness and castigation; they necessarily acquire conflicting beliefs respecting the parental character. A mother commonly thinks it sufficient to tell her little boy that she is his best friend; and assuming that he ought to believe her, concludes that he will do so. "It is all for your good;" "I know what is proper for you better than you do yourself;" "You are not old enough to understand it now, but when you grow up you will thank me for doing what I do;"--these, and like assertions, are daily reiterated. Meanwhile the boy is daily suffering positive penalties; and is hourly forbidden to do this, that, and the other, which he wishes to do. By words he hears that his happiness is the end in view; but from the accompanying deeds he habitually receives more or less pain. Incompetent as he is to understand that future which his mother has in view, or how this treatment conduces to the happiness of that future, he judges by the results he feels; and finding such results anything but pleasurable, he becomes sceptical respecting her professions of friendship. And is it not folly to expect any other issue? Must not the child reason from the evidence he has got? and does not this evidence seem to warrant his conclusion? The mother would reason in just the same way if similarly placed. If, among her acquaintance, she found some one who was constantly thwarting her wishes, uttering sharp reprimands, and occasionally inflicting actual penalties on her, she would pay small attention to any professions of anxiety for her welfare which accompanied these acts. Why, then, does she suppose that her boy will do otherwise?

But now observe how different will be the results if the system we contend for be consistently pursued--if the mother not only avoids becoming the instrument of punishment, but plays the part of a friend, by warning her boy of the punishments which Nature will inflict. Take a case; and that it may illustrate the mode in which this policy is to be early initiated, let it be one of the simplest cases. Suppose that, prompted by the experimental spirit so conspicuous in children, whose proceedings instinctively conform to the inductive method of inquiry--suppose that so prompted, the boy is amusing himself by lighting pieces of paper in the candle and watching them burn. A mother of the ordinary unreflective stamp, will either, on the plea of keeping him "out of mischief," or from fear that he will burn himself, command him to desist; and in case of non-compliance will snatch the paper from him. But, should he be fortunate enough to have a mother of some rationality, who knows that this interest with which he is watching the paper burn, results from a healthy inquisitiveness, and who has also the wisdom to consider the results of interference, she will reason thus:--"If I put a stop to this I shall prevent the acquirement of a certain amount of knowledge. It is true that I
may save the child from a burn; but what then? He is sure to burn himself sometime; and it is quite essential to his safety in life that he should learn by experience the properties of flame. If I forbid him from running this present risk, he will certainly hereafter run the same or a greater risk when no one is present to prevent him; whereas, should he have an accident now that I am by, I can save him from any great injury. Moreover, were I to make him desist, I should thwart him in the pursuit of what is in itself a purely harmless, and indeed, instructive gratification; and he would regard me with more or less ill-feeling. Ignorant as he is of the pain from which I would save him, and feeling only the pain of a balked desire, he could not fail to look on me as the cause of that pain. To save him from a hurt which he cannot conceive, and which has therefore no existence for him, I hurt him in a way which he feels keenly enough; and so become, from his point of view, a minister of evil. My best course then, is simply to warn him of the danger, and to be ready to prevent any serious damage." And following out this conclusion, she says to the child--"I fear you will hurt yourself if you do that." Suppose, now, that the boy, persevering as he will probably do, ends by burning his hand. What are the results? In the first place he has gained an experience which he must gain eventually, and which, for his own safety, he cannot gain too soon. And in the second place, he has found that his mother's disapproval or warning was meant for his welfare: he has a further positive experience of her benevolence--a further reason for placing confidence in her judgment and kindness--a further reason for loving her.

Of course, in those occasional hazards where there is a risk of broken limbs or other serious injury, forcible prevention is called for. But leaving out extreme cases, the system pursued should be, not that of guarding a child from the small risks which it daily runs, but that of advising and warning it against them. And by pursuing this course, a much stronger filial affection will be generated than commonly exists. If here, as elsewhere, the discipline of the natural reactions is allowed to come into play--if in those out-door scramblings and in-door experiments, by which children are liable to injure themselves, they are allowed to persist, subject only to dissuasion more or less earnest according to the danger, there cannot fail to arise an ever-increasing faith in the parental friendship and guidance. Not only, as before shown, does the adoption of this course enable fathers and mothers to avoid the odium which attaches to the infliction of positive punishment; but, as we here see, it enables them to avoid the odium which attaches to constant thwartings; and even to turn those incidents that commonly cause squabbles, into a means of strengthening the mutual good feeling. Instead of being told in words, which deeds seem to contradict, that their parents are their best friends, children will learn this truth by a consistent daily experience; and so learning it, will acquire a degree of trust and attachment which nothing else can give.

