

**S**tories and Story  
Telling

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STORIES  
AND  
STORY-TELLING

IN  
MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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## INTRODUCTION

MORE and more, in these days, the leaders of educational thought are coming to recognize the significance of nature's informal means of training her children. Modern psychology finds in natural play a more valuable means of education than any pedagogical device ever formulated by a professional teacher, and points out that it is such because it is nature's own, because it leads to expression the mental and physical powers of the child and youth precisely as they mature, and in the exact ways that ages of racial experience have shown to be most valuable to man. So it begins to recognize in story-telling the earliest, the simplest, and so far as moral influence is concerned, the most universally effective means of impressing upon a new generation the lessons that have been learned by those who have gone before.

It has no charm of novelty, but it is only the shallow mind that discredits the old because it is old. Nature is chief of all conservatives. The things that had large influence in shaping man's individual nature or his social customs she never wholly discards. Man's oldest possessions are the really indispensable ones. The traits that served the race in its infancy are the ones that mark the unfolding life of every child, and though they may withdraw themselves from casual notice during the active years of maturity the fact that they again force themselves into prominence in old age and are the last to fail in the final dissolution is evi-

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dence that, unnoticed, they have served their purpose during the intervening years.

Such a place as this story-telling has in the education of the race. Long before teachers or text-books appeared instruction was given in story form to the children who gathered about the mother's knee. Youths, grouped about their elders before the evening camp-fire, thrilled to the story of old deeds of valor and braced their souls to vie with the heroes who had won the admiration of their fathers' fathers. Modern mothers, not knowing why they do it, use the same magic to gain the same ends. The great German prophet of childhood gave the story a large and honored place in the rarely wise and successful institution which he founded. From time to time prophet and sage, preacher and statesman have made it their tool for the shaping of human conduct and character.

So instinct and genius have made it their method in the past. Now, perhaps more consciously and thoughtfully than ever before, teachers are seeking to make it a part of their equipment. In the field of moral and religious education this movement is beginning to be felt, yet not as deeply or as widely as it should be. The Sunday-school, our special institution for moral and religious culture, has not made as large use of the method as has the home and the public school (at least in the kindergarten), and in all three of these institutions what has been attempted has been chiefly with the younger children. With such it is almost the only method to be used. With the older pupils other means of influence are available, but this one never loses its power if it be used with tactful adaptation to changing interests and motives. It has its large place in dealing with the adolescent, and with the adult as well.

These brief chapters have been prepared with the

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desire to aid parents, teachers, and workers in settlements, vacation schools, and less formal agencies of moral education who are as yet unskilled in the use of stories. The instruction given is designedly elementary in its nature, and always keeps in mind the aim of character-building. The plans suggested are offered with less of diffidence because they have been tested in the classroom for a number of years with satisfactory results. More than a few, some of whom had never attempted to tell a story, have under their guidance developed unusual skill as story-tellers, both as entertainers and as teachers.

The writer has sought to acquaint himself with the readily accessible literature of the subject and with the desire to be helpful rather than to be original has availed himself of helpful suggestions wherever he found them. He desires especially to mention his personal indebtedness to Dr. Walter L. Hervey's *Picture Work*. The fact that no adequate discussion of the use of stories for purposes of moral and religious education has yet appeared is sufficient justification of the present modest effort.

The chapters may be read in a few hours, and it is hoped not wholly without profit to those who have already served their apprenticeship. To those who use the book in that way the writer offers no apology for hints at the close of each chapter which savor of the textbook; for beginners, for whom it is especially designed, can not afford to omit study and persistent practise.

Since story-telling always implies an audience, co-operative work will be especially helpful. A teacher-training class or a story club will afford opportunity for mutual observation and criticism and for discussion and exchange of story material, and will multiply the value of study of the book. One of the best means of

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securing such an opportunity is through the organization of a local branch of the National Story-Tellers' League, information concerning which may be obtained by addressing *The Story Hour*, a magazine which is devoted to its interests, at 3320 Nineteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

In such groups parents, Sunday-school and public school teachers, kindergartners, and young people often unite with advantage to all. After the first meetings, which should be made as easy as possible for the beginners, programs may be arranged which will lead the members into new fields and enlarge their repertories as their skill increases. In such a scheme successive meetings might be devoted, for example, to modern fairy-tales, hero stories, Norse myths, folk-tales of the East, Christmas stories, myths and folk-tales of the American Indians, humorous stories, love stories, stories of the medieval saints, Thanksgiving stories, animal stories, fables, stories from history, etc. The interests of the members would determine the selection of the topics and their grouping in an orderly way.

