

Education of Children

by J.C. Philpot

Children are their own best educators and should be taught in a way that is adapted to their capacity and taste, using simple, clear language and engaging stories.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:6, Proverbs 22:6, Proverbs 29:17, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21

Topics: "Christian Education", "Parental Responsibility"

Description

J.C. Philpot emphasizes the importance of educating children in a way that is both instructive and entertaining, highlighting how children are their own best educators by being naturally curious and eager to learn. He discusses the significance of writing in a style that captivates children's attention and imparts valuable life lessons without forcing religious beliefs. Philpot also addresses the responsibility of parents in nurturing their children's moral principles and the potential consequences of neglecting their upbringing. He advocates for the creation of a children's Magazine on free-grace principles, free from the errors of Arminianism, to provide wholesome and engaging content for young readers.

Transcript

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A Magazine for children on free-grace principles has long been much needed. Many godly parents would gladly hail a work free, on the one hand, from the errors of Arminianism, and filled, on the other, with matter useful, instructive, and, to a certain extent, entertaining.

Much is said about the proper education of children, and various systems have each their fervent advocates; but how few people seem aware of the fact that children are their own best educators. Take a child but four years old. What an amazing amount of knowledge that child has already acquired, and that almost wholly by his own exertions. Not to speak of the thousands of surrounding objects which it has become acquainted with and can recognize at a glance, it has learned a language. Consider that wonderful feat. Take a man of five and twenty, of cultivated mind and intellect, land him in a boat on the Feejee Islands, or drop him out of a balloon in the middle of Turkey--will that man at the end of four years speak Feejee or Turkish as well as yon little fellow who four years ago gladdened his mother's heart with his first cry, now speaks English? The Basque, a language spoken in the north of Spain, is considered so difficult that it is commonly said there never was an instance of a foreigner's having learned it. But a

Basque child learns it in four years--a feat you could not perform in a lifetime. And all this, besides a thousand other things, the child has learned when seemingly doing nothing but play and amuse itself.

But, of course, as children grow they need what is called education, that is, instruction in the more orderly and mechanical way. Were it possible to go on with nature's plan, the best mode of education would be still the instructor's lips; but as all human knowledge is accumulated in books, to books recourse must be had to give the child the benefit of this heap.

But besides the dull, dry spelling-book, which by learning to read, throws back the gates of the temple of human knowledge, as the difficulties of reading are gradually overcome, and the minds of children open--we speak here, of course, of intelligent children, a very decided minority--books of another class and description than the formal school book begin to attract their attention. No one can watch their engaging ways, or listen to their interesting talk, without perceiving how alive they are to novelty, how peculiarly impressible their minds are, and eager for information, as their constant questioning shows. To feed this mental appetite--we speak here, perhaps, from personal recollection--they pounce upon a fresh book as a thrush upon a worm. See how a child hangs over its new picture-book; how it creeps into the corner--not then the dreaded place of punishment--sits on its little stool, and devours with its eyes the crude and gaudy colored pictures. What efforts it makes to spell out the wondrous adventures of giants and dwarfs, and what implicit confidence it places in those marvelous legends which, as nursery tales, have come down from our Scandinavian sires, and date from periods of unknown antiquity.

Talk of the dulness and inattention of children! See their glistening eyes at the tale of "The Children in the Forest"! How they hate the cruel uncle, and how they love the little robins who covered their bodies with leaves. Or see them listening to the history of little Moses, or of Joseph cast into the pit, and sold by his cruel brethren. How they remember every incident, and what a deep impression these beautiful narratives make on their minds. What a memory, too, they have! So that if you tell them a little tale of the poor lamb that lost its way, and what piteous adventures it met with until restored to its bleating mother, unless you next day repeat the exact incidents in exact order, the monitor on your lap will soon join in chorus with the breathless auditors round your knee in reminding you where your narrative is faulty. How susceptible, again, they are to little pieces of poetry. Not to mention the absurd nursery rhymes, which, absurd as they are, so hit the taste and capacity of children, that they are sung alike to little fur-clad Lord John in the duke's carriage, and to little barefooted Joe in the laborer's chimney corner--not to dwell on such nursery rhymes, how comes it to pass that such infantile poems as "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," have such universal currency? There must be something peculiarly adapted to the mind of children in these and similar pieces, to make them so widely known and so universally popular.

