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S E R M O N,  
U P O N  
E D U C A T I O N:  
P R E A C H E D

At the Anniversary of a Public School,

A T

C R E W K E R N E, in the County of SOMERSET,

On Tuesday September 14, 1773.

By the Rev. THOMAS COKE, M. A.



S H E R B O R N E:  
Printed by W. CRUTTWELL, 1774.  
[ Price Six - Pence.]

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## The AUTHOR's Apology.

**T**HE Author of this Sermon, having been severely and (he thinks) undeservedly censured on account of it, by a few of the congregation before which it was preached, presents it to the consideration of the impartial Publick. As the principal, if not the sole motive, which has induced him to publish it, is the vindication of his character, he has here given it in the exact form in which he delivered it from the Pulpit. But if, additional thereto, it shall, by God's blessing, contribute in some small degree to the publick good, or the salvation of any of his fellow-creatures, the utmost extent of his wishes will be gratified.



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A  
S E R M O N,

Preached Sept. 14, 1773.

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PROVERBS xxii. 6.

*Train up a Child in the Way he should go: and  
when he is old he will not depart from it.*

**T**HE education of youth has been  
universally allowed to be of the  
highest importance to mankind.  
Such being the general opinion of every civi-  
lized nation, it hath been to me (in consider-  
ing this subject) matter of great surprize and  
concern, that in our country, where religion  
and liberty flourish in greater purity than  
in any other part of the globe, the very  
principal branch of education, namely, the  
morals and religion of children, hath been  
generally neglected. The eternal welfare of

B the

the child being frequently sacrificed to the sinister and narrow motives, or infidelity and immorality, of parents and tutors.

The wise man, in the words of my text, lays it down as a Proverb, consequently as agreeable to the common sense and experience of mankind, "Train up a child in the way he should go;" that is, in the fear of God and the keeping his commandments, in which, (as he elsewhere proves) consists the whole duty of man, and without which every other thing upon earth is but vanity of vanities. And he adds a reason for it, "When he is old he will not depart from it." If the seeds of virtue and religion are early implanted, and take possession of his tender heart, the strong impressions made on it will have a lasting effect throughout his future life; they will preserve him innocent, virtuous, and pious in the tenour of his conduct, and will be indelible monitors either to guard and protect him from the sinful temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil; or, to bring him back to his former religious course, if, through the depravity of his nature, or any outward cause, he deviate from his principles.

In

In discoursing upon these words, I shall endeavour in the first place to prove to you,

That it is highly necessary to begin the great work of training up mankind to religion in the time of childhood: and whilst their minds are most susceptible of impression, to lay the foundation of every future improvement in holiness:

2dly, shall lay down such rules as appear to me most conducive to this great end.

And shall, lastly, conclude with a few general observations on the great advantages accruing to the publick, and more particularly to individuals from a religious education.

1st, I am to prove to you, that we should begin the great work, and lay the foundation of religion, in the time of childhood. As we are infallibly assured from reason and scripture, that there will be a future state of retribution; where the everlasting condition of each of us will be determined according to our conduct in this present life; as a term of years of never so long duration can bear no degree of comparison with eternity; it

therefore follows, that our eye should be continually fixed upon the life to come, and, as far as possibly may be, no step or action be undertaken, before its relation to that life be thoroughly considered. Upon this important consideration I ground the absolute necessity of laying hold on every opportunity, which the infant-dawn of reason or outward circumstances afford us, to train up children to the love and practice of every religious duty, of which their particular age and capacity will admit. For although the great and good Governor of the universe, when he is pleased in his infinite mercy to remove children out of this dangerous world before they arrive at years of discretion, will, I do believe, through the merits of our blessed Saviour, forgive all those sins of ignorance and infirmity, of which alone they are capable of being guilty: Yet it is certain, that every wilful sin, though supposed originally to proceed from a bad education which it was not in the person's power to avoid, will be punished, without a particular, or at least a general repentance, with everlasting perdition. It may justly be inferred from hence, how careful and diligent parents and tutors should be in the discharge of their duties towards

wards the children under their tuition; for they may depend upon it as a certain truth, that they shall be strictly answerable at the last day, before the great Judge of the world, for every child with whom they have been intrusted: And if, through the negligence or ill example of either of them, any soul be lost, a soul created by that Almighty Judge for everlasting happiness, and redeemed with his own most precious blood for the same gracious purpose, such a parent or tutor can have no probability of salvation, or of escaping everlasting torment with that poor creature whom he ruined, and those Devils whose malicious designs he so effectually promoted. But to return,

