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SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR
MORAL BETTERMENT

BY
PATTERSON WARDLAW

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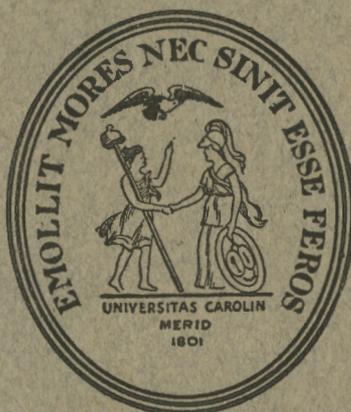
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ISSUED SEMI-MONTHLY
BY THE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION DIVISION

No. 173

December 15, 1925

COLUMBIA, S. C.
Second Class Mail Matter



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SUMMER SESSION

**For Superintendents, Principals, and High School
Teachers**

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR
MORAL BETTERMENT

BY
PATTERSON WARDLAW



(SECOND EDITION)

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
EXTENSION DIVISION
1925

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR
MORAL BETTERMENT

BATTERSON BANCROFT



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
54 EAST LAKE STREET
CHICAGO, ILL. U.S.A.

FOREWORD

Dr. Wardlaw's "Suggestions for Moral Betterment," originally issued as a bulletin of the University of South Carolina in October, 1915, is again presented, slightly revised, to the public by the University because it is felt that its message to the citizenship of the State is still of value. Suggestions for moral betterment are always timely.

It is hoped that this bulletin may be of service to the people of South Carolina in directing their thoughts toward the improvement of social and moral conditions. Character building ought to receive the serious attention of any people.

ORIN F. CROW, Acting Director,
University Extension Division.

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OSCAR F. LEWIS, Acting Director
University Extension Division

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MORAL BETTERMENT

Some of us remember Dr. Mitchell's story about the remark of a wise old Mississippian. One of those useful but boring people, the statistics-mongers, was retailing to him the number of houses in Mississippi, of the various kinds and degrees of comfort. Finally the old gentleman observed, "It doesn't make so much difference what kind of houses people live in as what kind of people live in the houses." That is the heart of the whole matter. "What kind of people?" is the one question of which our other problems are just parts.

I have no patent specifics to offer, but shall simply try to recall some of the more obvious truths of moral sanitation. Nor am I trying to discuss moral education as ordinarily understood. The question before us is, What can we, as citizens of the State, as members of society, as well-wishers of our race, do toward having the right kind of people in the world—toward cultivating right character?

Need I remind you that the urgency is especially acute just now? "Do you realize," says an advertizement, "that you have lived to see more changes than were seen by all those who lived hundreds of years before you?" The mere rapidity of the change is sufficiently dizzying, but the rapidity is not the chief feature. We are changing into a world that is vastly complex: the tax upon intelligence is staggering. We are acquiring powers over nature, appalling powers to destroy self and others, which call for an amount of self-control that the world has not heretofore needed. It is as if children were put in charge of passenger trains. Whether we shall have real democracy or its boss-led counterfeit, the masses will be keenly conscious of their power and act according to their own character. And, in the face of all this, the old restraints from evil, the old motives

to good are fast becoming decrepit. Joseph LeConte says somewhere that, thru climatic or other changes in a land-area, nature says to a species, "Here is an opportunity for higher development. Adapt or die!" The present seems a corresponding epoch in human history. Whether we shall adapt or descend is a question of ethical adjustment. The average of society must be made better or get tremendously worse.

I. Powers of Evil

What can we do about it?

Let us look first at the negative side. We can strive against those social disadjustments which cause individual misadjustments: we can fight to get rid of those things that are dragging people down to lower living.

Now it may be objected that man needs temptation to keep him from being a molly-coddle. That is true. I do not wish to rid man of temptation. No strong character is developed except by fighting and conquering it. But, when the powers of evil get so strong that human nature has not a fighting chance, then it is time to put an end to those powers. You might as well say that Belgium, in order to develop her strength, needed to be left to the tender mercies of German *kultur*. The principle is this: Temptation in itself is neither good nor bad for character. Overcoming temptation produces strength: being overcome by it produces weakness.

