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Frederick Temple, Rowland Williams, Baden Powell, Henry Bristow Wilson,
Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, Mark Pattison and Benjamin Jowett

Excerpt

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THE EDUCATION OF THE WORLD.

IN a world of mere phenomena, where all events are bound to one another by a rigid law of cause and effect, it is possible to imagine the course of a long period bringing all things at the end of it into exactly the same relations as they occupied at the beginning. We should, then, obviously have a succession of cycles rigidly similar to one another, both in events and in the sequence of them. The universe would eternally repeat the same changes in a fixed order of recurrence, though each cycle might be many millions of years in length. Moreover, the precise similarity of these cycles would render the very existence of each one of them entirely unnecessary. We can suppose, without any logical inconsequence, any one of them struck out, and the two which had been destined to precede and follow it brought into immediate contiguity.

This supposition transforms the universe into a dead machine. The lives and the souls of men become so indifferent, that the annihilation of a whole human race, or of many such races, is absolutely nothing. Every event passes away as it happens, filling its place in the sequence, but purposeless for the future. The order of all things becomes, not merely an iron rule, from which nothing can ever swerve, but an iron rule which guides to nothing and ends in nothing.

Such a supposition is possible to the logical understanding: it is not possible to the spirit. The human

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heart refuses to believe in a universe without a purpose. To the spirit, all things that exist must have a purpose, and nothing can pass away till that purpose be fulfilled. The lapse of time is no exception to this demand. Each moment of time, as it passes, is taken up in the shape of permanent results into the time that follows, and only perishes by being converted into something more substantial than itself. A series of recurring cycles, however conceivable to the logical understanding, is inconceivable to the spirit; for every later cycle must be made different from every earlier by the mere fact of coming after it and embodying its results. The material world may possibly be subject to such a rule, and may, in successive epochs, be the cradle of successive races of spiritual beings. But the world of spirits cannot be a mere machine.

In accordance with this difference between the material and the spiritual worlds, we ought to be prepared to find progress in the latter, however much fixity there may be in the former. The earth may still be describing precisely the same orbit as that which was assigned to her at the creation. The seasons may be precisely the same. The planets, the moon, and the stars, may be unchanged both in appearance and in reality. But man is a spiritual as well as a material creature, must be subject to the laws of the spiritual as well as to those of the material world, and cannot stand still because things around him do. Now, that the individual man is capable of perpetual, or almost perpetual, development from the day of his birth to that of his death, is obvious of course. But we may well expect to find something more than this in a spiritual creature who does not stand alone, but forms a part of a whole world of creatures like himself. Man cannot be considered as an individual. He is, in reality, only man by virtue of his being a member of the human race. Any other animal that we know would probably not be very different in its nature if

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brought up from its very birth apart from all its kind. A child so brought up becomes, as instances could be adduced to prove, not a man in the full sense at all, but rather a beast in human shape, with human faculties, no doubt, hidden underneath, but with no hope in this life of ever developing those faculties into true humanity. If, then, the whole in this case, as in so many others, is prior to the parts, we may conclude, that we are to look for that progress which is essential to a spiritual being subject to the lapse of time, not only in the individual, but also quite as much in the race taken as a whole. We may expect to find, in the history of man, each successive age incorporating into itself the substance of the preceding.

This power, whereby the present ever gathers into itself the results of the past, transforms the human race into a colossal man, whose life reaches from the creation to the day of judgment. The successive generations of men are days in this man's life. The discoveries and inventions which characterize the different epochs of the world's history are his works. The creeds and doctrines, the opinions and principles of the successive ages, are his thoughts. The state of society at different times are his manners. He grows in knowledge, in self-control, in visible size, just as we do. And his education is in the same way and for the same reason precisely similar to ours.

All this is no figure but only a compendious statement of a very comprehensive fact. The child that is born to-day may possibly have the same faculties as if he had been born in the days of Noah; if it be otherwise, we possess no means of determining the difference. But the equality of the natural faculties at starting will not prevent a vast difference in their ultimate development. That development is entirely under the control of the influences exerted by the society in which the child may chance to live. If such society be altogether denied, the faculties perish,

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and the child (as remarked above) grows up a beast and not a man; if the society be uneducated and coarse, the growth of the faculties is early so stunted as never afterwards to be capable of recovery; if the society be highly cultivated, the child will be cultivated also, and will show, more or less, through life the fruits of that cultivation. Hence each generation receives the benefit of the cultivation of that which preceded it. Not in knowledge only but in development of powers the child of twelve now stands at the level where once stood the child of fourteen, where ages ago stood the full-grown man. The discipline of manners, of temper, of thought, of feeling, is transmitted from generation to generation, and at each transmission there is an imperceptible but unfailling increase. The perpetual accumulation of the stores of knowledge is so much more visible than the change in the other ingredients of human progress, that we are apt to fancy that knowledge grows, and knowledge only. I shall not stop to examine whether it be true (as is sometimes maintained) that all progress in human society is but the effect of the progress of knowledge. For the present, it is enough to point out that knowledge is not the only possession of the human spirit in which progress can be traced.