In every group so formed the writer wishes that he might have a listener's place.

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# Stories and Story-Telling

IN

## Moral and Religious Education

### CHAPTER I

#### THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF THE STORY

ALL the world loves a story, but, after all, few have learned to take story-telling seriously. Every heart responds to the charm of a well-told tale, but even among teachers comparatively few have realized that usually there are moral forces among those feelings that are stirred. When stories have been told for any purpose beyond that of mere entertainment, commonly it has been as the first step in literary training, or simply to call back the wandering attention of the pupil to a lesson that is essentially dull. Still, such stories as have been used have had their secret influence, and character has been shaped for good or ill. In every age, however, really great teachers who have had character-building as a conscious aim have known the value of the story and have made it a most effective means of shaping the lives of both old and young. Jesus, Plutarch, the monks of the Middle Ages, Froebel, and the kindergartners of to-day have not failed of accomplishing their aim.

“Good story-telling is the best intellectual qualification of the teacher,” our greatest educationist has said. If he had the teacher of children in mind there is no exaggeration. Of the teacher of youth and of the



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average of adults it is almost equally true, so far as moral influence is concerned.

The very origin of story-telling was in the teaching impulse. Its chief significance throughout the long past of primitive life, when it was almost the only form of literature, was certainly educational. Events which were fraught with meaning were kept alive in memory and handed down from one generation to another that they might help to shape the life of youth. In this way men gave the warning of the certain penalty which nature inflicts upon those who break her laws. So they sought to stir the sleeping spirit of hero-worship and aspiration. Aside from purely unconscious imitation the story is almost the only pedagogical means used by primitive men. And as we trace the development of human culture we find that it does not lose its place in the higher stages.

Every race has its heritage of folk-tales and myths that have a far larger meaning than the mere entertainment of the young. Scientists study these stories of the past with painstaking care, because they reveal the genius of the people. Not only do they reflect the ideals which have shaped the social and religious life, but they have shaped those ideals and have given them form and power. As factors in molding character the stories of the gods are not less important than the rites of worship.

China, India, Arabia, Japan, honored the story-teller; they felt his charm and were molded by his magic. For centuries the stories of Homer formed the only literary content of education among the Greeks, and they kept their place through the succeeding years of a culture that we hardly equal to-day. When Roman education was at its best, stories of their national heroes and statesmen such as we find in Plutarch's *Lives* formed

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one of the most important parts of the curriculum. How largely the Hebrew life was shaped by story a glance at the Old Testament will reveal.

All the long line of skalds, jongleurs, and bards of the European peoples were story-tellers in the truest sense. All their songs were of the ballad-epic type. Music and verse were the adornments of the tale, and indeed served a more practical purpose than that, as they were an aid to memory before the songs were committed to writing — a device which many of us remember from the days when we sang the multiplication tables in the arithmetic class or the Palestine geography song in the Sunday-school. The minnesingers and troubadours sang chiefly of love and with them versification and music came to receive more emphasis. On the other hand the minstrels of the age of chivalry with their songs of noble deeds were honored for their influence upon character, and had a recognized place in the educational system of feudalism.

In our own days and among our own people the story still manifests its power. In more lines than one Dickens was most effectively a reformer. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* outweighed in influence thousands of sermons and tens of thousands of pages of antislavery tracts a generation ago. *Ramona* and *Black Beauty* have not been without their practical influence. Who will dare to say that all the books on ethics have influenced American life as much as the product of the novelist's pen?