What are some of the most serious obstacles to straight living?

THE THREE FURIES

Probably the first evil to occur to your minds is the danger of drink. I shall say less about that, not because I underrate the evil, but because almost everything has been said on the subject that can be said.

I do believe that one of our most urgent duties is to create a sentiment against drinking—and that for two reasons. First, it is a dangerous practice. This sounds old, but it gains new strength every year. If self-control was difficult and important in 1914, it is arduous and imperative in 1926. And then, apart from this, contempt for law is bad—perilously, deplorably bad. We should turn public sentiment against the silly assumption that to break the prohibition law is an evidence of smartness or of superior social standing. Two giant menaces to civilization are lawlessness abroad—war—and lawlessness at home.

What can we do about gambling? We can at least work for the enforcement of the laws. But we must go deeper. Underlying it all is a general conception, a habit of thinking, which needs to be choked out, root and branch. It is the notion that it is admirable to get something for nothing, to win by wit rather than by service. It is the “get-rich-quick” itch. You can expect to have it in sport so long as it is so widely tolerated in business. Gambling on goods is as bad as gambling on a game—or worse. Every just man ought to strive to hasten that state of public opinion in which it will be disreputable to gain money except for service actually rendered. Only then will you be striking at the real root of gambling. Are there not businesses right here in Columbia which would lose their respectability if the test were applied? Is it not a reasonable test?

Probably the most frightful peril to our social welfare is the sex evil. Yet when we undertake to check it we meet tremendous difficulties on every hand.

I do not believe in licenst segregation. I know that we shall be told that you cannot make men good by legislation. That is true in what it literally says, but it is not true in what it implies. You cannot by legislation make men good, but you can legislate to stop other people

from causing them to be bad. You can't make them healthy by legislation, but you can legislate to quarantine against disease. Whenever any vice is not permitted to win or lose by its own unaided attractiveness, whenever powerful interests combine for gain and deliberately plot to make vice artificially irresistible, whenever the hunted youth cannot, if he will, keep out of the meshes of its net, then society has a right to act in its own defense and smite those interests as criminal. Vice is an offense against morals, but a conspiracy to promote vice may become a crime against society.

But greatly more important than the law is public sentiment. The fight must be on to the death against the heresy of the double standard of morality.

Young people and the public must have information; but let it be given temperately and modestly, and not by lecturers who enjoy tickling the ears of audiences with prurient topics. There is such a thing, let it be remembered, as over-exciting the sex-consciousness.

But let us look more broadly. Our standards of living and our ideals of life are coming more and more under the control of a conception which is a falsehood, because it contradicts one of the biggest facts of human nature. More and more is it assumed that the single life is the normal life. More and more are wages, standards of living, and plans of life becoming such as are possible ordinarily only to the single man. All this is a tremendous fiction. You cannot drive out nature. If you try, she will come back with her own avenging pitch-fork. I venture to lay down the thesis that the attempt to disregard or crush out any one of the great elemental instincts is almost certain, in the long run, to derange character. The sex instinct is one of the three or four most fundamental forces in our constitution. That so large a part of our life is lived and planned and euphemized on the assumption that that does not exist which

is indeed one of the realest facts of human experience is as false as the plan for the third story of a house without provision for the second.

I am not speaking of individual cases. I know that there are splendid men who live the single life from economic prudence or from high devotion to duty; and them I honor. But it will do no harm to speak plainly about the general average. Whenever a large proportion of men are single, whenever a large proportion of youth expect to remain single, intelligent people know what the result is going to be. This ideal needs sorely to be corrected. Any thing which puts marriage out of the question for the young man, any extravagance which increases the difficulty of supporting a family is a social evil of the first magnitude.

