

RATIONALISM IN THE NURSERY.

BY THE EDITOR.

WHEN rationalism, as a religious movement, first dawned on the world, it was exaggerated to such an extent and carried into such improper fields, that it became ridiculous as a theory and a religion. Reason, however, we must remember, is the most essential feature of the human soul, and the proper training of reason is indispensable. It is of such importance that it ought to begin at an early date, and the application of reason should extend to all the questions of life, secular and religious.

As to the use of reason in religion we must distinguish between what is rational and rationalistic. The rational ought to be welcome, while the rationalistic is a misapplication of the rational.

There are some great religious teachers, such as St. Augustine and Luther, who unqualifiedly declare that religion must from its very nature appear irrational to us. They claim that reason has no place in religion, and must not be allowed to have anything to do with it. The ultimate basis of a religious conviction, they urge, is not knowledge but belief,—a view which in its utmost extreme is tersely expressed in the famous sentence, *Credo quia absurdum*,—I believe because it is absurd. In opposition to this one-sided conception of the nature of religion, rationalists arose who attempted to cleanse religion of all irrational elements, and their endeavors have been crowned with great results. We owe to their efforts the higher development of religion, and must acknowledge that they were among the heroes who liberated us from the bondage of superstition. Nevertheless, the rationalistic movement, or that movement in history which goes by the name of Rationalism, is as one-sided as its adversary. Without any soul for poetry, its apostles removed from the holy legends the miraculous as well as the supernatural, and were scarcely aware of how prosaic, flat, and insipid religion became under this treatment. On the one hand they received the

accounts of the Bible in sober earnestness like historical documents; on the other hand they did not recognise that the main ideas presented in religious writings were of such a nature as to need the dress of myth. We know now that the worth and value of our religious books does not depend upon their historical accuracy, but upon the moral truths which they convey. We do not banish fairy-tales from the nursery because we have ceased to believe in fairies and ogres. These stories are in their literal sense absurd and impossible, yet many of them contain gems of deep thought; many of them contain truths of great importance. The rationalistic movement started from wrong premises and pursued its investigations on erroneous principles. Our rationalists tried to correct the letter and expected thus to purify the spirit. But they soon found it beyond their power to restore the historical truth, and in the meantime lost sight of the spirit. They were like the dissector who seeks to discover the secret of life by cutting a living organism into pieces; or like a chemist, who, with the purpose of investigating the nature of a clock, analyses the chemical elements of its wheels in his alembic. The meaning of religious truth cannot be found simply by rationalising the miraculous element in the holy legends of our religious traditions.

Rationalism is a natural phase of the evolution of religious thought, but it yields no final solution of the problem. In a similar way our classical historians attempted in a certain phase of the development of criticism to analyse Homer and the classical legends. They rationalised them by removing the miracles and other irrational elements; and naïvely accepted the rest as history. The historian of to-day has given up this method and simply presents the classical legends in the shape in which they were current in old Greece. Legends may be unhistorical, what they tell may never have happened, yet they are powerful realities in the development of a nation. They may be even more powerful than historical events, for they depict ideals, and ideals possess a formative faculty. They arouse the enthusiasm of youth and shape man's actions, and must therefore be regarded as among the most potent factors in practical life.

We regard the rationalistic treatment of Bible stories as a mistake, yet for that reason we do not accept the opposite view of the intrinsic irrationality of religion. We do not renounce reason; we do not banish rational thought from the domain of religion. Although we regard any attempt at rationalising religious legends as a grave blunder, we are nevertheless far from considering reason

as anti-religious. On the contrary, we look upon reason as the spark of divinity in man. Reason is that faculty by virtue of which we can say that man has been created in the image of God. Without reason man would be no higher than the beast of the field. Without rational criticism religion would be superstition pure and simple, and we demand that religion shall never come in conflict with reason. Religion must be in perfect accord with science; it must never come into collision with rational thought. Reason after all remains the guiding-star of our life. Without reason our existence would be shrouded in darkness.

If children hear stories that are irrational there is no need of telling them flatly that the story is not true, but it will be wise to ask the question, Is that possible? Children are sure to take certain things as facts without thinking of applying criticism. Their little souls are as yet blanks. How is it possible to expect in them the critical attitude of a scholar? If children see pictures of angels, or devils, or fairies, they will believe them to be as they see them, without questioning the possibility of such beings.