From the very first the Christian Church has utilized this power. The stories of the Gospels have done infinitely more to influence the lives of men than all the books of systematic theology that the Church has produced in twenty centuries of time. The stories of the saints that arose during the Middle Ages were not without their meaning and their power. In the midst of bar-

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ren asceticism and scholastic wrangling they kept simple faith alive and stirred the longing for fellowship with God. The preachers of our own day who have had widespread popular influence have been those who have not scorned the story-teller's art. No one forgets the stories of a Moody, a Talmage, or a Spurgeon, and thousands have been unable to close their hearts against the messages that those stories brought.

Jesus was a master story-teller. He did not invent the parable; the rabbis used it constantly; but so skilful was his use of this device that in our thought it is associated almost wholly with his name. As we shall see, his stories were marvels of perfection both in form and use. When we study them we do not wonder that the common people heard him gladly. It is not strange that the stories impressed his followers so strongly that many of them found place in the record of his life and teaching. Nor was it only for those throngs that followed him among the hills of Palestine that those stories were voiced. Most of us feel that we have gained our clearest and most impressive knowledge of his teachings from those parables or from the simple account of his life which is *The Story of the Gospels*. When we wish to minister to a needy heart we commonly turn to that story of his life or to one of those other stories that he told.

In other ways our own attitude toward the Bible is significant. A test as to the extent to which the content of the book has impressed itself upon the average member of the Sunday-school will give telling evidence. Examine any class, old or young, on the concrete content and moral teaching of the book of Genesis; then repeat the test with the prophecy of Jeremiah. Or test the knowledge of 1 Samuel as compared with that of Isaiah or Colossians. The fact that many more of our Sunday-school lessons have been chosen from the historical than

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from the prophetic or doctrinal books does not weaken the evidence, for that fact must be explained. Few would contend that the moral and religious teachings of Genesis and 1 Samuel are higher than those of the prophets and apostles. More lessons are chosen from those books because they contain more material of real educational value for the average mind. They are full of stories. The very fact of their selection is a strong, if unconscious, tribute to the value of the story as a pedagogical device.

The loss of a love for stories may be the result of sophistication, but it is not an evidence of wisdom. To feel contempt for their use reveals ignorance of the art of education. The conscientious teacher will hardly be content to say, "I cannot tell a story." He will make himself a teller of tales. This is his duty and his opportunity, and when he has mastered the simple art it will be his joy as well.

### WHAT OTHERS SAY

Stories are the oldest form of transmitted culture, and the most formative. — *Richard G. Moulton.*

The household story was the earliest ethical study in the educational curriculum of the race. — *Quoted by Nora Archibald Smith.*

Every fairy-tale worth reading at all is a remnant of a tradition possessing true historical value; historical at least in so far as it has naturally arisen out of the mind of a people under special circumstances, and risen not without meaning, nor removed altogether from the sphere of religious truth. — *John Ruskin.*

The Pueblo child does not receive commands to do or to refrain from doing without the reason for the command being given in the form of a story, in which the given action is portrayed with the good or evil resulting to the doer. — *F. C. Spencer.*

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The narrative which extends from Genesis to Esther is found, in its literary analysis, to be an alternation between two forms: a framework and connective tissue of history, with the high lights and spiritual essence of the whole given by brilliant stories. — *Richard G. Moulton*.

I would rather be the children's story-teller than the queen's favorite or the king's counsellor. — *Kate Douglas Wiggin*.

Let me tell the stories and I care not who writes the textbooks. — *G. Stanley Hall*.

### HINTS FOR FIRST-HAND STUDY

Consider what stories that you have heard or read have largely influenced your life. Do not overlook any whether long or short, whether fiction, biography, history, or the informal story of another life. Most stories that have deeply impressed you will be found to have had an appreciable influence.

Ask your acquaintances for similar facts from their own experience. If you belong to a story-teller's league or to a club or class that is making a study of story-telling, discuss these facts freely. Notice how some stories that would now be rejected because of literary imperfections were morally helpful to the members during their childhood.

### OUTLINE FOR STUDY OF THE TOPIC

The value of the story attested by

- a. Its origin.
- b. Its use by many peoples.
- c. Its influence in social reforms.
- d. Its place in Christian teaching.
- e. Its use by Jesus.
- f. Its influence in our own lives.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING ON THIS TOPIC

Sara Wiltse, *The Story in Early Education*, pp. 1-3.