I might digress a moment to remark on the eugenic application of this. Is not the present situation admirably planned to promote the survival of the improvident?

Perhaps my general attitude needs a little clearer defining. There are two antipodal systems of conduct. The first is animalism. It consists in unbridled indulgence of the animal appetites. The natural reaction against that has been asceticism, which arose in various ages and races and probably in all the higher religions. It believed in killing the animal appetites for the sake of the spiritual life. It was immensely worthier than its rival, for who would not rather be even Simeon Stylites than a hog? But it is not necessary to be either. The true view is that the best character-culture finds a legitimate place in life for every one of the great elemental instincts, those which we call higher attaining their fullest development only when rooted in the more fundamental. Of course the more animal instincts need to be put under the control of the more rational. For that purpose, some repression is necessary, but greatly preferable, when possible, is transformation—that is, developing the instinct into its higher forms.

And so the way to fight the sex-evil is not to kill the instinct, but to elevate and ennoble it. "Not until you fill a man's heart with a genuine love for woman", says President Hyde, "can you lift him above the temptation of its cruel and beastly counterfeit." Just to the extent that we can idealize man's love to woman, just to the extent that we can restore and increase the true romance of the sexes, just to that extent can we overcome this frightful evil. Romance is not merely a graceful ornament of life: it is a necessity of truly human living. The way to fight the beastly is to exalt the human.

HURTFUL CUSTOMS

There are certain social customs that hurt character.

A large portion of wrong living comes from extravagance. Now I do not favor either miserliness or asceticism. I believe in a comfortable and elegant enjoyment of the good things of life if one can honestly afford it. But, except for necessity, to spend up to one's income is a criminal neglect of the future: to go beyond it is simply dishonesty. The spending tempts to all sorts of vices; the getting is a great temptation to crime. How many have gone wrong as a result of fast living!

The practise breeds endless suffering. Think of the legions of men and women, each of whose lives has become one long, cheerless, hopeless toil—all in the frantic struggle to keep up with the procession, all to meet the demands of a foolishly extravagant standard of living. Every one who indulges in that extravagance makes it harder for the other man to get along.

The cruelest form of this extravagance is the offensive display of wealth. Of course it is right to use one's money for the enjoyment of comfort and beauty; but when it is spent, not for comfort and beauty, but to make the man who has not feel his inferiority, then it is

unkind—it is inhumane. It is this display that is fomenting the growing discontent of the less fortunate section of the people. Moreover it is this extravagance particularly that incites to still further extravagance.

The mere tyranny of certain customs is demoralizing by virtue of the slavishness and insincerity that it produces. Take Christmas giving. It was a beautiful practise so long as it was free and spontaneous. But whenever one gives, not because he loves to, but because he must, then two evils happen; the man becomes to that extent a slave, and a beautiful custom has lost its significance. The same thing is illustrated by funeral extravagances. Other examples are the matter-of-course compliment, the facile pious phrase; the compulsion, on those who cannot afford, to compete with those who can, in the barbaric ostentation of commencement presents. It is further exemplified by the practise of calling on men in public gatherings, each to say how much he will subscribe to a cause. When, in these circumstances, one subscribes, not for the sake of the cause, but because he dares not refuse, then he is robbed both of his money and of his liberty. Often one renders a real public service by refusing to be coerced in such a manner.

I know that, as our civilization becomes more complex, there must be increasingly numerous surrenders of the right of individual decision for the sake of the common good (which should really mean greater individual liberty in other directions), but that is itself a reason why those liberties which do not conflict with the common good should be the more carefully guarded. The preservation of a remnant who think independently (for the sake, not of being odd, but of being honest) is the saving salt which alone will prevent rational government by the people from decaying into government by the many-headed, one-minded beast, the mob.

Now I do not advise any body to be a crank unnecessarily, but I do believe that every reasonable man may do real good by setting his whole influence against this too prevalent habit of sheepliness.