And now, having indicated the more sympathetic relation which must result from the habitual use of this method, let us return to the question above put--How is this method to be applied to the graver offences?

Note, in the first place, that these graver offences are likely to be both less frequent and less grave under the regime we have described than under the ordinary regime. The ill-behaviour of many children is itself a consequence of that chronic irritation in which they are kept by bad management. The state of isolation and antagonism produced by frequent punishment, necessarily deadens the sympathies; necessarily, therefore, opens the way to those transgressions which the sympathies check. That harsh treatment which children of the same family inflict on each other, is often, in great measure, a reflex of the harsh treatment they receive from adults--partly suggested by direct example, and partly generated by the ill-temper and the tendency to vicarious retaliation, which follow chastisements and scoldings. It cannot be questioned that the greater activity of the affections and happier state of feeling, maintained in children by the discipline we have described, must prevent them from sinning against each other so gravely and so frequently. The still more reprehensible offences, as lies and petty thefts, will, by the same causes, be diminished. Domestic estrangement is a fruitful source of such transgressions. It is a law of human nature, visible enough to all who observe, that those who are debarred the higher gratifications fall back upon the lower; those who have no sympathetic pleasures seek selfish ones; and hence, conversely, the maintenance of happier relations between parents and children is calculated to diminish the number of those offences of which selfishness is the origin.

When, however, such offences are committed, as they will occasionally be even under the best system, the discipline of consequences may still be resorted to; and if there exists that bond of confidence and affection above described, this discipline will be efficient. For what are the natural consequences, say, of a theft? They are of two kinds--direct and indirect. The direct consequence, as dictated by pure equity, is that of making restitution. A just ruler (and every parent
should aim to be one) will demand that, when possible, a wrong act shall be undone by a right one; and in the case of
theft this implies either the restoration of the thing stolen, or, if it is consumed, the giving of an equivalent: which, in
the case of a child, may be effected out of its pocket-money. The indirect and more serious consequence is the grave
displeasure of parents—a consequence which inevitably follows among all peoples civilised enough to regard theft as a
crime. "But," it will be said, "the manifestation of parental displeasure, either in words or blows, is the ordinary course
in these cases: the method leads here to nothing new." Very true. Already we have admitted that, in some directions,
this method is spontaneously pursued. Already we have shown that there is a tendency for educational systems to
gravitate towards the true system. And here we may remark, as before, that the intensity of this natural reaction will, in
the beneficent order of things, adjust itself to the requirements—that this parental displeasure will vent itself in violent
measures during comparatively barbarous times, when children are also comparatively barbarous; and will express
itself less cruelly in those more advanced social states in which, by implication, the children are amenable to milder
treatment. But what it chiefly concerns us here to observe is, that the manifestation of strong parental displeasure,
produced by one of these graver offences, will be potent for good, just in proportion to the warmth of the attachment
existing between parent and child. Just in proportion as the discipline of natural consequences has been consistently
pursued in other cases, will it be efficient in this case. Proof is within the experience of all, if they will look for it.

For does not every one know that when he has offended another, the amount of regret he feels (of course, leaving
worldly considerations out of the question) varies with the degree of sympathy he has for that other? Is he not
conscious that when the person offended is an enemy, the having given him annoyance is apt to be a source rather of
secret satisfaction than of sorrow? Does he not remember that where umbrage has been taken by some total stranger, he
has felt much less concern than he would have done had such umbrage been taken by one with whom he was intimate?
While, conversely, has not the anger of an admired and cherished friend been regarded by him as a serious misfortune,
long and keenly regretted? Well, the effects of parental displeasure on children must similarly vary with the pre-
existing relationship. Where there is an established alienation, the feeling of a child who has transgressed is a purely
selfish fear of the impending physical penalties or deprivations; and after these have been inflicted, the injurious
antagonism and dislike which result, add to the alienation. On the contrary, where there exists a warm filial affection
produced by a consistent parental friendship, the state of mind caused by parental displeasure is not only a salutary
check to future misconduct of like kind, but is intrinsically salutary. The moral pain consequent on having, for the time
being, lost so loved a friend, stands in place of the physical pain usually inflicted; and proves equally, if not more,
efficient. While instead of the fear and vindictiveness excited by the one course, there are excited by the other a
sympathy with parental sorrow, a genuine regret for having caused it, and a desire, by some atonement, to reestablish
the friendly relationship. Instead of bringing into play those egotistic feelings whose predominance is the cause of
criminal acts, there are brought into play those altruistic feelings which check criminal acts. Thus the discipline of
natural consequences is applicable to grave as well as trivial faults; and the practice of it conduces not simply to the
repression, but to the eradication of such faults.