We may, then, rightly speak of a childhood, a youth, and a manhood of the world. The men of the earliest ages were, in many respects, still children as compared with ourselves, with all the blessings and with all the disadvantages that belong to childhood. We reap the fruits of their toil, and bear in our characters the impress of their cultivation. Our characters have grown out of their history, as the character of the man grows out of the history of the child. There are matters in which the simplicity of childhood is wiser than the maturity of manhood, and in these they were wiser than we. There are matters in which the child is nothing, and the man everything, and in these we

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are the gainers. And the process by which we have either lost or gained corresponds, stage by stage, with the process by which the infant is trained for youth, and the youth for manhood.

This training has three stages. In childhood we are subject to positive rules which we cannot understand, but are bound implicitly to obey. In youth we are subject to the influence of example, and soon break loose from all rules unless illustrated and enforced by the higher teaching which example imparts. In manhood we are comparatively free from external restraints, and if we are to learn, must be our own instructors. First come Rules, then Examples, then Principles. First comes the Law, then the Son of Man, then the Gift of the Spirit. The world was once a child under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the Father. Then, when the fit season had arrived, the Example to which all ages should turn was sent to teach men what they ought to be. Then the human race was left to itself to be guided by the teaching of the Spirit within.

The education of the world, like that of the child, begins with Law. It is impossible to explain the reasons of all the commands that you give to a child, and you do not endeavour to do so. When he is to go to bed, when he is to get up, how he is to sit, stand, eat, drink, what answers he is to make when spoken to, what he may touch and what he may not, what prayers he shall say and when, what lessons he is to learn, every detail of manners and of conduct the careful mother teaches her child, and requires implicit obedience. Mingled together in her teaching are commands of the most trivial character and commands of the gravest importance; their relative value marked by a difference of manner rather than by anything else, since to explain it is impossible. Meanwhile to the child obedience is the highest duty, affection the highest stimulus, the mother's word the

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highest sanction. The conscience is alive, but it is, like the other faculties at that age, irregular, undeveloped, easily deceived. The mother does not leave it uncultivated, nor refuse sometimes to explain her motives for commanding or forbidding; but she never thinks of putting the judgment of the child against her own, nor of considering the child's conscience as having a right to free action.

As the child grows older the education changes its character, not so much in regard to the sanction of its precepts as in regard to their tenor. More stress is laid upon matters of real duty, less upon matters of mere manner. Falsehood, quarrelling, bad temper, greediness, indolence, are more attended to than times of going to bed, or fashions of eating, or postures in sitting. The boy is allowed to feel, and to show that he feels, the difference between different commands. But he is still not left to himself: and though points of manner are not put on a level with points of conduct, they are by no means neglected. Moreover, while much stress is laid upon his deeds, little is laid upon his opinions; he is rightly supposed not to have any, and will not be allowed to plead them as a reason for disobedience.

After a time, however, the intellect begins to assert a right to enter into all questions of duty, and the intellect accordingly is cultivated. The reason is appealed to in all questions of conduct: the consequences of folly or sin are pointed out, and the punishment which, without any miracle, God invariably brings upon those who disobey His natural laws—how, for instance, falsehood destroys confidence and incurs contempt; how indulgence in appetite tends to brutal and degrading habits; how ill-temper may end in crime, and must end in mischief. Thus the conscience is reached through the understanding.

Now, precisely analogous to all this is the history of the education of the early world. The earliest

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commands almost entirely refer to bodily appetites and animal passions. The earliest wide-spread sin was brutal violence. That wilfulness of temper, —those germs of wanton cruelty, which the mother corrects so easily in her infant, were developed in the earliest form of human society into a prevailing plague of wickedness. The few notices which are given of that state of mankind do not present a picture of mere lawlessness, such as we find among the medieval nations of Europe, but of blind, gross ignorance of themselves and all around them. Atheism is possible now, but Lamech's presumptuous comparison of himself with God is impossible, and the thought of building a tower high enough to escape God's wrath could enter no man's dreams. We sometimes see in very little children a violence of temper which seems hardly human: add to such a temper the strength of a full-grown man, and we shall perhaps understand what is meant by the expression, that the earth was filled with violence.

Violence was followed by sensuality. Such was the sin of Noah, Ham, Sodom, Lot's daughters, and the guilty Canaanites. Animal appetites—the appetites which must be subdued in childhood if they are to be subdued at all—were still the temptation of mankind. Such sins are, it is true, prevalent in the world even now. But the peculiarity of these early forms of licentiousness is their utter disregard of every kind of restraint, and this constitutes their childish character.