BLINDNESS OF MIND

The next of the forces of evil that I shall mention is ignorance. Ignorant people are not necessarily bad, but they are the favorite tools in the hands of bad men. Under present-day conditions, an ignorant population is almost sure to be without real liberty. The very life of South Carolina as a free state depends on removing the ignorance which holds her in chains. There is no finer opportunity for missionary achievement than for a young man to consecrate his career to the humble work of teaching in South Carolina.

Yet the fight is not merely against ignorance of letters, but especially against unreason. The arduous mission of the school is to work towards substituting reasonableness as a standard of acting, in place of passion, prejudice, tradition, and blind obedience to either the elite or the multitude.

THE STATE AS A SCHOOL

But there are schools and other schools. In our government itself, there are forces which are educating men to wrong. The State very properly spends thousands and thousands of dollars on education; but what she is building with her right hand she is, in many instances, tearing down faster with her left. Just as ministers seem sometimes to forget that religion is greater than the church, so we teachers may need to be reminded that education is bigger than the schools. We are too prone to overlook the fact that the two strongest educators are habit and imitation. People are educated vastly more

by what they *do* than by what they are told. "Everybody's doing it" is a more effective argument than "You ought to do it."

Take, for instance, the tax system. South Carolina, in her method of returning taxes, is an expert educator of liars. The State compels you to take an oath that you have returned your property at what you honestly believe to be the market value: yet every informed person knows that a man who honestly returns his property at full value pays three or four times as much as others pay for equivalent property. Even the officials sneer at you. The State of South Carolina, thru its tax system—or, if you prefer, the people thru the practise which that system has bred—says to the citizen, "If you dare to tell the truth about your property, I will fine you by a tax out of all proportion to that of your neighbors, and then I will see that you get well laughed-at for a fool." Our statesmen wish to reform our tax-laws because of their failure as tax-laws; but of vastly greater significance is their success as a means of undermining rectitude.

What great schools our courts are! Every righteous decision is more powerful than a lecture on justice. On the other hand, every time a jury renders an unjust verdict, it gives a lesson in toleration of crime, a lesson in contempt for law that scores of school lessons cannot unteach. What worse thing can happen to a people than a general break-down of confidence in justice?

This dangerous sentiment of contempt for law is tremendously fostered by the almost universal practise of passing laws which are not enforced and are not intended to be enforced. Law—that is real law—is not advising people what they ought to do, but telling them what they have got to do. Its neglect rouses contempt for law in general and trains in the habit of law-breaking. One of our greatest evils is the spirit of lawlessness, and the greatest teacher of lawlessness is a disregarded law.

If, as seems to be widely felt, our whole penal system has ceased to be truly representative of the conscience of the people, then both system and conscience must suffer very sorely. Have we not seen evidences of both?

Truly the State is deep in the business of education—and compulsory education at that! Yet the people thinks that its duty to education is done when the schools are properly cared for. It is like the man who, boasting of his zeal for health because he employs a doctor, permits his children to live in contempt of hygiene and in constant exposure to infection.

Of course, it is not necessary to remind you of graft; but there is an aspect of it that is not sufficiently appreciated. To get corruption into the government of a commonwealth is calamitous to the government; but much worse is the result in the minds of the young. Whenever high positions are held by bad men, society is saying in effect to its youth, "The nice moral lessons that we give you don't really count: these are the men that we delight to honor!"

NOW AS TO OUR ECONOMIC LIFE

Perhaps no special group of men or of institutions is to blame; but it is undeniable that large and increasing numbers of our fellow-men feel that they are not getting a fair deal in the distribution of the world's wealth. A great army of salaried men, after years of faithful service, stand facing an old age of destitution. We hear of men who, in spite of grinding toil—or worse, for lack of opportunity to toil—must experience that bitter hell on earth, the unavailing cry of their children for bread. We hear of young womanhood working and worrying and starving their lives out at from three to seven dollars a week. And gentlemen have actually been discussing in what ratio of cases a woman must sell her virtue in order to live. We are told of the bitter despair that

drives out of men's hearts love for man and faith in God. Is not something wrong somewhere?