It is evident, then, that there is a style of writing adapted to the capacity and taste of children, and it is equally evident that unless the secret of this style is got at and got into, you may write until the world is in a blaze, but you will never get children to read, understand, or care one rush for your books. Many can write for adults, but there is not one in a thousand, nor perhaps in a hundred thousand, who can write for children. It is not merely the language which must be adapted to their comprehension, and this must be good old Saxon English, such as the translators of the Bible and Bunyan used; nor is it merely the absence of all abstract terms and arguments, and of everything dull and prosing, but there must be the presence of that lively, engaging, and interesting manner and matter which at once arrests the attention, and while it interests, informs the mind.

Grace, we know, is supernatural, the special gift of God, and therefore is so far out of the question; but the minds of children are, for the most part, exceedingly plastic and open to impression. How well we remember the events and circumstances of childhood. Our native place, the house we were born and bred in, the fields in which we sported, the hedges where we gathered primroses and violets, the school we went to, with the schoolmaster and schoolboys--why are all these well-known scenes so deeply engraved in our memory? why do they revisit us in our dreams and can never be forgotten while life remains? Does not all this prove the plastic nature of childhood--that as the Egyptian or Assyrian bricks, after three or four thousand years, still bear the impression of the moulder's fingers, so our memory still, for the same reason, shows the prints of our childish feet, simply because the clay was then soft and wet? Should not occasion, then, be taken to imprint on this soft, plastic clay, life-lessons?

Religion, in the high, the only true sense of the word, we cannot teach children. To worship God in spirit and in truth must be the alone work of the Spirit; and as without faith it is impossible to please God, and faith is his special gift, the manmade prayers of unbelieving children cannot be pleasing in his sight. But why should not the nicest principles of honor, truthfulness, generosity, kindness, industry, and the strictest morality be inculcated? And without ever leading them to hypocrisy or false profession, why should not such fundamental truths as the holiness and justice of God, the strictness and curse of the law, salvation by grace, pardon and acceptance only through the blood of Christ, the necessity and nature of the new birth be laid before them?

Though it was not so with us, yet, from the testimony of others, we believe there are many instances where the Lord begins to work on the conscience in childhood, or at least early youth. Is it wise, no, more, is it merciful or consistent with godliness, rudely and roughly to crush all tender buddings of what may prove real grace for fear of hypocrisy? Holding with the firmest hand and feeling ourselves most deeply the thorough fall of man and the helplessness of the creature, need we be ever dinning in their ears, "Ah! you can do nothing"? Are we so afraid of making them Pharisees, that we would sooner see them Antinomians? They will learn soon enough they can do nothing. The fear is, lest like thousands they learn too soon to abuse the doctrine of human helplessness to sin the more eagerly.

It has often been remarked, and few things have brought greater reproach on the truth, that the children of professing parents often exceed all others in wickedness. In some cases this will happen whatever amount of the tenderest care has been shown, but it is often the result of the parents' own carelessness and neglect, if not worse. Retribution forms a part of God's moral government; and as parents sow they will often reap.

We are perhaps wandering from our subject; but our purpose is to show that there is abundant room for a periodical for children, and our hints may serve to point out what, in our opinion, a child's Magazine should be. Children are very fond of having a little book which they may call their own. And if they pay for it themselves, it is all the more prized. How disappointed they are if their little Magazine does not come on the first of the month. And what journeys they will take to the bookseller's to inquire if it is arrived. All this shows that children will read periodicals adapted to their capacity and taste.

There are several children's Magazines which embrace a fair amount of useful and entertaining instruction; but the dead fly of Arminianism sadly taints their ointment. Could we, then, have a periodical filled with all their good matter and free from their bad, it would indeed be an acquisition. The need of it is certainly felt in the churches.

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