EARLY EDUCATION AND EARLY IMPRESSIONS.

IT can hardly fail to strike every thinking and observing individual, that there are a great many persons in the world who commence life without any fixed or definite idea: who are blown hither and thither by every strange wind of doctrine, influenced by every fresh vagary of fortune or fashion: who flit from occupation to occupation, and from amusement to amusement, like butterflies, having no aim or object in life beyond mere existence, or the enjoyment of the passing hour.

Such people not unfrequently marry young, and when they are cut adrift from the moorings of home, and forced to begin life entirely on their own account, they look back on the circumstances that led to their union as a series of accidents or chances, more or less lucky according to their position. After the first bloom of enthusiasm has rubbed off, they are apt to regard the cares, duties, and responsibilities of married life as trying, onerous, and often sorely perplexing, more especially in the matter of bringing up their children.

Indeed to all parents, young parents especially, this proves a real stumbling-block. Some from excessive anxiety, some from excessive worry, exclaim, "What am I to do with my children?" It has been often stated that the mind of a child is a sheet of blank paper, on which anything whatever may be written—a statement which is only to a certain extent true, as it is an obvious fact that both in our physical and mental constitution there are original tendencies and propensities, which only require cultivation and guidance: the seeds are already sown, the first faint lines of character are already traced on the fair blank sheet, and only want the heat and light of instruction and training to bring them clearly out, and show fully and fairly their proportions. If sufficient food, raiment, and mere affection were all that a human being required during the first decade of existence, such wants could be supplied with comparative ease; but who that has watched the eager, curious, and observant eyes of a child, or listened to the remarks that seem to bubble like a spring of water from some inner depths of intelligence, or to the pertinent, often profound questions, that puzzle the gravest and wisest teachers, who that has been staggered by some query, put with childish directness of purpose and perfect confidence of a satisfactory reply, or astounded by some abstract reflection gravely uttered, can help admitting that in childhood the mind is predominant over the body, and that early education is a very serious matter, requiring to be well thought about, and by no means neglected? Gentleness, firmness, and truth are amongst the earliest influences that should be brought to bear upon the mind of childhood. The adoption of love, and disuse of terror, are having the happiest influences on modern education, and wilful cruelty and wanton mischief have ceased to be the schoolboy's characteristic, since undue severity has become a thing of the past. Indeed the general increase of gentleness and politeness amongst all classes is one of the grandest and, at the same time, one of the inevitable results of modern culture. The history of past centuries exhibits a very painful severity towards the young; the crown was not deemed more essential to the king, the Great Seal to the chancellor, than the birch to the schoolmaster. It requires no great effort of imagination to call up the grim old pedagogue, with his knitted brows and compressed lips, and we can easily understand the art by which each trembling youngster—

> "——had learned to trace
> The day's disaster in his morning face."

Lady Jane Gray tells us that she never sat down in her mother's presence. Even the study of the severest theology, or the driest philosophy, must have been a relaxation from such unmotherly austerity. The youngsters of this nineteenth century have much to be grateful for in that respect. The Wackford Squeerses, the Dotheboys Halls, and the grim parents have passed away, vanished under the genial influence of civilisation. As we grow more cultivated, we become more kindly-mannered if not kindly-affectioned one to another, and the terrible icy barrier of coldness, reserve, and unkindness between parent and child, teacher and pupil, is for ever swept away.

The great battle of existence, the daily toil for daily bread, occupies much of the time of the vast majority of fathers and mothers, thus forcing them to delegate to some one else the important task of educating their children; and it is satisfactory to know that the opportunities for doing so are greatly increased and improved, but there are some things which must be taught at home, some principles which can be instilled by parents only. In ordinary education the mere intellectual faculties are considered to require care and culture; the moral nature is left entirely to itself, or else it is supposed to derive some adventitious benefit from the intellectual training; frequently too the body is neglected, health and vigour are often ruthlessly sacrificed to a morbid craving for mental distinction. The natural appetite for knowledge, which should be carefully fostered, is sometimes stimulated by unhealthy ambitions. The desire of gaining a prize takes the place of a genuine love of learning and advancement, and when the prize is won at school, and the praise at home, a child is very apt to forget facts that have been mentally bolted instead of being slowly masticated. It should be ever present to the mind of a teacher that children have three distinct natures—the moral, the mental, and the physical. It takes several years to amalgamate those three, and while they remain separate each must have separate treat-

ment. One should never trench upon or be made subservient to the other—the cultivation of the mental nature is the work of the schoolmaster or mistress—the wants of the other two must be supplied at home.