The education of this early race may strictly be said to begin when it was formed into the various masses out of which the nations of the earth have sprung. The world, as it were, went to school, and was broken up into classes. Before that time it can hardly be said that any great precepts had been given. The only commands which claim an earlier date are the prohibitions of murder and of eating blood. And

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these may be considered as given to all alike. But the whole lesson of humanity was too much to be learned by all at once. Different parts of it fell to the task of different parts of the human race, and for a long time, though the education of the world flowed in parallel channels, it did not form a single stream.

The Jewish nation, selected among all as the depository of what may be termed, in a pre-eminent sense, religious truth, received, after a short preparation, the Mosaic system. This system is a mixture of moral and positive commands: the latter, precise and particular, ruling the customs, the festivals, the worship, the daily food, the dress, the very touch; the former large, clear, simple, peremptory. There is very little directly spiritual. No freedom of conduct or of opinion is allowed. The difference between different precepts is not forgotten; nor is all natural judgment in morals excluded. But the reason for all the minute commands is never given. Why they may eat the sheep and not the pig they are not told. The commands are not confined to general principles, but run into such details as to forbid tattooing or disfiguring the person, to command the wearing of a blue fringe, and the like. That such commands should be sanctioned by divine authority is utterly irreconcilable with our present feelings. But in the Mosaic system the same peremptory legislation deals with all these matters, whether important or trivial. The fact is, that however trivial they might be in relation to the authority which they invoked, they were not trivial in relation to the people who were to be governed and taught.

The teaching of the Law was followed by the comments of the Prophets. It is impossible to mistake the complete change of tone and spirit. The ordinances indeed remain, and the obligation to observe them is always assumed. But they have sunk to the second place. The national attention is distinctly

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fixed on the higher precepts. Disregard of the ordinances is, in fact, rarely noticed, in comparison with breaches of the great human laws of love and brotherly kindness, of truth and justice. There are but two sins against the ceremonial law which receive marked attention—idolatry and sabbath-breaking; and these do not occupy a third of the space devoted to the denunciation of cruelty and oppression, of maladministration of justice, of impurity and intemperance. Nor is the change confined to the precepts enforced: it extends to the sanction which enforces them. Throughout the Prophets there is an evident reference to the decision of individual conscience, which can rarely be found in the Books of Moses. Sometimes, as in Ezekiel's comment on the Second Commandment, a distinct appeal is made from the letter of the law to the voice of natural equity. Sometimes, as in the opening of Isaiah, the ceremonial sacrifices are condemned for the sins of those who offered them. Or, again, fasting is spiritualized into self-denial. And the tone taken in this teaching is such as to imply a previous breach, not so much of positive commands, as of natural morality. It is assumed that the hearer will find within himself a sufficient sanction for the precepts. It is no longer, as in the law, 'I am the Lord;' but, 'Hath not he showed thee, O man, what is good?' And hence the style becomes argumentative instead of peremptory, and the teacher pleads instead of dogmatizing. In the meanwhile, however, no hint is ever given of a permission to dispense with the ordinances even in the least degree. The child is old enough to understand, but not old enough to be left to himself. He is not yet a man. He must still conform to the rules of his father's house, whether or not those rules suit his temper or approve themselves to his judgment.

The comments of the Prophets were followed in their turn by the great Lesson of the Captivity. Then

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for the first time the Jews learned, what that Law and the Prophets had been for centuries vainly endeavouring to teach them, namely, to abandon for ever polytheism and idolatry. But though this change in their national habits and character is unmistakeable, it might seem at first sight as if it were no more than an external and superficial amendment, and that their growth in moral and spiritual clearness, though traceable with certainty up to this date, at any rate received a check afterwards. For it is undeniable that, in the time of our Lord, the Sadducees had lost all depth of spiritual feeling, while the Pharisees had succeeded in converting the Mosaic system into so mischievous an idolatry of forms, that St. Paul does not hesitate to call the law the strength of sin. But in spite of this it is nevertheless clear that even the Pharisaic teaching contained elements of a more spiritual religion than the original Mosaic system. Thus, for instance, the importance attached by the Pharisees to prayer is not to be found in the law. The worship under the law consisted almost entirely of sacrifices. With the sacrifices we may presume that prayer was always offered, but it was not positively commanded; and, as a regular and necessary part of worship, it first appears in the later books of the Old Testament, and is never even there so earnestly insisted upon as afterwards by the Pharisees. It was in fact in the captivity, far from the temple and the sacrifices of the temple, that the Jewish people first learned that the spiritual part of worship could be separated from the ceremonial, and that of the two the spiritual was far the higher. The first introduction of preaching and the reading of the Bible in the synagogues belong to the same date. The careful study of the law, though it degenerated into formality, was yet in itself a more intellectual service than the earlier records exhibit. And this study also, though commencing earlier, attains its maximum after the cap-