What makes it more necessary to begin at this early time of life, is the impossibility of keeping out of the minds of children evil habits and dispositions by any other method than producing and encouraging in them the contrary habits and dispositions towards virtue and religion; for the mind, soon as it begins to open and expand, is continually employing itself, and will certainly run into vice and error through the channel of its own depraved nature, if not turned and forced

forced into that most excellent channel which leads to piety and goodness. And this is another consideration, which puts the whole out of doubt, namely, the depravity of human nature, that universal corruption from which no child of Adam is entirely free; of the truth of which we must be satisfied from the least experience, from the least knowledge of ourselves or our fellow-creatures, and of which no one can doubt who sincerely believes that the holy Scriptures are the Word of God.

One-argument more I will just mention; if our future conduct so much depend upon the foundation laid in our younger years, we have great reason to believe, that that infernal Spirit, who is suffered, through the infinite and unsearchable wisdom of Providence, “ \* to go about the world, like a roaring lion, “ seeking whom he may devour,” that he does not think children beneath his notice, but by every mean that lies in his power, endeavours to “ § catch away the good seed sown in their hearts,” and to increase that depravity of the soul, which all of us bring into the world.

\* 1 Peter v. 8.

§ Matt. xiii. 19.

If

If therefore our eternal happiness or misery in so great a measure depend upon our early education; if our nature be so corrupt, and have so direct a tendency towards every thing which is evil; if we have all the powers of darkness to contend with in this arduous task, how careful ought those of us to be who are concerned in this important work, to employ their whole attention about their charge; to instill gradually into their tender minds, and as they are capable of receiving it, † “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:” to teach them diligently, and talk to them of their duty to God and their neighbour, ‡ “when they sit in the house, and when they walk by the way, and when they lie down, and when they rise up.”

Which leads me to my second general head, namely, to lay down such rules as are most conducive to the great end here proposed.

And this I shall do, 1st, As they relate to instruction; 2dly, to example; And 3dly, to discipline.

1st, As

† Isaiah xxviii. 10.

‡ Deut. vi. 7.

1st, As they relate to instruction. The first and most obvious part of religion, in which children should be instructed, is the belief of a God, || “ who hath made us “ and not we ourselves, of whose good pleasure we are and were created.” They should be made, as far as may be, sensible of the numberless obligations they are under to that great and good Being, to whom they are indebted for † “ life and breath and all things.” They should be taught to say, \* “ Where is God my Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, “ and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven :” Their instructor should chiefly dwell upon the more pleasing attributes of the Deity : his eternal justice, and the consequent obligation he is under of punishing with everlasting torment every obstinate and unrepenting sinner, should seldom and only upon urgent occasions be touched upon. For as the grand design of training up children in the knowledge and practice of religious duties, is to infuse into their minds a sincere and habitual love towards God and their neighbour; every thing which works upon their fear, the most prevalent passion perhaps  
in

|| Psa. c.

† Acts xvii. 25.

\* Job xxxv. 10, 11.

in children, and which leads them to hate and detest rather than love any object on which it is employed, would tend to the very contrary purpose. They should be shewn the necessity of praying to God morning and night, if they expect a continuance of the blessings they at present enjoy, any new favours, or that complete eternal happiness which is promised in holy Scripture to every good Christian after this life. And to assist them in this, it will be necessary to put into their hands such short forms of prayer, as are suitable to their particular age and capacity.

It may not be amiss to observe in this place, that one great and necessary mean towards the completion of the great work, of which we are speaking, are the frequent and hearty prayers of the parents and tutors to Almighty God for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, without which all their endeavours will be of no avail. For the Scripture saith, that \* “ the effectual  
 “ fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth  
 “ much;” and if they be not righteous, they are very unfit to have the care of children.

C

We

\* James v. 16.

We should also take every opportunity of impressing upon them a love of and dependence upon our blessed Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ. I mean not here, that children should be puzzled with discourses about the deep mysteries of the Holy Gospel: the infallible truth of which they cannot be expected thoroughly to comprehend, as it depends upon the eternal truth of that great Being who cannot lie, and the consequent truth of the Word wrote by his immediate inspiration. But what I would principally recommend is, that some plain history of our Saviour's life and doctrines, fit for and level with the capacities of children; be given them to read, which if wrote with propriety, would I believe be as pleasing, and am sure would be more instructive, than any other book whatsoever. But if such a book cannot be procured, the tutor should supply the want of it, as far as his abilities would permit. Indeed I know of no complete work for this purpose, and therefore sincerely wish, that some eminent person in literature and piety would condescend (if it would be a condescension) to write and publish some such book, in such a stile, and with such useful remarks upon the different occurrences of our blessed Saviour's life,

life, as might at once render it plain, agreeable, and instructive to children: Nor is there any reason why they should not be as much pleased with such a book, as with the many paltry ones which are frequently put into their hands. And this would be much more to their advantage than the obliging them to read, as is the present custom, the whole Bible indiscriminately, both what they do, or with care and attention may be made to understand, and those parts of which it is impossible for their weak understandings to have the least notion or idea.