Strict personal neatness, and systematic habits, sow the seeds of future order and punctuality in the graver business of life; and it is well to infuse into every child's mind a little wholesome self-respect—to impress upon each a sense of position and individual responsibility, and teach children that certain things are unworthy of them, and should not be done, not merely because their parents say so, but because of a certain social and individual dignity of their own. So should they be early shown that certain other things are for their good, that gentleness, politeness, unselfishness, and affection are qualities not only very beautiful and admirable in themselves, but that they have a value far beyond their happy influence on the home circle, that they are beyond all price valuable qualities to bring out into the wide world, the best of capital to commence the business of life with, and that they rarely fail to win for their possessor love, esteem, and friendship, and that they make no enemies. Children are quite capable of understanding all that and more, and if the precepts are backed up by the constant daily, hourly practice of that same gentleness, politeness, unselfishness, and affection, they cannot fail to sink down deep into the souls of children, and bring forth good fruit in due season.

Very many kind, well-meaning parents consider that when they give their children the best education within their reach, a sufficient quantity of plain wholesome food, and warm decent clothing, they have done everything essential for their future welfare, and that it is not only prudent but praiseworthy for them to screw, and scrape, and pinch, and cut down every expense in order to save money, and put it carefully out at interest. Now to a great extent this same saving is a very laudable measure, but it is not by any means without its disadvantages.

A little extra expenditure, to make home more refined and pleasant, to provide graceful surroundings, and at the same time increased comfort, is well-spent money—or at least in the great majority of cases it proves a good investment. There is nothing children are more vividly impressed by than their home surroundings; nowhere do they go without taking quiet notes and mentally comparing their own drawing-room, or their own luncheon-table at home, with that of the friend or schoolfellow they are visiting. Their style of dress and general appearance, if inferior to that of their companions, often causes them real serious unhappiness; and though we do not approve of tricking children out like dolls, or making lay figures of them to hang the latest French fashions on, we would like to see them always neatly, appropriately, and at the same time stylishly dressed—that is, their dresses of a shape and colour becoming to them, carefully made and well fitting, no matter whether the material be linsey, holland, or French merino. Well-made, well-fitting dresses make children look graceful, and to a certain extent act gracefully, while uncouthly-cut, ill-made, baggy frocks, transform really pretty children into dowdies. And so with everything else, children observe and are influenced by their surroundings; therefore it is very desirable that their homes be neat, orderly, and refined; it gives them graceful ideas, accustoms their minds to elegance, and makes them quite at home with the external forms of good-breeding.

But while advocating a refined and tasteful home—as refined and as tasteful as the position, circumstances, and future prospects of parents will permit—let it not for a moment be imagined that we approve of lavish expenditure or profusion, or would advise anybody to live up to or beyond their income. Such conduct would be folly, and no amount of logic could refine it into anything else. In no sense of the word do we recommend ostentation, and in no circumstances is extravagance justifiable; and we feel quite certain that good taste, style, and quiet dignity and perfect refinement are quite in harmony with the strictest economy and good management. If people want well-cooked, well-served food, a scrupulously clean, neat home, and respectful attention, they have to pay a trifle more for it than for slipshod, slovenly attendance and cookery; but the gain is so great, and the extra expense so comparatively small, that people who can afford it never for a moment regard the outlay as an extravagance, but rather consider it to be what it really is—a great economy. There is nothing more contrary to good-breeding, or more in opposition to true politeness, than display of any kind, whether of wealth, or knowledge, or anything else. True refinement delights in quiet harmony of action, thought, word, and surroundings, for the great pleasure such harmony gives, and the grace with which it invests even the simplest home. Show, and glitter, and gaudy grandeur are an utter abomination, and positively painful to the eye of one whose mind was early impressed with the true beauty of simplicity. Refinement avoids all extremes—steers clear of all peculiarities in dress, manner, and conversation; it breeds sincerity, gentleness, truth, unselfishness, or rather it is the result of those qualifications combined with a simple, earnest belief in one's self, and an honest desire to always do the thing that is right. A truly refined woman is

> "A creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food,
> For transient sorrow's simple wiles,
> Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles."

It is from the example of such a mother that children learn to be simple, natural, gentle, and graceful. In their nursery, or at their mother's knee, the seeds of their future manners are sown. And such early impressions are more powerful, and have a far better, happier influence than all my Lord Chesterfield's principles of politeness committed to memory, or all the other rules and maxims ever written. Beyond all doubt and question, example has a most powerful influence on both early education and early impressions, and it becomes every one to well consider what sort of example he or she sets, and what sort of impressions are provided for the minds of children.