It was characteristic of a child's mind when a little three year old boy once asked one of his aunties, "Have you ever seen an angel?" and she replied, "No, have you?" "Yes," he said confidently, "in my picture book." That things can be pictured which are not realities, is an idea that has not as yet entered the mind of a young child. And it will be wise not to tell him directly that certain pictures are unrealities, but to guide his opinion and help him to form his own judgment.

Children are liable to lose the moral of a fairy tale if they are told at once that fairies and ogres are unrealities. It will for a time be sufficient to tell them it is a story and never mind whether it actually happened or not. And if the moral of the story now and then finds application in their experiences they will learn to appreciate it, and yet distinguish between poetry and reality. They will acquire a taste for poetry without falling a prey to romanticism.

There is a difference between true and real. Real is a thing that is concrete and actual; history is real, and all things real are instances of general laws. A truth is the recognition and correct knowledge of a general law; and the lesson of a general law in the moral world may sometimes be better set forth in an invented story than in incidents that have actually happened. In this sense a story, a myth, a legend, may be unhistorical, unreal, and even absurdly impossible, and yet be true in its significance. Children do

not, of course, at once appreciate this distinction between truth and historical actuality, and one of my little boys for a long time refused to listen to "stories that were not true," as he said. He objected to fairy tales as not being based upon facts, preferring to hear the account of the invention of steam engines or of the landing of the Pilgrims. It almost seemed for a long time as though he had no sense for poetry; but by and by he learned to like certain fairy tales whose spirit he appreciated—for instance, of the boy who knew no fear and who, when he went abroad to learn what fear was, gained a kingdom.

Parents must develop the critical sense of their children without destroying poetry and the enjoyment of fiction. If children prefer the one or the other extreme, let them freely develop it and fear not that they will become over-credulous or over-critical, that they will become superstitious through a belief in fairy tales, or prosaic on account of their objection to stories that are not true. Every child passes through successive phases in its mental development, and it will only assimilate the impressions and information for which its budding mind is ready. If these phases show an occasional onesidedness, parents need not worry, for mankind, at large, also had its phases, and the religious evolution of the race necessarily passed through the mythological and dogmatic period.

The same rule that applies to fairy tales holds good in the realm of religious legends and stories. The parents' rule might be: Give the children every chance of forming their own opinion, and let them acquire information of all kinds in whatever way life may offer it to them. Let children go to churches, witness religious processions, attend Sunday-school, but preserve under all conditions their independence of judgment without directly forestalling the decision to which they are ultimately liable to come. Parents who wish to insist on a rational comprehension of religious truths need not be in a hurry to influence the souls of their little ones. If they give them outright the results of free investigation instead of merely stimulating their critical powers by questions and suggestions, they are liable to make them shallow, and instead of making them rational will make them rationalistic.

One of my little boys, now eight years old, recently learned to skate on the ice. He could do it so long as he remained unconscious of himself, but he gave up at once after his first accident, because the thought of falling frightened him. When I told him that he could do it if he only had confidence in himself, he answered, "Isn't there a truth in the story of St. Peter's walking on

the See of Galilee? He sank when he lost faith, and he walked on the water when he had the confidence that he could do it. He added at once, "I do not believe that he walked on the water, but the story is good, isn't it?"

As to credulity in the common walks of life, it will always be wise to distinguish between what actually is true and what a person has stated to be true, or what he may believe to be true. The distinction is subtle to a child's mind in the beginning, but as soon as he understands it, he will utilise it and it will become a trait of character that in future life may be of great importance. He will learn to respect the right of others to believe as they please, although he may come to the conclusion that the belief itself has no foundation and is unacceptable to himself.

MUTUAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

An only child is apt to be spoiled, and why? Because he does not have the benefit of the mutual education that brothers and sisters in their common plays as well as in their quarrels naturally bestow upon one another. If he is not self-willed, and if his peculiarities do not manifest themselves in naughtiness, he will as a rule be over-sensitive,—which in later life may prove almost more disastrous; for he will be liable to fret without any cause when others unwillingly or unwittingly offend him.

Parents that have several children should not be grieved if their boys, or even their girls, sometimes quarrel among themselves. There are few brothers who would not now and then come to blows, and there is no harm done in their childish quarrels, so long as they are kept within proper limits, and parents should interfere as little as possible, except to counterbalance the greater strength of the elder ones, to prevent their having toys which might turn out to be dangerous weapons, and in general to see to it that no serious harm be done. There is no better system of education than that which springs from the conflict of interests that originates within the sphere of the children's own experiences.

