

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Moral Culture

Revd W. MURRAY

In previous numbers of this Magazine, attention has been drawn to the necessity and advantages of intellectual and physical culture. It is true that no one who wishes to exhibit the usefulness and taste the happiness of life to the full can afford to under-estimate the value of these two things. But another subject occupies a position of equal, if not of greater, importance in human life, and should also receive adequate attention, namely, *Moral Culture*.

The mistake which many advocates of culture make is that they limit it to the sphere of the intellect, notwithstanding the abundant evidence of history to shew that in the long run, happiness and usefulness accompany moral rather than intellectual power. Indeed, the moral nature stands related to the other parts of human culture as a foundation does to a building, or the principles of a concern to its methods. It controls their use, and determines their value. A working man requires not only tool, but a knowledge of how to use them: and in ordinary life, the mind and the body are tools used by the will, and the direction of the will belongs to the realm of the moral nature. Moral culture is therefore an element of our life second to none in importance.

Shakespeare has taught us this lesson by the character of Iago. Iago is a man whose intellect is as sharp as a needle in framing policies and in reading the feelings and motives of his neighbours: but he has no moral feeling to regulate the power of his mind. His own success means failure and pain to others: and he is exhibited to the world as little better than a dangerous brute, a consummate villain, a curse to his fellows, and a blot on the page of human progress and happiness. Let every one therefore set himself to acquire not only a *sound mind* and a *sound body*, but also a *sound moral nature*. Let him set before himself as one of the great duties of life, culture in pure and noble feelings in himself, and in unselfish and manly dealings with his neighbour.

Morality and religion lie very close to each other both in thought and experience. To the great majority of people, moral questions resolve themselves ultimately into religious questions. Religion seems to add necessary force to the principles of morality. Moreover, the evidence of history tends to shew that the loss of religious faith among the people has never

been a sign of increasing moral vitality. So that there is some ground for believing religion to be the root from which morality, like a flower, grows. On the other hand, it is true that morality has been studied, taught and developed, without constant reference to the religious subjects of man's nature, destiny, and obligation which lie at its root. Some religious beliefs have also at times been even a hindrance to a pure morality. And these things have appeared to justify a belief that morality and religion are wholly independent of each other. We, probably, come nearest to the truth when we suppose religion and morality to be both of them necessary elements in human nature: to have each a sphere of its own: and to be each a help or a hindrance to the other. They set and re-act on each other. The highest manhood would then content in possessing both religion and morality of a pure and undefiled character.

The laws of moral living may be gathered to a point in the one word *Sympathy*. Confucius said that the great rule of life was reciprocity: and Christ commended the same in still simpler language when he urged men to love their neighbours as themselves, and to do to others as they would that others should do to them. It is plainly evident that the popular creed of the world, which sanctions selfishness and is embodied in the maxim often quoted "every man for himself," is in direct opposition to the moral teaching which these great teachers have given to Chinese and European alike. Now, just as ignorance makes intellectual, culture necessary, and disease physical culture: so the low standards of the world prove the need of more careful attention being bestowed upon the subject of moral culture by every one.

Moral culture teaches us to look to the welfare of others as well as ourselves. It forbids a man succeeding at the expense of his neighbour. It teaches him to respect both himself and others. Its aim is to secure not private and selfish welfare, but the welfare of the greatest number: in other words, the highest conceivable amount of human pleasure and usefulness. Such an end is surely worthy of the self-sacrificing efforts of every man.

Moral culture, regarded either from a religious or social standpoint lays duties on every one; and these duties may be divided into two classes. First, *duties directly concerning oneself*. If an army is to be maintained efficient, each soldier in it must assist in tending his own health, weapons, and general efficiency. Thus, also, morality in seeking the welfare of the whole world lays on each man a duty of preserving his own life in a healthy condition, and of developing his faculties to the utmost extent of their usefulness. If, on the other hand, he prefers indulgence in drink, opium, social vice, indolence or other courses of life which rather injure health, usefulness, and happiness, he has committed a moral fault, dishonoured his manhood, and deserves the condemnation of his fellowmen, his God, and his own reason. Secondly, *duties to others*. It is impossible, in so short a paper as this, to do justice to the large subject of man's social duties. We must content ourselves by saying that love to one's neighbour as Christ taught, or reciprocity such as Confucius taught places a bann on the unjust treatment of others, whether it be by dishonest business transactions, debt, bribery, or untruthfulness. Moral culture also lays on men duties in several special spheres of life, such as the family, the state, the church, social society, and the business callings in which they are occupied. But all these several duties come under the

one sublime and easily remembered law of the world's greatest teacher in morality and religion: "*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*" Let the practice of this precept be placed on a level with every effort towards intellectual and physical perfection, that the happiness and progress of the world may be secured.

Sources: *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1897: 127-129