G. Stanley Hall, *Sunday-school and Bible Teaching*, Pedagogical Seminary, Vol. VIII, pp. 448-450.

## EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF THE STORY

Nora Archibald Smith, *The Children of the Future*, pp. 101-104.

Ezra Allen, *The Pedagogy of Myth in the Grades*, Pedagogical  
Seminary, Vol. VIII, pp. 258-277.

S. B. Haslett, *The Pedagogical Bible School*, pp. 241-244.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT A STORY REALLY IS

NOTHING, one would think, is less in need of definition than a story; yet many fail of success in story-telling precisely because they do not know in what a story consists. Description and exposition are related literary forms with which the story is sometimes confused.

Description deals chiefly with things, and seeks to give definiteness of impression by adding details to details. The story finds its material in events, and especially in action: it presents the movement as flowing toward one end and in its impression emphasizes the wholes of conduct.

The purpose of exposition is to make clear by explanation. Accuracy and orderliness are the essential qualities. As in the case of description it lacks the consistent and unified action which characterizes the story.

Both of these forms appear at times in the story, but always in a subordinate place. Sometimes substantially the same material may be presented in different literary forms. For example, the Twenty-third Psalm approaches description in its form, though it is expository in its nature. William Allen Knight's *Song of Our Syrian Guest* is an exposition of the psalm. Miss Cragin's *Lost Lamb* presents the same general material in story form.

The very words suggest that history and story have much in common, but they are not the same. History

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is a form of narrative, but it appeals especially to the sense of reality and of the connectedness of things. It is essentially a record of events that have an importance in themselves, and it makes much of their mutual relations and their causes and consequences. The story makes its appeal chiefly to the imagination and the feelings. Imaginary events can never become history, but certain events of history may become story if they are so presented as to make their appeal to the feelings. History suggests the clashing of nations, the progress of civilization, successive changes through long periods of time. The story implies unity, completion, and limitation to a comparatively narrow field.

A story, then, may be said to be a narrative of true or imaginary events which form a vitally related whole, so presented as to make its appeal chiefly to the emotions rather than the intellect. Each one of these characteristics, as we shall see, contributes directly to the power of the story as an educational device.

A closer analysis of the literary form that the story takes reveals certain essential elements that are common to every tale. All successful story-tellers, though they may be untrained, recognize them, and consciously or unconsciously observe certain rules in connection with their use. Only as the teacher conforms to these natural requirements can he effectively use the story as a means to an end in moral education. However strong he may be in argument or exposition, if he does not appreciate these fundamental characteristics of the story, he is at as great a disadvantage as the workman who knows the qualities of no metals save copper and lead when he is asked to shape a tool from steel.

In every story provision must be made for four elements: the beginning, a succession of events, the climax, and the end. Each serves its peculiar purpose, and that



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it may do it effectively must be shaped with that end in view.

Every story of necessity has a beginning; but though it cannot be omitted it may easily be bungled. And it is as true of story-telling as of racing that a bad start often means a handicap that cannot be overcome. It is because so few persons consider the way a story begins a matter of importance that so many fail at just this point.

The beginning of a story corresponds to the formal step of preparation in teaching a lesson. Its function is in part to introduce and characterize the leading person or persons, and sometimes to provide a background for the action. But aside from this preparation for the facts of the story it is especially desirable that it should arouse interest, and often it adds much to the story's power if it gives a hint of the line of thought that is to be developed, or if it awakens the kind of feeling that the dénouement is to stir.

One invariable rule may guide the novice here, — the shorter this introductory step, the better, provided it accomplishes its purpose. Long explanations are tiresome, especially when they are given before there is anything to explain. We all remember how we used to omit not only the preface and introduction, but as well the opening chapters of certain historical novels. If our custom has changed, it is because we seek more than the story now. Let us not forget that the writer gives his audience an option here that one who tells his stories cannot. It is safest to assume that the story is what the hearer wants.

In our youthful days we sometimes found stories of another sort. How we delighted in those that plunged us at once into the midst of excitement and mystery, and allowed us to gather by the way as much of explana-