Now I am no economist, and I would not presume to offer a solution of this problem; but this much is clear: The prevalence of such a belief will prove to be one of the greatest forces for the worsening of men on both sides of the controversy. It behooves, then, all who crave the betterment of men to look fairly into this thing; if the grounds of discontent are real, to remove them; if they are untrue, to find some means of bringing about a better understanding.

Perhaps this is the fundamental thing to be altered. It is probably true that, as an individual, so in society, the first step toward the higher life is the removal of the physical disorders which make such a life impossible.

II. Forces for Good

We have been talking about fighting the things that make men crooked, but we must find something that will help to get them straight. It is not enough to clear the rocks from your track; you must put on some steam. And so we need to get something into men's lives that will give a positive push in the right direction. What will give that push.

Two things are indispensable.

The first is generous impulses. The more of innocent joy you put into the life of young people, the more sweetness will you put into their character. The more of good fellowship they have, save where it leads to wrongdoing, the broader will be the foundation for higher character.

The second indispensable is a high purpose founded on a great hope. How can you expect people not to wander if they have nowhere in particular to go?

In cultivating character, we must take facts as we find them. We must work on men's nature as it is, not as we

think it ought to be. First that which is natural (or biological) and then that which is spiritual: from the fundamental to the accessory: first the animal, then the social, then the religious.

GETTING READY

The starting point is to give to the individual a chance for health and physical comfort. A sick man *may* be good, but he is fighting an up-hill battle. There are housing conditions in Columbia in which it is impossible for anybody short of a saint to live a decent life. Are you going to begin with moral instruction for these people? And so thru scores of illustrations.

Equally important is the provision for healthy, clean, socializing recreation and play. Do you know that, in the large cities especially, they are realizing more and more that one, at least, of the chief causes of crime by young people is the misdirected play activities? What else can you expect? Youth is overflowing with energy, and with play-energy at that. It is going to find some outlet. If it can't get that outlet thru legitimate play, then it will get it somehow else. Among the chief menaces to order in the American city are the gangs of boys, who, because they cannot play without clashing with the officers of the law, are developed into the sworn enemies of the law. And one of the great needs for the purity of life, in the large cities is for the right kinds of opportunity for the social mingling of the young folks. Some of the larger cities are awakening to these facts, and are spending millions of dollars on playgrounds for children. This is the most reasonable remedy. Not that the chance for harmless play will make all children good, but the lack of it will practically force them to be bad. As Miss Jane Addams says, "Recreation is stronger than vice, and recreation alone can stifle the lust for vice."

But it is not as a mere preventiv of evil that play is necessary. It is one of the essential factors in building up human nature. It is needed for the body; it is necessary for the full health of the mind. To the play-spirit we must look for the source of gracefulness and generosity of impulse, for the good-fellowship which is the best raw material of altruism, for the liberty of spirit without which no man is a full-grown person. Play is the soul's declaration of independence. It will soon be realized that adequate provision for decent public recreation is as truly a duty of the authorities as provision for lights, water, and streets. This provision will include, not only play-grounds, but also theaters and other places of amusement, and the whole will be a regular part of the educational system.

A corollary of the foregoing is that there must be reasonable hours of labor. I don't see how any character can be strong or free, that is entirely without leisure.

A SERIOUS START

But generous impulses are not enough. We must implant a purpose—an aim in life. Play implies work, as valleys imply hills. So the next thing that we need to do is to encourage the ambition to acquire property or to achieve a professional career, coupled with the ability and habit of work.