No teachings in words can better explain to a child that the rights of others must be respected, than the practical experiences, be they ever so trivial, which give meaning to the moral exhortations of the golden rule and of practising justice. The child must feel the resistance of others, in order to learn that there are limits imposed upon us in society by the rights of our fellows. Therefore, if parents see their children quarrelling they should not be

anxious about them. Every blow that one little brother gives or receives is a moral lesson which will bear fruit in time.

While the quarrels of children are not to be regarded as an evil, they should not be fostered or produced. They should only be suffered, and parents should not be alarmed at occasional out-breaks of anger. Far from fostering quarrels, parents should see to it that their children love and respect one another, and it is easy enough for them to do so. They should never in the presence of one child speak slightly of their other children, but always in respectful and loving terms. Every word of contempt or ill-will, even of deserved reproach, if listened to by a brother or sister, sinks much more deeply into their hearts than adult people as a rule are apt to believe. It is remembered, and though it may remain unnoticed for a long time, it will finally come out in one shape or another when least expected. It may be true that most of the grudges and ill-will that brothers sometimes show one another are due to the carelessness of parents who reprove the little fellows in the presence of their brothers. Parents, therefore, ought to make it a rule to treat children throughout in the presence of their brothers and sisters, and also of strangers, not very differently from adult people. Whatever reproaches have to be made ought to be done, at least as far as possible, in private, and not for the purpose of humiliating the child.

Children are apt to scold one another, but their words have not the same weight that those of parents and nurses have. Their revilings, therefore, cannot do the same harm. On the contrary, if parents or nurses show their disapproval of using names, bickerings in the nursery will be remembered as deterring examples.

When little children interfere with the plays of their older brothers and sisters, taking away their toys and running off with them, the older children naturally grow indignant and are apt at once to beat their weaker playmates. Then of course it is time to interfere and give them a lesson in patience. And the best method to keep older children in good humor, is to teach them to look upon their smaller companions with the eyes of grown up people. When a baby of two years runs away with her four year old sister's doll, it is better to let her carry off her spoils, and taking the elder child in your arms, to say: "Now let us watch baby and see what she is doing with dolly. I'll see to it that she does not break it. Now look how she carries the doll. Would any mamma carry her baby by the leg? She does not yet know how to treat babies, but we will teach her. You are the elder, you must tell her how."

Possibly for the first time children may not prove amenable, but by and by they will learn to take fatherly or motherly interest in the queer ways of their younger sisters and brothers, and that will help them to bear with their smaller companions if they unduly interfere with the rights of their elders and provoke their anger.

Of course, children should always be watched, especially if they have dangerous toys in their hands, such as iron tools which may easily become weapons, but at the same time they ought to enjoy their liberty as much as possible, so as to educate one another by mutual assistance and interest—as well as by friction.

I remember a children's party given in the days of my own childhood in celebration of the birthday of one of my little friends. Our host had received a game called "Reynard the Fox," and he had invited all his little comrades to play the new game. But he had cleverly arranged it so that none of his guests had the least chance of winning, and he alone bore off all the honors and prizes of the day. He was an only child, and that too without a mother who might have checked his ambitious plans, and the outcome of the children's party was general dissatisfaction and finally an actual rebellion against the host who tried to usurp all the power. At last his father interfered to restore order, and settled the dispute in a manner which was not to the taste of the spoiled child. When I recounted the story at home and informed my parents about the little tricks which my friend had used to insure his victories, they pointed out to me the lesson that the host should always look to the interests of his guests, and that it was a matter of honor on his part to let them be satisfied and go home with the pleasant feeling of having been well entertained. The vanity of gaining all the honors of the day spoiled the birthday party of my little friend for himself and others. Had he been wise enough to suffer his guests to gain all the prizes, he would have increased their friendship and would probably have enjoyed the day much more than he hoped to do and might have done by winning all the prizes, even if his guests had not demurred.

I do not remember whether as the host of a children's party I was better than my spoiled friend, but I am sure that it was an experience which made a deep impression on my mind, and it seems to me that parents should improve all the opportunities they have of guiding children's inclinations in the right way by utilising their own experiences.

FEAR AND CIRCUMSPECTION.