In brief, the truth is that savageness begets savageness, and gentleness begets gentleness. Children who are
unsympathetically treated become unsympathetic; whereas treating them with due fellow-feeling is a means of
cultivating their fellow-feeling. With family governments as with political ones, a harsh despotism itself generates a
great part of the crimes it has to repress; while on the other hand a mild and liberal rule both avoids many causes of
dissension, and so ameliorates the tone of feeling as to diminish the tendency to transgression. As John Locke long
since remarked, "Great severity of punishment does but very little good, nay, great harm, in education; and I believe it
will be found that, _caeteris paribus_, those children who have been most chastised seldom make the best men." In
confirmation of which opinion we may cite the fact not long since made public by Mr. Rogers, Chaplain of the
Pentonville Prison, that those juvenile criminals who have been whipped are those who most frequently return to
prison. Conversely, the beneficial effects of a kinder treatment are well illustrated in a fact stated to us by a French
lady, in whose house we recently stayed in Paris. Apologising for the disturbance daily caused by a little boy who was
unmanageable both at home and at school, she expressed her fear that there was no remedy save that which had
succeeded in the case of an elder brother; namely, sending him to an English school. She explained that at various
schools in Paris this elder brother had proved utterly untractable; that in despair they had followed the advice to send
him to England; and that on his return home he was as good as he had before been bad. This remarkable change she
ascribed entirely to the comparative mildness of the English discipline.

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After the foregoing exposition of principles, our remaining space may best be occupied by a few of the chief maxims and rules deducible from them; and with a view to brevity we will put these in a hortatory form.

Do not expect from a child any great amount of moral goodness. During early years every civilised man passes through that phase of character exhibited by the barbarous race from which he is descended. As the child's features--flat nose, forward-opening nostrils, large lips, wide-apart eyes, absent frontal sinus, etc.--resemble for a time those of the savage, so, too, do his instincts. Hence the tendencies to cruelty, to thieving, to lying, so general among children--tendencies which, even without the aid of discipline, will become more or less modified just as the features do. The popular idea that children are "innocent," while it is true with respect to evil _knowledge_, is totally false with respect to evil _impulses_; as half an hour's observation in the nursery will prove to any one. Boys when left to themselves, as at public schools, treat each other more brutally than men do; and were they left to themselves at an earlier age their brutality would be still more conspicuous.

Not only is it unwise to set up a high standard of good conduct for children, but it is even unwise to use very urgent incitements to good conduct. Already most people recognise the detrimental results of intellectual precocity; but there remains to be recognised the fact that _moral precocity_ also has detrimental results. Our higher moral faculties, like our higher intellectual ones, are comparatively complex. By consequence, both are comparatively late in their evolution. And with the one as with the other, an early activity produced by stimulation will be at the expense of the future character. Hence the not uncommon anomaly that those who during childhood were models of juvenile goodness, by and by undergo a seemingly inexplicable change for the worse, and end by being not above but below par; while relatively exemplary men are often the issue of a childhood by no means promising.

Be content, therefore, with moderate measures and moderate results. Bear in mind that a higher morality, like a higher intelligence, must be reached by slow growth; and you will then have patience with those imperfections which your child hourly displays. You will be less prone to that constant scolding, and threatening, and forbidding, by which many parents err. Leave him wherever you can to the discipline of experience, and you will save him from that hot-house virtue which over-regulation produces in yielding natures, or that demoralising antagonism which it produces in independent ones.

This liberal form of domestic government, which does not seek despotically to regulate all the details of a child's conduct, necessarily results from the system we advocate. Satisfy yourself with seeing that your child always suffers the natural consequences of his actions, and you will avoid that excess of control in which so many parents err. Leave him wherever you can to the discipline of experience, and you will save him from that hot-house virtue which over-regulation produces in yielding natures, or that demoralising antagonism which it produces in independent ones.

By aiming in all cases to insure the natural reactions to your child's actions, you will put an advantageous check on your own temper. The method of moral education pursued by many, we fear by most, parents, is little else than that of venting their anger in the way that first suggests itself. The slaps, and rough shakings and sharp words, with which a mother commonly visits her offspring's small offences (many of them not offences considered intrinsically), are generally but the manifestations of her ill-controlled feelings--result much more from the promptings of those feelings than from a wish to benefit the offenders. But by pausing in each case of transgression to consider what is the normal consequence, and how it may best be brought home to the transgressor, some little time is obtained for the mastery of yourself; the mere blind anger first aroused settles down into a less vehement feeling, and one not so likely to mislead you.

