

The Education of Children

by Cotton Mather

An Address

Sirs!

A Little Book to assist, The Education of Children, is now in your Hands. But can they be well Educated, if their Parents never send them to SCHOOL? This is a point that seems now to call for some Inculcation.

A Good School deserves to be call'd, the very Salt of the Town, that hath it: And the Pastors of every Town are under peculiar obligations to make this a part of their Pastoral Care, That they may have a Good School, in their Neighbourhood.

A woeful putrefaction threatens the Rising Generation; Barbarous Ignorance, and the unavoidable consequence of it, Outrageous Wickedness will make the Rising Generation Loathsome, if it have not Schools to preserve it.

But Schools, wherein the Youth may by able Masters be Taught the Things that are necessary to qualify them for future Serviceableness, and have their Manners therewithal well-formed under a Laudable Discipline, and be over and above Well-Catechised in the principles of Religion, Those would be a Glory of our Land, and the preservatives of all other Glory.

The Minster that shall give his Neighbours No Rest, unto they have agreeable Schools among them, and that shall himself also at some Times inspect and Visit the Schools, will therein do much towards Fulfilling that part of his Ministry, Feed my Lambs; and his Neighbours under his Charge will (whatever they think of it!) have cause to Bless God, for this Expression of his Faithfulness.

But these are not the only persons to whom this matter belongs; The Civil Authority, and the whole Vicinity cannot be True to their own Interest, if they do not say, We also will be with thee.

When the REFORMATION began in Europe an hundred and fourscore years ago, to Erect Schools everywhere was one principal concern of the Glorious and Heroic Reformers; and it was a common thing even for Little Villages of Twenty or Thirty Families, in the midst of all their Charges, and their Dangers, to maintain one of them.

The Colonies of New England were planted on the Design of pursuing that Holy Reformation; and now the Devil cannot give a greater Blow to the Reformation among us, than by causing Schools to Languish under Discouragements.

If our General Courts decline to contrive and provide Laws for the Support of Schools; or if particular Towns Employ their Wits, for Cheats to Elude the wholesome Laws; little do they consider how much they expose themselves to that Rebuke of God, Thou hast destroyed thyself, O New England.

Would we Read, in the ancient Histories, how zealous the more discreet Pagans were to maintain Schools among them; it might put us Christians to the Blush, among whom 'tis common for Schools to starve and sink; and a mind sordidly covetous, Withholds more than is meet, but it tends unto what is Infinitely worse than poverty.

Sirs, What will be the Issue of these Things The Issue will be, That, Si Ecclesia desideret pastorem, facilius Impostorem, inveniet quam pastorem; Et Res publica pro Doctore Juris, Juris Tortorem; Et pro medicis, mendici, pro praeceptoribus, Deceptores sese offerent.

But least through the Want of Schools, there should in a little while be scarce one man in a place able to construe this Description of the Fate following upon that want, I will transcribe in plain English, the first Article of the Prognostications upon the Future State of New England, lately published:

"Where [Godly] Schools are not vigorously and Honourable Encouraged, whole Colonies will sink apace; into a Degenerate and Contemptible Condition, and at last become horribly Barbarous:

And the first Instance of their Barbarity will be, that they will be undone for want of men, but not see and own what it was that undid them." You will therefore pardon my Freedom with you, if I Address you, in the words of Luther:

"If ever there be any Considerable Blow given to the Devil's Kingdom, it must be, by Youth Excellently Educated. It is a serious Thing, a weighty Thing, and a thing that hath much of the Interest of Christ, and of Christianity in it, that Youth be well-trained up, and that Schools, and School-Masters be maintained. Learning is an unwelcome guest to the Devil, and therefore he would fain starve it out."

But we shall never long retain the Gospel, without the help of Learning. And if we should have no Regard unto religion, even the outward prosperity of a people, in this World would necessarily require Schools and Learned. Alas, that none are carried with Alacrity and Seriousness to take care for the Education of Youth and to Help the World with Eminent and Able men."

But the Freedom with which this Address is made unto you, is not so great as the Fervour that has animated it. My Fathers and Brethren, If you have any Love to God and Christ and Posterity; let [Godly] Schools be more Encouraged.

If you would not betray your Posterity into the very Circumstances of Savages, let Schools have more Encouragement. But in the Anguish, the Despair of Success to be otherwise found by this Address, I will Turn it from you unto the Almighty Hearer of Prayer.

And, O thou Saviour, and Shepherd of Thy New-English Israel: Be Entreated Mercifully to look down upon they Flocks in the Wilderness. Oh, give us not up to the Blindness and Madness of neglecting the Lambs in the Flocks. Inspire thy People, and all Orders of men among thy People with a just care for the Education of Posterity. Let Well-Ordered and well-instructed and well-maintained Schools, be the Honour and the Defence of our Land. Let Learning, and all the Helps and Means of it, be precious in our Esteem and by Learning, let the Interests of thy Gospel so prevail, that we may be made wise unto Salvation. Save us, O our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Save us from the Mischiefs and Scandals of an Uncultivated Offspring; Let this be a Land of Light, unto Thou, O Sun of Righteousness, do Thyself arise unto the World with Healing in thy Wings. Amen.

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