Nor can there be any necessity, in grammar-schools, that the boys should not be instructed in any thing but what relates to the Romans and Greeks: the first thing that ought to be considered, is to make them good Christians. It is far from my intention to decry the best of the Classick-writers, they are excellent in their way, and very proper for the instruction of youth; but surely it will be granted me, that there will as much true knowledge be gained by translating a passage into Latin or Greek out of such a book as was just now mentioned, as an expedition of

Alexander the Great, or a lewd story of the heathen gods and goddeffes.

We may not improperly take notice of the shameful neglect of many schoolmasters in their choice of books for the employment of their scholars. They regard nothing but the elegance of the language, and are as well pleased to hear their boys translate the lewd odes of Anacreon, (which tend only to teach them drunkenness and debauchery,) as the moral writings of Plato or Cicero. Surely such masters can hardly believe that there will be a great day of account.

In respect to the instructions necessary to be given them in morality, they are so closely connected with the foregoing, that it would be difficult to separate them; love and gratitude to our Creator and Redeemer being the true foundation of every moral duty. If a child can once be made thoroughly sensible of his dependence upon God for every blessing, he will of course be filled with an awful fear of offending him by a breach of any one of his commandments. If he be filled with a sincere love and admiration of our blessed Redeemer,  
by

by frequently reading over all his benevolent actions and precepts that are recorded in the Four Evangelists, or at least so many of them as may be thought proper for his particular age and capacity; he will naturally be led to a desire of imitating those amiable perfections, as far as in his power. We are not indeed to expect that the sense of an over-ruling Providence, and a love and consequent desire of imitating the life of our blessed Saviour, can be instilled into a child in the same degree of perfection, as into one of riper years; but something I am persuaded may be done in this respect, the more the better.

And even from profane writers, particularly historians, if schoolmasters or tutors would be prudent and careful in their choice of them, great instruction might be gathered, by pointing out in an agreeable light the worthy actions and great sentiments of the most excellent among the heathens; and thus boys may be advanced in the knowledge of the languages, and of their moral duties, at the same time.

It may be remarked here, as what may affect some kind of people, that the rules  
which

which have been laid down under this division are perfectly consistent with that well-known Aphorism of Aristotle, "Children are not fit to hear lectures on moral philosophy."

I shall just mention one thing more which greatly tends towards the instruction of children in piety and the knowledge of their duty; namely, the sending them constantly to be catechised by the Minister of the parish. The great service of public catechising to the children of the poor is so obvious, that it can hardly be disallowed by any one; people of fortune or leisure may indeed, by their own care and attention, or by a tutor, answer every end that is to be procured from this method of instruction; but then they should consider, how much they may promote the eternal welfare of the children of their poorer neighbours, by setting them the example; for nothing affects the lower sort of people in general so much as the example of their superiors. But, the inhabitants of many parishes, I am much afraid, are not able, through the neglect of their Ministers, to comply with the orders of our wise and excellent Church in this particular. And how  
those

those slothful servants can reconcile their neglect of this important duty with the solemn protestation they made on the day of their ordination, "I will instruct the youth in the catechism by the help of God," (and which, to make it if possible more binding, they confirmed by partaking of the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper) how they can reconcile, I say, their neglect of this duty with that solemn protestation, it would be better for them seriously to consider.

I come, 2dly, to treat of the example, which should be given to children, than which there is not any thing of more consequence. For as weak as their understandings are, they are sensible, that the actions shew the man much more than his words; and when those do not both correspond, they have a strong idea of his hypocrisy, tho' they may hardly know the meaning of the word; The old proverb is a very true one;

*Maxima debetur pueris reverentia,*

"The greatest reverence is due to children." We should keep a perpetual guard on what we do or say in their presence, "our hand

hand should be always on our mouth." Children can be very attentive and observant, and the finding out of one vice in their parent or teacher, will do them more hurt than a thousand moral lectures will do them good. It has often surprised me to see many, who have professed a regard for their little ones, commit notorious crimes in their presence, get drunk, blaspheme the sacred Name of God, or make excuses to other people for their conduct, which their children who are present must know to be false. They do not consider that each crime is doubled, and that they shall be answerable not only for their own sins, but also for those of their children, which proceed from the influence of their bad example; nay, perhaps, for many crimes committed years after they have been laid in the grave.