Do not, however, seek to behave as a passionless instrument. Remember that besides the natural reactions to your child's actions which the working of things tends to bring round on him, your own approbation or disapprobation is also a natural reaction, and one of the ordained agencies for guiding him. But while it should not be _substituted_ for these natural penalties, we by no means argue that it should not, in some form,
accompany_ them. Though the _secondary_ kind of punishment should not usurp the place of the _primary_ kind; it may, in moderation, rightly supplement the primary kind. Such amount of sorrow or indignation as you feel, should be expressed in words or manner; subject, of course, to the approval of your judgment. The kind and degree of feeling produced in you will necessarily depend on your own character; and it is therefore useless to say it should be this or that. Nevertheless, you may endeavour to modify the feeling into that which you believe ought to be entertained.

Beware, however, of the two extremes; not only in respect of the intensity, but in respect of the duration, of your displeasure. On the one hand, avoid that weak impulsiveness, so general among mothers, which scolds and forgives almost in the same breath. On the other hand, do not unduly continue to show estrangement of feeling, lest you accustom your child to do without your friendship, and so lose your influence over him. The moral reactions called forth from you by your child's actions, you should as much as possible assimilate to those which you conceive would be called forth from a parent of perfect nature.

Be sparing of commands. Command only when other means are inapplicable, or have failed. "In frequent orders the parents' advantage is more considered than the child's," says Richter. As in primitive societies a breach of law is punished, not so much because it is intrinsically wrong as because it is a disregard of the king's authority--a rebellion against him; so in many families, the penalty visited on a transgressor is prompted less by reprobation of the offence than by anger at the disobedience. Listen to the ordinary speeches--"How _dare_ you disobey me?" "I tell you I'll _make_ you do it, sir." "I'll soon teach you who is _master_"--and then consider what the words, the tone, and the manner imply. A determination to subjugate is far more conspicuous in them, than anxiety for the child's welfare. For the time being the attitude of mind differs but little from that of a despot bent on punishing a recalcitrant subject. The right-feeling parent, however, like the philanthropic legislator, will rejoice not in coercion, but in dispensing with coercion. He will do without law wherever other modes of regulating conduct can be successfully employed; and he will regret the having recourse to law when law is necessary. As Richter remarks--"The best rule in politics is said to be '_pas trop gouverner_': it is also true in education." And in spontaneous conformity with this maxim, parents whose lust of dominion is restrained by a true sense of duty, will aim to make their children control themselves as much as possible, and will fall back upon absolutism only as a last resort.

But whenever you _do_ command, command with decision and consistency. If the case is one which really cannot be otherwise dealt with, then issue your fiat, and having issued it, never afterwards swerve from it. Consider well what you are going to do; weigh all the consequences; think whether you have adequate firmness of purpose; and then, if you finally make the law, enforce obedience at whatever cost. Let your penalties be like the penalties inflicted by inanimate Nature--inevitable. The hot cinder burns a child the first time he seizes it; it burns him the second time; it burns him the third time; it burns him every time; and he very soon learns not to touch the hot cinder. If you are equally consistent--if the consequences which you tell your child will follow specified acts, follow with like uniformity, he will soon come to respect your laws as he does those of Nature. And this respect once established, will prevent endless domestic evils. Of errors in education one of the worst is inconsistency. As in a community, crimes multiply when there is no certain administration of justice; so in a family, an immense increase of transgressions results from a hesitating or irregular infliction of punishments. A weak mother, who perpetually threatens and rarely performs--who makes rules in haste and repents of them at leisure--who treats the same offence now with severity and now with leniency, as the passing humour dictates, is laying up miseries for herself and her children. She is making herself contemptible in their eyes; she is setting them an example of uncontrolled feelings; she is encouraging them to transgress by the prospect of probable impunity: she is entailing endless squabbles and accompanying damage to her own temper and the tempers of her little ones; she is reducing their minds to a moral chaos, which after years of bitter experience will with difficulty bring into order. Better even a barbarous form of domestic government carried out consistently, than a humane one inconsistently carried out. Again we say, avoid coercive measures whenever it is possible to do so; but when you find despotism really necessary, be despotic in good earnest.

