

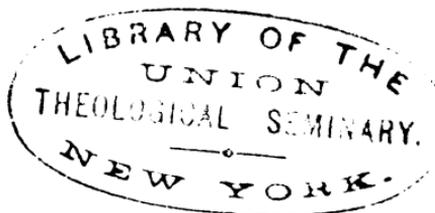
TIMELY TOPICS.

POLITICAL, BIBLICAL, ETHICAL, PRACTICAL.

DISCUSSED

BY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS, PROFESSORS AND EMINENT
WRITERS OF OUR TIME.

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SOURCES OF MORALS.

BY PRESIDENT W. M. BLACKBURN, D.D., PIERRE UNIVERSITY, DAKOTA.

THE revived demand for an education that will make good citizens has become a movement. In it is the assumption that moral teaching should have a place in every school, for the school itself, and for the later life of every pupil in society and in the State. The capacity of the child for moral ideas is admitted: they are readily received and understood when the method of teaching is wisely adapted to the moral powers of the learner. This capacity is large—wonderfully large and vigorous. What great things a little child wants to know!

In her "Lectures to Kindergartners" Miss Peabody relates certain very interesting experiments, showing that a little child craves great truths and finds delight in the knowledge of God as the good Friend, Father, Creator and First Cause. She makes this fact the mainspring of moral teaching, and goes even farther in saying "The true method of the intellect is the perpetual gift of a very present God, as much as the true method of the heart and soul."

How make this capacity a moral energy? Not solely through the emotions or feelings, for they alone do not work, conviction strong and lasting. The affections may not become a directing moral force. Love is not law although it may lead to obedience when a right law is made known.

Nor does this moral receptivity lie entirely in the realm of intellect. The moral truth should be reasonable and rationally taught. And yet the sweetest reasonableness alone will not assure duty. "You know better" is a common rebuke to the disobedient.

This receptive power is more nearly in the domain of will

There is no real morality without will—voluntariness, intention, purpose. "I did not mean to" is a child's excuse, as if non-intention were a justifying plea. Yet it is not the equivalent of "I meant not to," or "I meant to avoid the error." We want to see well-meant, well-willed deeds, for the essence of morality is in the intention. How reach the will? Through emotion, affection and reason co-operating and directed to right rules of conduct; that is, trained to obey the right laws of life. We offer, then, these four propositions:

I. Morality requires law. One expression of law is the conscience of the child. Conscientiousness is a high, noble quality in a pupil. Where you find it you expect moral earnestness. But the conscience needs to be awakened in most children, and instructed in all; as an inward law it needs to be revised, rectified and supported by some other form of law more definite and clearly stated. It is not the most trusty source, nor the ultimate standard of morals. Appeal to it always, and with as much emotion, affection and reason as every case may require; but with the appeal awaken or convey the thought of right and just law. To say "Do right" is valueless advice unless your pupils know the elementary law of right. To "put them on honor" effectively you must have an assurance that they have an adequate knowledge of the highest law of honor.

II. Law must have authority: authority to enact it and to enforce it. In morals the supreme authority is God. He has delegated the requisite amount of His authority to every parent, every teacher, and every ruler of men; in others words, the home, the school, and the State are within the dominion of God, and in them all He is the supreme author of morality. Let the teacher wisely, kindly, firmly use his own authority in the public school, with that of the State, and above all point to that of the Good Father and the Great King.

You may go into some land of ancient teachers and literatures, say India, and collect from them excellent precepts for a moral life; precepts admirably and forcibly expressed, setting forth the highest ethical virtues that come within the range of philosophy, poetry, and parable. It has been done, and a volume of them has been published for the schools of an English race. But they have long failed in India to produce the morality they commended. Why? One reason is there was in them no "Thus saith the Lord"—no authority above and beyond the human teacher; nothing to make the precepts royal and imperative to a human soul.

III. Moral law and authority must have definite and imperative expression. Where find it? Do not the Ten Commandments present paternally and royally a summary of all ethical principles and duties? The Bible interprets the Ten Commandments, out of which all others grow. Why should any one object that they are Hebrew—Israelite, Jewish? If so, they are none the worse for that. Their merit is inherent. Their worth is in the gold, apart from the coinage. But they are evidently older than Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, older than any known religious sect or philosophical school; so old that they were the moral law when religion was universal—the unbroken faith of the human race. Their reannouncement on Mount Sinai did not make them peculiarly Hebrew; nor did their reaffirmation by Jesus Christ render them peculiarly Christian. They are as unsectarian as the belief in one supreme God. Elements of them are in every moral system and in the laws of every civilized land. They are the original source of all our moral teachings. They have this advantage over all merely human compends of ethics, a "Thus saith the Lord."

It is a great thing for pupils to tell one another, "The teacher says so." He has a happy moral power over them

when they quote his ethical precepts, refer to his good example, and gracefully admit his rightful authority. The teacher is to them a source of morality. And so is every good book which they are persuaded to read and study, every anecdote that presents a needed, or noble, trait of personal character to the child-mind, every illustration of a social grace and a civic virtue, every line, set in the copy-book, telling of imitable wisdom and excellence. We do not ignore these means of moral guidance ; they are producing good results. And yet, we think it is a greater thing for teacher and pupils to unite in saying of any moral duty, "The Good Father says so"—"God says so"—or "The Bible says so"; for then they appeal to the original source of morals. This is very different from making the Church, or any form of it, or any sect in philosophy, the authority in ethics. It does not put any sort of "sectarianism" into the school-room. It recognizes in some simple, unpretentious way (I am not here saying how) the prime moral law, the Divine Author of it and the Book which contains it.

IV. The teacher of morals cannot afford to ignore a moral religion. It has never been done with safety. The separation of religion from education is a very modern thing. It would have shocked even a pagan in the times of Cyrus, Plato or Seneca. It is now an experiment, only in the earlier stage of its trial, and it has not furnished the evidence that ethics can be maintained without the help of divinely revealed truth. Morality and religion are not identical ; yet morality is a part of religion ; the very part which insures moral conduct, and for this reason it should enter into the teachings of the public school. It is the shortest way to teach ethics, to continue the succession of honest men and women in social life and to assure the safety of the State by the virtues and the votes of good citizens. The well that furnishes water to thirsty pupils is worthy of grateful recognition by the master of the school.