Let every one, therefore, who has the care of youth, take especial heed that he set them a good example in himself, or, he may depend upon it, all his labour will be fruitless. Let him resolve, and say with the Psalmist, \*  
 " I will behave myself wisely in a perfect  
 " way, I will walk within my house with a  
 " perfect heart."

3dly,

\* Psalm ci. 2,

3dly, In respect to discipline. I would recommend it as an unalterable rule, that the influence of fear never be employed, where the child may be drawn by the more amiable and more effectual cords of love. Your free and open forgiveness of his first fault should rouse up his generosity and gratitude ; on a repetition of it you should, by proper reproof, call shame to your aid ; but if he still continue to repeat the crime, if he shew a determined obstinacy, then, and not till then, let the rod be used : to such a case we may apply the words of Solomon, † With-  
 “ hold not correction from the child : for  
 “ if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall  
 “ not die. Thou shalt beat him with the  
 “ rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.”  
 But let this correction be applied only upon the breach of moral duties. Let it be reserved for that purpose alone. Let it never be used upon any other occasion, lest the frequent use of it weaken its force. And even when the child’s morality is concerned, let it be kept as the last resource to “ deliver his soul from hell.”

D

Children

† Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.

Children should have their hours of recreation and amusement, they require more than men ; but even then amidst their most playfome moments, a good instructor should, unknown to them, have a continual watch over them, that he might judge of their dispositions, and the particular vice or vices to which they were most addicted or inclined ; and so might be able to correct and amend them.

It may be objected, that few, if any Masters, can afford time for bestowing the instruction and discipline here recommended upon each of their scholars, either thro' being engaged in other employments, or through the great number of scholars under their care.

As to the first objection. The charge and care of children being so very great, the man who acts up to his duty, and with integrity, and takes upon him such a charge, will not, till that is entirely discharged, accept of any other employment : or, if he have any office from which he is not able to divest himself, he will by no means undertake the care of children ; as (we may venture to pronounce)

nounce) he would certainly be deficient in one or other of his duties.

The 2d objection, that the Master himself cannot take the requisite care of the morals of his scholars on account of their numbers, is, to those who regard the life to come as that which merits our chief concern, an invincible argument against public schools. Many may be ready to cry out at the seeming impropriety of condemning publick schools in a sermon preached at the anniversary of a publick school : but such objections have no weight with me ; for as long as I have the honour to serve in the vineyard of my Lord, I shall upon every subject, in every discourse, speak the truth with boldness, as I shall answer it to him on the great day of account. It is quite lamentable to think, how much the morals and religion of youth are neglected in the present publick schools ; for the truth of which I may appeal to any candid person, who has had the least opportunity of observing the dispositions and practices of the generality of young people, who have been sent to a publick school for their education. Many of them, before they have arrived at the age of sixteen or seventeen, have been perfect

masters of the vile arts of debauchery, drunkenness, and almost every kind of immorality. One would think, their masters looked upon Heaven and Hell as only old women's tales, or that the knowledge of Latin and Greek were sufficient to secure their everlasting salvation. Learning, and a knowledge of the arts and sciences, are highly ornamental to a good man, and empower him, through the grace of God, to be a blessing to his fellow creatures; but to a bad man, they are only so many opportunities and temptations towards making him the greater villain and curse to mankind.

It may be said, that my observations can only respect men of large fortune, who are able to provide, at a great expence, proper tutors for their children. But although it is almost impossible for a master to go through his duty with propriety, when he has the charge of forty or fifty pupils, it does not follow from thence that he is not able to discharge his duty towards eight or ten. And certainly so many parents of small fortunes, who might have neither leisure, nor perhaps abilities themselves, to instruct and educate their children as they could wish, if they could

could fix upon a worthy learned man, who would take upon him the care of their children, might without hurting themselves make it worth his while to give up his whole attention to them, if they were so wise as to have a hearty concern for the eternal as well as temporal interests of their children, and regarded goodness and piety as the best fortune they could leave them.