It happens that children sometimes are frightened by phantoms of their own imagination, and being naturally weak and feeling that they are unable to protect themselves, may at the idea of a fancied danger fall into hysterics. What is to be done if such a state supervenes, or if symptoms appear which indicate its approach,—a state in which the child is overpowered by all kinds of presentiments and would be impervious to argument?

The best plan is *not* to deny at once the reality of the imagination which is the immediate cause of the sudden fright, for that fancied fearful object is a reality to the child, and to deny it would be to cut off all means of curing it. The best way is to consider it temporarily as being real, or at least possible, and accept the state of things imagined. Place yourself in the child's position, and thence start for further operations. That is the first condition which insures the child's confidence, so that it will be willing to follow you, and you will then have easy play to examine the state of affairs, which will of course result in the discovery that there was no cause for fear.

A few examples will illustrate the case.

A little girl frequently fancied she saw bears and tigers whenever she happened to awake in the night. Presumably she dreamed of some danger, may be on account of having eaten too much for supper or having eaten the wrong kind of food. At any rate, she frequently awoke crying in the night, and in her fear interpreted the dim outlines of a dress or a curtain as a fearful beast that was about to attack her. The best thing to do is to deal tenderly with such fancies and remove the child as far as possible from the object that has caused her excitement. Then, if you can do so without disturbing the other children, light the lamp and let it fall full on the thing that has given rise to her fear. Be slow, and express your opinion first as a kind of preliminary assumption that the bear may after all be mamma's skirt or the curtain moving in the draft; and when this comforting probability is understood, follow up your advantage and declare it to be a good joke that a harmless piece of cloth should look like a fearful animal. Make the child smile at the incongruity of her fancy, and her laugh will cure the horror of the dream and dispel the nightmare as sunshine dissolves the mist.

One day I walked with one of my little boys along a wooded creek. It was winter, and the trees were leafless and dry. Now it

happened that a trunk of a tree which had lost its crown and was encircled by strong vines, looked, from a certain position, like a man, or rather like a tramp (for he looked very ragged) bending over a broken bicycle. The vines were so queerly shaped that the illusion was almost perfect. My little boy stood aghast for a moment. "There is a bad man," he said, "with a bicycle," and he pointed to the strange sight. I could not help at once tracing the figure to which he referred, but I knew at the same time that it was a tree and not a real man, for a man would not have stood so motionless as did that weird, ragged looking figure in the valley. The fear of the little boy was great, and he did not know what to do,—whether to run away or to hide, and as his imagination was easily worked up I felt that there was danger of an hysterical outbreak. The first thing to be done was to remain very calm myself. Calmness produces calmness, as irritation will produce irritation. Mental states are by imitation as much catching as contagious diseases. Now I told the little fellow to stand perfectly still and watch that tramp in the valley. At the same time I took him in my arms, which of course alleviated his immediate fears, and while he watched that tramp-like figure I called his attention to the fact that he stood perfectly still and did not move, except as a tree will in a gentle breeze. When he had grown calmer, I proposed to walk towards the man and see what he did. But the little fellow was still too much afraid and said, "Let us go away as quickly as we can." But that seemed to me very undesirable. Although we were on our way home, I saw clearly that I had first to disillusion him as to the cause of his fear. As he would not walk towards the strange figure directly, I thought it wisest to approach it indirectly, and while we moved some steps to the side, the tree ceased to look like a man and appeared more like a tree. At the same time the figure remained motionless as before. This increased the courage of the boy and I at once took advantage of it. "I don't believe it is a man," said I, "let us go and see." He still objected. I again changed our position to a place which presented another view of that queer tree, and the confidence of the boy grew more and more. The hysterical condition disappeared completely and there remained only a certain awe of the weird appearance; but it seemed to me advisable to dispel that awe too and leave no trace of it. Even now it seemed to me advisable not to approach the tree directly and quickly, but slowly, as Indians would do when deer-stalking or stealing upon an enemy. The approach made in this careful way increased his confidence, for we stopped whenever

new doubts arose which manifested themselves in renewed hesitation; and at last I said "it would be fun if the wild man would turn out to be merely a tree stump. Really, I believe it is only a tree. What do you think?" And he thought that it was really a tree and his fright changed slowly into fear, then into awe, then into circumspection, then into a strong suspicion of the causelessness of his fear, and at last into good humor at the situation. When we came to the place and stood before the leafless tree, which had no longer any resemblance to a man or a bicycle, we had a hearty laugh and I did not fail to impress on the boy the ridiculousness of the situation. Lest the experience should vanish from his memory, I sometimes reminded him of the incident, recommending him in all similar cases first to look closely at the frightful apparition. Perhaps then it will dissolve into nothing, just as an imagined highwayman changed into a rotten stump.