I need not recall that idleness itself rusts out the springs of character, and that idle hands are the devil's cat's-paws. As one large class of youth that get into trouble are those who haven't learned to play right, so another large class are those who haven't learned to work. About the first thing the reformatories do for a boy is to begin to teach him a trade, for they know that the only way of permanently reforming him is to make it possible for him to earn a living. This ability should be a part of the education of every normal child. I know

the usual objection—that schooling should be for culture. It is because I believe so intensely in culture that I want it to have a solid foundation insted of floating cloud-like in the air. Many urge this view for industrial reasons, but it is more important for the sake of character.

But the main benefit is the steadying effect of an aim in life. Aimless living will not hurt a child, but for the adolescent the aimless life is the dangerous life. You can't expect a youth to keep straight unless he has a motiv to guide him. Do you wonder that a boat floats down stream, when there is no steam or sail to take it up? The youth needs the "motive of a life career."

Along with this should go the habit of saving. I need not repeat the remarks about the evils of extravagance or remind you of the war's lessons on the criminality of not laying up for the rainy day. There is, in this country, and especially in the South, an unreasonable prejudice against economy. I am not advocating niggardliness. I believe every youth should divide his income between the uses of the present and provision for the future. But to live a life of indulgence to present whims is to live in the plane of animals, intellectual and moral. The man who has no soul for anything higher than saving money is a slave, indeed, but he is a human slave: he whose soul does not reach beyond the indulgence of the hour is an animal slave. Make such a public opinion that a young man shall not be ashamed to admit that he is willing to save a quarter. School savings banks, postal savings banks, and similar institutions, are worthy of all encouragement. I repeat, then, that your youth must have a motiv if he is to become a man; and a motiv for individual welfare is better than none. It is only an unnatural, and therefore imperfect, ethics that would deny it a place among the legitimate values of life.

AN UPWARD STEP

Yet it is not enough. Every one needs some specific high purpose in life outside of oneself—something bigger and broader than self. And the first step—nature's first step—is the ambition to establish a family.

The homing instinct is as natural to the young man as is the feeding instinct, and almost as needful. It first shows itself in a mere blind attraction of the sexes for each other: they become mutually interesting. One of the greatest safeguards that a youth can have is association with a number of the right kind of young lady friends. Later, next to the power of religion itself, nothing exerts so elevating an influence on a young man's character, nothing so clears it of pettiness, so burns out the brutal and impure, nothing so fills him with noble ideals and strong purpose as his love for some sweet, pure woman, and the aspiration to make himself worthy of her love.

Next the homing instinct asserts itself more consciously and deliberately when it leads to a definite purpose to make a home. This conscious purpose is one of the most steady and uplifting forces than can enter into a young man's life.

Then, too, the natural first step in the cultivation of unselfishness is to exercise it in the family relation. This is true in childhood: it becomes true a second time in maturity. Ordinarily there is nothing that quite takes its place.

Everything, then, that tends to promote (within the limits of prudence) the establishment and success of the home makes for righteousness. I am not now returning to the discussion of the dangers of celibacy, but I refer to the fact that the welfare of the family lies at the foundation of all other social welfare. This great relation touches and influences practically every other relation

A study of the times leaves little doubt that the hunger of mankind is leading it to a great epoch of spiritual realization—probably the greatest since the coming of christianity. The prime need of the world today is a re-discovery of the christianity of Christ.

I have merely scratched the surface of this great question, and that only in little patches. To emphasize the main thoughts which run thru the whole discussion, I will repeat three theses:

1. The attempt to ignore or crush out any of the elemental instincts is almost certain to derange character.

2. Successful character-culture finds a useful function in life for every one of the great elemental instincts, those which we call higher depending, for their fullest development, on the life of the more fundamental.

3. While the chief error of the past has been the ignoring of our fundamental instincts, a vastly greater blunder would be the neglect of the highest laws of our being.

However impotent we are in the face of this great problem, of one thing I am sure—that if a solution is ever found, it will be reached thru recognizing, what has become a platitude in other departments, that human nature, like all other nature, can be controlled only by observing her laws.

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