The poor only are excepted in these observations upon publick schools; they are not able to afford much, if any thing, out of their wretched pittance for the education of their children; and therefore the highest and most beneficial of charities is to establish schools and seminaries of learning for those, whose poverty would otherwise deprive them of one of the most valuable things in this life, a good and pious education; they being too numerous to be brought under the regulations before laid down for the rich. Indeed, if people of affluent fortunes would but look with the eye of faith at the glory and happiness awaiting those who turn many to righteousness, it would be their earnest endeavour to be instruments, as far as possible, in promoting a kind  
of

of charity so beneficial to themselves as well as to others.

I come, in the third and last place, to point out the great advantages arising to the publick, and more particularly to individuals, from a religious education.

Those who have been trained up in the habitual love of God, their Creator and Redeemer, " will not depart from it when they " are old," they will be actuated by that most glorious principle throughout the whole course of their lives, and will continually experience the truth of the Apostle's position, \* " Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of " that which is to come."

To enumerate all the advantages springing up from an entire trust in God, and a sincere love of our neighbour, the consequences of a pious education, would be more than the time will allow. I shall therefore confine myself to a few of the most important. And 1st, As they respect the Publick: the  
principal

\* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

principal part of which is composed of the lower or labouring people; who, if they were, through the industry of their parents, or the charitable assistance of others, educated piously, and brought up to the knowledge and habitual practice of all their religious duties, would become most useful members of the community; instead of the idleness, drunkenness and debauchery, not to say, thefts and murders, by which too many of them at present hurt and disturb the public peace, partly through a want of education, and partly through the bad example set them by their superiors, we should have a laborious industrious commonalty, going through every branch of their duty, not upon the servile principle of pleasing men, but the noble and firm one of pleasing and serving their God; sensible that, if the lowness and meanness of their condition bring upon them any transitory momentary afflictions, they will be most amply compensated hereafter by a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Our commerce, by the honesty as well as industry of our merchants and tradesmen, founded upon Christian universal benevolence, would soon be found in the most flourishing condition; and the English nation would

would be a proverb of honesty through all the commercial parts of the globe. Men of fortune, by their example and benevolence, would diffuse blessings around them, wherever they reside ; and, through their charity, and the industry of their inferiours, there would not be a poor man throughout our tribes. Our Magistrates would execute justice and maintain truth : Our Nobles be endued with grace, wisdom, and understanding : Our Priests be decked with righteousness, with true knowledge and understanding of God's holy Word, and by their preaching and living would set it forth and shew it accordingly : And our Sovereigns would make it the great business of their lives to preserve their people in wealth, peace, and godliness. Such, through the Grace of God, would be the happy consequences of an universal attention to the religious education of children. So greatly would righteousness exalt a nation, so that such a people might with truth cry out \* “ happy are we, who are in such a “ case, yea, blessed are we who have the “ Lord for our God.” And although such an universal attention to this important point is hardly to be expected, yet the obligation remains,

\* Psal. cxliv. 15.

remains equally strong upon each individual to promote it to the utmost of his power.

And in the smaller societies of private families, the effect of a good education would be no less visible. If the Master and Mistress of a family did their duty in the education of their children, and the instruction of their servants in the fear of the Lord, their house would be a little but well-regulated kingdom: their children would be attentive to the instruction, follow the example, and be obedient to the discipline of their parents; they would flourish † “like olive-branches round  
“about their table;” they would be the very joy of their hearts.

But lastly, the particular exclusive advantages arising to individuals from a pious education are truly inestimable. The recollection of a life entirely devoted to the service of God must at any period of it give an inexpressible satisfaction; must fill the soul with that divine peace, which the world can neither give nor take away. The grief, anxiety, and sorrow, which are the necessary attendants of deep repentance, will hardly be

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known

† Pſal. cxxviii. 4

known to him, who has spent the chief part of his life in well-doing. Having endeavoured to have " a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men," the good and wise amongst mankind will be his constant and sincere friends. And when that good Providence, who has been his continual guide and protector upon earth, shall be pleased to deprive the world of so great a blessing and treasure, he will gladly and cheerfully obey the call, knowing that to die will be his greatest gain, as death will open to him the door to everlasting life, where he shall enjoy, in complete bliss, the presence of his blessed Creator and Redeemer, for ever and ever.

As such would be the certain consequences of an universal compliance with the advice of Solomon in my text, no less than a general reformation of manners; let me seriously recommend it to you, my brethren, as you regard the good of your country, the honour and welfare of your families, and your own salvation, to promote by your riches, by your mental abilities, and by every other mean that lies in your power, the pious and religious education of every child within your  
 respective