Another instance of fear that I found necessary to allay in the same little boy, happened on the farm to which we were accustomed to go. When he first encountered a pig, he was so frightened at its grunt that he could not be induced to walk into the yards in which the swine were kept with the cows and sheep. As it did not seem to me advisable to yield to his fear, I carried him to the fence on my arm, where he felt safe, and explained to him that pigs are very much afraid of men and even of little boys if they only courageously hunted them. So when a pig approached the fence I drove it away, which gave the little boy a great deal of pleasure to see his old enemy put to flight. I at once made use of his elated state of mind and pursued the pig. When he saw that the pigs were really cowards, I put him on the ground and gave him a stick and let him give chase himself. First he would not go to the ground; but having repeatedly witnessed the wild flight of chased pigs, he ventured the feat, stick in hand, still clinging, however, to his papa's hand. Of course, I took care that the first pigs he met with were not too large and that they would quickly retire at our approach. The little boy's courage grew with his success, and after a few repeated pig hunts he lost all the fear he had entertained, and I now found it necessary to give the boys, him as well as his little brother, a warning not to be too bold with pigs when they were alone, because the big ones might not be quite so cowardly as they thought, and might turn out to be ugly.

Make it a rule never to excite fear in children, and never show fear yourself in their presence. On the contrary, set children an example of calm behavior in instances where either you yourself

become involved in an actually perilous situation or where the child's imagination sees a mere show of danger.

Unfortunately most of the help employed in a house, especially the servants in the kitchen, show an extraordinary fear of mice, which is transferred to the children. If a child observes but once a scene of excitement, because a little mouse happens to be heard, parents will have a great deal of trouble to eradicate the evil effect. This impression will probably last forever, and can only be counteracted by carefully superadding the ridiculousness of such fear.

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The elimination of fear in education should not, however, promote audacity and foolhardiness; on the contrary we must begin at an early age to caution children and make them look out for and anticipate dangers.

When taking a walk with children, it is advisable to think aloud, and to tell them why we walk here and there, why we look out when crossing the tracks, or crossing streets; and to point out to them the dangers that must be avoided. Circumspection must be one of the fundamental ideas in a child's mind, especially in our days when civilisation begins to grow more and more complex.

If you have electric wires in the house, either for lighting or for bells, it is advisable to improve the occasion whenever a repair is made, or whenever an opportunity may offer itself, to show to children the sparks that appear when wires touch. If the current is too weak to do any harm, it is even advisable to let children touch wires and receive a shock. At any rate, they ought to be informed of the dangers to which they expose themselves in touching wires. They ought to know that as the electricity in the wires of a bell are weak, so the electricity in the wires of a street railway are very powerful and would, if touched, unflinchingly kill a man. It is not exactly necessary to tell children the terrible accidents that frequently happen, but it is necessary to give them full information about what might happen. When they grow older, attaining an age at which the imagination is no longer apt to be overstrung, they should also be told of the accidents whenever and wherever they happen, and how they happen, so that they will learn to avoid them.

It will be useful under all circumstances to impress short rules upon the minds of the children, never to touch a wire that might happen to dangle from a pole, and never to step on a wire that

might touch the ground, and the connexion of which cannot be traced. It might be harmless, but it might be a live wire.

The same rules, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to innumerable other situations. If parents visit factories or machine shops with their children, as in my opinion they ought to do from time to time, they should give due warning not to touch any running machinery and especially to be on the lookout with regard to belts. Before they approach the machinery they should watch it for a moment so as to know how far its sphere of danger reaches. In smithies and near fire-places of any kind, children must be taught never to step on iron, because even the dark-looking irons may still be hot, and it will be instructive to touch with a piece of wood some hot iron which, having lost its reddish blaze, appears to the uninitiated eye quite harmless. The wood will quickly catch fire, and the child should learn that if it stepped on that same iron the heat would soon burn through the shoe into the flesh, and perhaps to the bone.

Of course, these little lessons in caution should not be given so as to make the children timid; and, as a rule, it will be time to devote special attention to them as soon as the child has lost its natural fear. First teach children courage, then show them the need of circumspection.