Remember that the aim of your discipline should be to produce a _self-governing_ being; not to produce a being to be _governed by others_. Were your children fated to pass their lives as slaves, you could not too much accustom them to slavery during their childhood; but as they are by and by to be free men, with no one to control their daily conduct, you cannot too much accustom them to self-control while they are still under your eye. This it is which makes the system of
Do not regret the display of considerable self-will on the part of your children. It is the correlative of that diminished coerciveness so conspicuous in modern education. The greater tendency to assert freedom of action on the one side, corresponds to the smaller tendency to tyrannise on the other. They both indicate an approach to the system of discipline we contend for, under which children will be more and more led to rule themselves by the experience of natural consequences; and they are both accompaniments of our more advanced social state. The independent English boy is the father of the independent English man; and you cannot have the last without the first. German teachers say that they had rather manage a dozen German boys than one English one. Shall we, therefore, wish that our boys had the manageableness of German ones, and with it the submissiveness and political serfdom of adult Germans? Or shall we not rather tolerate in our boys those feelings which make them free men, and modify our methods accordingly?

Lastly, always recollect that to educate rightly is not a simple and easy thing, but a complex and extremely difficult thing, the hardest task which devolves on adult life. The rough-and-ready style of domestic government is indeed practicable by the meanest and most uncultivated intellects. Slaps and sharp words are penalties that suggest themselves alike to the least reclaimed barbarian and the stolidest peasant. Even brutes can use this method of discipline; as you may see in the growl and half-bite with which a bitch will check a too-exigeant puppy. But if you would carry out with success a rational and civilised system, you must be prepared for considerable mental exertion--for some study, some ingenuity, some patience, some self-control. You will have habitually to consider what are the results which in adult life follow certain kinds of acts; and you must then devise methods by which parallel results shall be entailed on the parallel acts of your children. It will daily be needful to analyse the motives of juvenile conduct--to distinguish between acts that are really good and those which, though simulating them, proceed from inferior impulses; while you will have to be ever on your guard against the cruel mistake not unfrequently made, of translating neutral acts into transgressions, or ascribing worse feelings than were entertained. You must more or less modify your method to suit the disposition of each child; and must be prepared to make further modifications as each child's disposition enters on a new phase. Your faith will often be taxed to maintain the requisite perseverance in a course which seems to produce little or no effect. But as intelligence increases, the number of peremptory interferences may be, and should be, diminished, with the view of gradually ending them as maturity is approached. All transitions are dangerous; and the most dangerous is the transition from the restraint of the family circle to the non-restraint of the world. Hence the importance of pursuing the policy we advocate; which, by cultivating a boy's faculty of self-restraint, by continually increasing the degree in which he is left to his self-restraint, and by so bringing him, step by step, to a state of unaided self-restraint, obliterates the ordinary sudden and hazardous change from externally-governed youth to internally-governed maturity. Let the history of your domestic rule typify, in little, the history of our political rule: at the outset, autocratic control, where control is really needful; by and by an incipient constitutionalism, in which the liberty of the subject gains some express recognition; successive extensions of this liberty of the subject; gradually ending in parental abdication.

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subjects—human nature and its laws, as exhibited in your children, in yourself, and in the world. Morally, you must keep in constant exercise your higher feelings, and restrain your lower. It is a truth yet remaining to be recognised, that the last stage in the mental development of each man and woman is to be reached only through a proper discharge of the parental duties. And when this truth is recognised, it will be seen how admirable is the arrangement through which human beings are led by their strongest affections to subject themselves to a discipline that they would else elude.

While some will regard this conception of education as it should be with doubt and discouragement, others will, we think, perceive in the exalted ideal which it involves, evidence of its truth. That it cannot be realised by the impulsive, the unsympathetic, and the short-sighted, but demands the higher attributes of human nature, they will see to be evidence of its fitness for the more advanced states of humanity. Though it calls for much labour and self-sacrifice, they will see that it promises an abundant return of happiness, immediate and remote. They will see that while in its injurious effects on both parent and child a bad system is twice cursed, a good system is twice blessed—it blesses him that trains and him that's trained.

NOTE:
(1) Of this nature is the plea put in by some for the rough treatment experienced by boys at our public schools; where, as it is said, they are introduced to a miniature world whose hardships prepare them for those of the real world. It must be admitted that the plea has some force; but it is a very insufficient plea. For whereas domestic and school discipline, though they should not be much better than the discipline of adult life, should be somewhat better; the discipline which boys meet with at Eton, Winchester, Harrow, etc., is worse than that of adult life—more unjust and cruel. Instead of being an aid to human progress, which all culture should be, the culture of our public schools, by accustoming boys to a despotic form of government and an intercourse regulated by brute force, tends to fit them for a lower state of society than that which exists. And chiefly recruited as our legislature is from among those who are brought up at such schools, this barbarising influence becomes a hindrance to national progress.

(The end)
Herbert Spencer's essay: Moral Education

By Herbert Spencer