



CHAPTER VIII.

EDUCATION.

IT may justly be a subject of wonder, how a nation without a written code of laws or system of jurisprudence, without any form or constitution of government, and without even a single elective or hereditary magistrate, can subsist together in peace and harmony, and in the exercise of the moral virtues; how a people can be well and effectually governed without any external authority; by the mere force of the ascendancy which men of superior minds have over those of a more ordinary stamp; by a tacit, yet universal submission to the aristocracy of experience, talents and virtue! Such, nevertheless, is the spectacle which an Indian nation exhibits to the eye of a stranger. I have been a witness to it for a long series of years, and after much observation and reflection to discover the cause of this phenomenon, I think I have reason to be satisfied that it is in a great degree to be ascribed to the pains which the Indians take to instill at an early age honest and virtuous principles upon the minds of their children, and to the method which they pursue in educating them. This method I will not call a system; for systems are unknown to these sons of nature, who, by following alone her simple dictates, have at once discovered and follow without effort that plain obvious path which the philosophers of Europe have been so long in search of.

The first step that parents take towards the education of their children, is to prepare them for future happiness, by impressing upon their tender minds, that they are indebted for their exist-

ence to a great, good and benevolent Spirit, who not only has given them life, but has ordained them for certain great purposes. That he has given them a fertile extensive country well stocked with game of every kind for their subsistence, and that by one of his inferior spirits he has also sent down to them from above corn, pumpkins, squashes, beans and other vegetables for their nourishment; all which blessings their ancestors have enjoyed for a great number of ages. That this great Spirit looks down upon the Indians, to see whether they are grateful to him and make him a due return for the many benefits he has bestowed, and therefore that it is their duty to show their thankfulness by worshipping him, and doing that which is pleasing in his sight.

This is in substance the first lesson taught, and from time to time repeated to the Indian children, which naturally leads them to reflect and gradually to understand that a being which hath done such great things for them, and all to make them happy, must be good indeed, and that it is surely their duty to do something that will please him. They are then told that their ancestors, who received all this from the hands of the great Spirit, and lived in the enjoyment of it, must have been informed of what would be most pleasing to this good being, and of the manner in which his favour could be most surely obtained, and they are directed to look up for instruction to those who know all this, to learn from them, and revere them for their wisdom and the knowledge which they possess; this creates in the children a strong sentiment of respect for their elders, and a desire to follow their advice and example. Their young ambition is then excited by telling them that they were made the superiors of all other creatures, and are to have power over them; great pains are taken to make this feeling take an early root, and it becomes in fact their ruling passion through life; for no pains are spared to instill into them that by following the advice of the most admired and extolled hunter, trapper or warrior, they will at a future day acquire a degree of fame and reputation, equal to that which he possesses; that by submitting to the counsels of the aged, the chiefs, the men superior in wisdom, they may also rise to glory, and be called *Wisemen*, an honourable title, to which no Indian is indifferent. They are

finally told that if they respect the aged and infirm, and are kind and obliging to them, they will be treated in the same manner when their turn comes to feel the infirmities of old age.

When this first and most important lesson is thought to be sufficiently impressed upon children's minds, the parents next proceed to make them sensible of the distinction between good and evil; they tell them that there are good actions and bad actions, both equally open to them to do or commit; that good acts are pleasing to the good Spirit which gave them their existence, and that on the contrary, all that is bad proceeds from the bad spirit who has given them nothing, and who cannot give them any thing that is good, because he has it not, and therefore he envies them that which they have received from the good Spirit, who is far superior to the bad one.

This introductory lesson, if it may be so called, naturally makes them wish to know what is good and what is bad. This the parent teaches him in his own way, that is to say, in the way in which he was himself taught by his own parents. It is not the lesson of an hour nor of a day, it is rather a long course more of practical than of theoretical instruction, a lesson, which is not repeated at stated seasons or times, but which is shewn, pointed out, and demonstrated to the child, not only by those under whose immediate guardianship he is, but by the whole community, who consider themselves alike interested in the direction to be given to the rising generation.

When this instruction is given in the form of precepts, it must not be supposed that it is done in an authoritative or forbidding tone, but, on the contrary, in the gentlest and most persuasive manner: nor is the parent's authority ever supported by harsh or compulsive means; no whips, no punishments, no threats are even used to enforce commands or compel obedience. The child's *pride* is the feeling to which an appeal is made, which proves successful in almost every instance. A father needs only to say in the presence of his children: "I want such a thing done; I want one of my children to go upon such an errand; let me see who is the *good* child that will do it!" This word *good* operates, as it were, by magic, and the children immediately vie with each other to comply with the wishes of their parent.

If a father sees an old decrepid man or woman pass by, led along by a child, he will draw the attention of his own children to the object by saying: "What a *good* child that must be, which pays such attention to the aged! That child, indeed, looks forward to the time when it will likewise be old!" or he will say, "May the great Spirit, who looks upon him, grant this *good* child a long life!"

In this manner of bringing up children, the parents, as I have already said, are seconded by the whole community. If a child is sent from his father's dwelling to carry a dish of victuals to an aged person, all in the house will join in calling him a *good* child. They will ask whose child he is, and on being told, will exclaim: what! has the *Tortoise*, or the *little Bear* (as the father's name may be) got such a *good* child? If a child is seen passing through the streets leading an old decrepid person, the villagers will in his hearing, and to encourage all the other children who may be present to take example from him, call on one another to look on and see what a *good* child that must be. And so, in most instances, this method is resorted to, for the purpose of instructing children in things that are good, proper, or honourable in themselves; while, on the other hand, when a child has committed a *bad* act, the parent will say to him: "O! how grieved I am that my child has done this *bad* act! I hope he will never do so again." This is generally effectual, particularly if said in the presence of others. The whole of the Indian plan of education tends to elevate rather than to depress the mind, and by that means to make determined hunters and fearless warriors.

Thus, when a lad has killed his first game, such as a deer or a bear, parents who have boys growing up will not fail to say to some person in the presence of their own children: "That boy must have listened attentively to the aged hunters, for, though young, he has already given a proof that he will become a good hunter himself." If, on the other hand, a young man should fail of giving such a proof, it will be said of him "that he did not pay attention to the discourses of the aged."

In this indirect manner is instruction on all subjects given to the young people. They are to learn the arts of hunting, trap-

ping, and making war, by listening to the aged when conversing together on those subjects, each, in his turn, relating how he acted, and opportunities are afforded to them for that purpose. By this mode of instructing youth, their respect for the aged is kept alive, and it is increased by the reflection that the same respect will be paid to them at a future day, when young persons will be attentive to what they shall relate.

This method of conveying instruction is, I believe, common to most Indian nations ; it is so, at least, amongst all those that I have become acquainted with, and lays the foundation for that voluntary submission to their chiefs, for which they are so remarkable. Thus has been maintained for ages, without convulsions and without civil discords, this traditional government, of which the world, perhaps, does not offer another example ; a government in which there are no positive laws, but only long established habits and customs, no code of jurisprudence, but the experience of former times, no magistrates, but advisers, to whom the people, nevertheless, pay a willing and implicit obedience, in which age confers rank, wisdom gives power, and moral goodness secures a title to universal respect. All this seems to be effected by the simple means of an excellent mode of education, by which a strong attachment to ancient customs, respect for age, and the love of virtue are indelibly impressed upon the minds of youth, so that these impressions acquire strength as time pursues its course, and as they pass through successive generations.

