

Training of the Will.

There are two contradictory opinions regarding the will; one that the will is capable of being trained, the other that it is absolute. The former opinion seems the most plausible, and this will here be treated.

"The will," says Harris, "is the power of a person in the light of reason and with susceptibility to the influence of rational motives, to determine the ends or objects to which he will direct his energy, and the exertion of his energy with reference to the determined end or object." From this definition it would seem that the will is capable of being trained, and when the two divisions, choice and volition, are given, it seems even more possible. By choice a person decides what object is best, or what course of action he will follow; and by volition he carries into effect the choice, or refuses to do so. Choice is absolute, is necessary; while volition follows from choice, though not necessarily, and in some cases not at all. As choice is the most important of the two, it must receive the most attention.

Take, for instance, a child who seems always to choose the wrong course of action, even though

he knows he is wrong; I believe that he can with care be trained to choose the right thing. If he is made to understand what is the right, and taught to choose it always, it cannot fail to have, in a great measure the desired effect. And if after the choice has been made, careful attention is paid to the right course of action, the moral part of the will will be benefited. For in many cases the young child that associates with or sees older persons who lead low, and mean, and degraded lives, has his choice of the low and mean developed to a greater degree than that of the right, the pure, and the true; this is the time to impress him with the true idea of right. It is true, one may always choose what he thinks is right, but he may not always be able to carry this into effect; as in the case of a drunkard, he may choose never to drink, but when the temptation comes he cannot resist yielding to his strong appetite.

The teacher has much of the will training of children in her hands; she can make them know right and wrong, see things quickly and clearly, so they may readily choose. If she presents objects that are new and interesting, the child will

at once be all attention; willing to learn what the object is, of what use it is, and whether it is good or bad. But it is only with the new and interesting that she may do this; for if it is something old, or is something the child has disliked, he will listen to no explanation or reasoning about it. And more good may be accomplished if the child does not realize what your aim is in talking of these things. By presenting a number of objects, good and bad side by side, and having the child choose, correcting him if necessary, he can be trained to choose always the best, and in this way to see quickly and clearly the difference. In the same way useful and useless objects may be studied.

Teachers might be divided in two classes; one who control the school by their own will, the other who teach the child to control through his will. The teacher controlling by her will insists that she has a quiet school; but if you step into her school-room, you find that her pupils are quiet through fright, more than discipline. The one who has the children control themselves never has a very quiet room, but the children are having their wills trained, and that is more important by far than a still room and

no will training.

A weak will may be gradually strengthened by reliance on one's own judgment; for a person with a weak will almost invariably gives up to one with a stronger; this allowed again and again cannot strengthen, but if possible will weaken. Locke says - "Strength of will is the power to resist, persist, to endure, to attack, to conquer obstacles, to snatch success from the jaws of death and despair." The person who strives to resist all that is wrong in action or thought, and endeavors persistently to follow the right, even though he is made to endure many seemingly difficult things, is strengthening his will; the very enduring is strengthening. The student who finds it hard to master his lessons, strengthens his will, when he is determined to succeed, and when he allows no obstacle to impede his progress; and often it is this firm resolve and the holding to it, rather than great intellectual power, that makes many good students. "Discipline, no less than concentration, is a cure for a weak will."

The strong will too, may be trained; this is important because with many, the strong wills are so often moved by passion and prejudice.

Such a person yields to no one, and feels that he and his views must always be foremost. The will must be restrained, or it makes despots and tyrants of its owners; and men with such strong wills tend to destroy themselves and those around them.

We have examples of the uneducated and the educated will in General Jackson and Abraham Lincoln. Jackson, quick in thought and action, never considering the end; while Lincoln was calm and slow, but always sure. In the words of another - "Jackson's career was like that of a wild storm, violent and destructive though sublime; while that of Lincoln was as the shining auroral light of a new morning, which shines more and more into the perfect day."

Since it has been seen who has the greater part of the will training of children, and how they may train them, how the weak will may be strengthened, the strong restrained, can any one doubt that the will can be successfully trained? It would seem not; for - "if the will is weak it must be taught self-reliance; if it is wilful it must have restraint; if it is violent it must acquire self-control; if it is without any true aim, it must be educated to self-direction".

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