

being, "In every work the beginning is the most important part, especially in dealing with anything young and tender, for that is the time when any impression which one may desire to communicate, is most readily stamped and taken. Shall we then, permit our children, without scruple, to hear any fables composed by any authors indifferently, and so to receive into their minds opinions generally the reverse of those which, when they are grown to manhood, we shall think they ought to entertain. Then, apparently, our first duty will be to exercise a superintendence over the authors of fables, selecting their good productions and rejecting the bad. And the selected fables we shall advise our mothers and nurses to repeat to their children, that they may thus mould their minds with the fables. But we shall have to repudiate the greater part of those now in vogue." On searching for the reason why Plato would reject so many fables, we find that his main reason is because they give a false or ignoble idea of God. He says: "God is good in reality, and is to be so represented." The first aim, then, in the highest education is to train children to the just idea of God, and as Plato wisely points out, this work can never be so well done as in the plastic years when the child is in the sole care of its mother. If the deep, all-informing sense of a God is to become vital in a mortal, it must be part of his very fibre, grow with him from his earliest years in growing beauty and harmony; or else it must be sought out in late years with anguish of soul, amid the fierce fires of mental and spiritual conflict which purify the seeker's soul so that he may see God, but which leave his nature seared and hardened so as to distort and obstruct the God-like in him. This, then, is Plato's first object in education, and why? I take it that his reason is that a man's whole character, and therefore his life, and the lives of those with whom he has to do, depends upon his thoughts, and if thought is ignoble, life soon becomes ignoble. We pride ourselves on "keeping our thoughts to ourselves," but such keeping is beyond the power even of the strongest. Slowly, slowly, but most surely, our

DOMINATING THOUGHTS

stamp themselves on our actions, our gestures, our very muscles; and if we strive to act contrary to our thoughts, with a view of concealing our true opinions, there very soon appears upon us, in mysterious subtle symbols, the character, false, insincere. If, then, we wish for a lofty noble nature, we must give lofty ideas, and give them most early. I have heard mothers argue thus: "I am not going to fill my child's mind with ideas of God, for I should be taking advantage of his helplessness in giving him ideas which I cannot really prove for myself." To such I would answer, "To be strictly logical, you should never give your child a draught of milk, or of water, for you cannot prove, otherwise than experimentally, that milk and water help to nourish human life; and you have abundant experimental proof that the truly God-fearing nations have in all ages been the great nations, and the truly great men have not been those that forget God." Happy is the child whose lot is cast in a home where the mother with grave reverence, not fully comprehending, yet humbly believing the mystery of Godhead, tries to fill her child's mind with the highest ideas human thought can reach unto. Would that mothers everywhere could

realise the importance of those first years when the child is literally their own to train or to neglect. Too often the first years are simply wasted, the child is fed and clothed, fondled, admired, laughed at, encouraged in funny sayings but earnestly and gently trained, no. The physical needs are most tenderly supplied, but mental and moral training is too often postponed. Just think what an enormous advantage it would be to our primary schools if the children entering them at the age of five had been trained as Plato prescribes. Such a training would mean that they began their literary training filled with reverence, and with enthusiasm, for what is enthusiasm in its primary meaning but "A God within?" These two qualities are among the very first requisites of a teachable mind. It would mean that, to begin with, the children were obedient, whereas now the privilege of giving the first lessons in that virtue is too often left to the teacher; it would mean that they were conscientious according to the measure of their years and their ability, whereas at present conscientious work is none too common among people of all ages. A lady in writing to me a short time ago from another part of the colony, asked me whether, in writing this paper, I could meet the charge she had frequently heard urged, that girls do not equal boys in thoroughness of work. I have never myself heard such a charge brought against girls in particular, and my own experience leads me to characterise it as unjust. I have worked with both boys and girls, both men and women; and, given equal ability, the girl's and the woman's work has been more, rather than less, thorough than the boy's or the man's. The charge might fairly be made a general one, I think, for it is not very common in any sphere of activity to find

ABSOLUTE THOROUGHNESS

We all have to suffer on account of carpenters who use unseasoned timber, cabinet-makers who use the glue-pot instead of the screw-driver, housemaids who do not sweep under the mats, plumbers who mend one hole and make two, teachers whose aim is to give information rather than to train natural faculty, doctors who make careless diagnoses, clergymen who take no trouble to understand human nature, lawyers who think more of their fees than of justice, and it is our own fault partly. We put up with a system of training that does not make for conscientious, thorough work. A few years back I was having a cabinet, which had been made in Wanganui, put into place by a cabinet-maker in another town. After a time the man said, "Do you mind telling me who made this? It's the best bit of work I've seen this long time. I once did work as good, but people won't pay for it, and I've had to come down." We New Zealanders, by our preference for the cheap, and showy, and unthorough, had caused this man, who evidently loved a piece of good work, to lower his ideal, and with it himself, and make him say, "I've had to come down." I fear we have helped many another man to "come down," and the reason, I am convinced, is in our neglect of Plato's first principle of education. Milton expresses just the same idea in his letter on education. Here are his words: "The end, then, of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him as we may, the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue,

which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection."

Having made clear their first principle in education, both Plato and Milton insist upon the great value of literature as one means of training men in knowledge of God: Milton devotes himself to explaining how the young may be most expeditiously trained in foreign languages, so that they may become acquainted with the literature of those languages. The reason for having a foreign language is that we may become masters of the literature, and thus masters of the highest thought. If this ideal were in the minds of our teachers of language we should have less gerund grinding and more translation in our classes. Plato, on the other hand, shows definitely how he expects the study of literature

TO INFLUENCE CHARACTER.

He would present to his pupils only such literature as would make them yearn to be brave in facing death, strong and patient in bearing personal loss, grave and self-controlled, true, temperate, scornful of bribery, not greedy even for honestly-earned money. He then passes on to consider what literary form is the most suitable to use in the instruction of the learner, and decides that the drama, the simple narrative, and the epic may all be used, provided that the style is kept simple and severe, free from anything that will draw the mind of the learner from the main object of his study.

What a revolution it would make in the study of our own noble literature, could all teachers be filled with Plato's ideas! "Literature is studied because it influences life." Cannot someone convince teachers from kindergartens up to university professors of the truth of that statement and force them to act upon it or vacate their positions? Only the other day I heard of students passing a University examination on Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus," and opening the book only once to write an essay which my informant naively told me "they got mostly out of the introduction." Whoever drew up the syllabus of English literature for New Zealand University students certainly chose such works as should have a most noble influence on the minds of our students, but weak examiners, blind teachers, and silly students use it so as to frustrate the aim of the University; nay, worse than to

FRUSTRATE A NOBLE AIM—

that of winning a little cheap and useless glory by a pretence of knowledge. If any book in our literature will help a youth to honesty of thought and breadth of thought and vividness of imagination, "Sartor Resartus" is such a book, and yet these noble fruits are all given up for the fleeting joy of passing. In the long run, passing matters not at all; what the book has helped one to, matters all in all. A few teachers still wonder why English literature should be given a place in our schools, and profess a kind of pious horror that Shakespeare and Milton and Tennyson and Browning should be put into the hands of school children, as if the act were a casting of pearls before swine. Children must read something, and if we teachers do not teach them to appreciate real literature, they will choose false and grow like what they read. We can all remember our impressionable teens, when for days at a time we were in our imagination the "cold, proud beauty," or "the sweet, shrinking, flower-faced maiden" of our latest romance. These imaginative days will never come again,