CHARACTER EDUCATION

BY

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PREFACE

A long time ago Emerson wrote, "The true test of civilization is not the census, nor the size of cities, nor crops—no, but the kind of man a country turns out." The wisdom of these words is now being definitely and practically recognized more than ever before in the history of the nation. Doubtless the extent of the present interest in character education, as well as the causes for the increase of this interest, would amaze the average reader.

There is, at the present time, a great deal of material available in this field, but much of it is formal, traditional, statistical, theoretical, and unapplied. Most of it fails to point out the importance of the capitalization of the many vital teacher-pupil, parent-child, and agency-child relationships. Much of it does not clearly place responsibility or make definite suggestions for improvement. And much of it is not at all interesting or attractive to the general reader.

This book, designed to be of immediate assistance to the school administrator, teacher, parent, or other person interested in the development of character, represents an attempt to remedy some of the weaknesses in the treatment of this phase of education. It offers a background of educational, psychological, and sociological principles; examines some of the current disagreements in this field; critically describes materials and methods; considers and evaluates the opportunities offered by the most important community agencies; indicates relationships and responsibilities; and makes definite suggestions for the proper capitalization of the many opportunities available. Practice, rather than theory, is emphasized. A main purpose is to stimulate the reader, by means of pithy quotations, intriguing references, and challenging statements, to further thinking, reading, and study.

Naturally, not all the story of character education can be told in one volume, or, for that matter, in a dozen and one volumes, because this field is concerned with everything in the individual's

life that causes him to think or act. Character is not one phase of life; it is the whole of life. And, consequently, not only the magnitude of the task but also the difficulty of presenting a complete and accurate picture of character and character education is at once evident.

It is probably well known that educators, both secular and religious, disagree quite widely on such basic factors as what constitutes character, the relative importance of various materials and methods, and the placing of responsibility. It is inevitable that the author will agree with some and disagree with others. Naturally, he is less interested in knowing who is right than he is in knowing what is true, as truth is concerned with the most beneficial materials and methods. Disagreement, if intelligent, friendly, and not too long drawn out, far from being useless, will be of great value in promoting the development of character education. We need, in this field, not a desultory and sporadic firing, but a definitely organized, well-coordinated, and vigorous charge on the ramparts of the enemies of youth. With a better understanding and appreciation of our responsibilities and with improved weapons and equipment, this should come. However, there are two factors on which there is no disagreement: first, the absolute necessity of good character in modern life, and second, the consequent need for a program for successfully developing it.

Because (1) of the tremendous importance of character education, (2) of the absolute necessity for all concerned to recognize, accept, and discharge their particular responsibilities, and (3) of the fact that those agencies which promote the development of the wrong kind of character know no rules and recognize no regulations, the author has written pointedly and vigorously, but he hopes not without ample foundation in fact.

Our program of character education must, of course, concern itself for the most part with children and young people, and with adults only as they may contribute to the education of the younger. Adults are, so to speak, "about through"; they are old in years and well established in ideals and habits, while the children are young in years and less well established in ideals and habits. Hence our program must be designed for today's children in today's and tomorrow's world. Of course, any such

program will be slow, painful, difficult, and often discouraging because results cannot be seen immediately. But any intelligent attempt will be rewarded with more complete and wholesome living by the children of this and following generations. Herein lies our greatest educational opportunity.

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CHAPTER I

BASIC CONCEPTIONS OF CHARACTER

It is not possible to present a complete discussion of character and all of its myriads of implications as they relate to modern life in one chapter, or for that matter in fifty-one or a hundred and one chapters. Whole books have been written and still more books will be written on certain of the lesser and more particularized phases of the subject. But enough will be presented in these pages to indicate briefly a few of the many ramifications of the problems that must be considered by anyone interested in attempting to improve character.

WHAT IS MEANT BY CHARACTER?

The usual definition of *character* runs something like this— "Character is the sum total of an individual's inner traits as represented by his conduct." Formerly it was quite customary to allow the first part of this definition to represent the description of character, but now, because we are certain that these inner traits or characteristics are developed, represented, or utilized in actual situations, we may describe it as one's way of responding or reacting to his environment, or, more particularly, to his social environment, in making desirable and wholesome adjustments to it. Of course these "desirable and wholesome" adjustments will vary from people to people and from time to time; what is wholesome for one people or time may be decidedly unwholesome for another people or time. But character, as we think of it now, must be represented in conduct, and there can be no conduct without settings and situations.

Formerly *morality* was widely used to express somewhat the same idea, but, as it is considered now, morality has more limited

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connotations. Moreover, like another closely allied term, *ethics*, it has an academic, "goody-goody" implication, often suggestive of theological controversies, that makes it unattractive, especially to younger people.

Good citizenship is a term now coming into widespread use that probably has more to commend it than *character*. It is active, descriptive, modern, and not at all formal or unpleasant.

However, there need be no quibbling over terminology, because morality, ethical character, and good citizenship are all included in the term *character*. Because of the present widespread use of the term, it will be used throughout this volume as being synonymous with, or including, the meanings represented in the other terms.[1]

A few short quotations may shed additional light on the elements and relationships of character.[2]

BAGLEY: "Moral character certainly presupposes as its basis a multitude of effective specific habits: . . . the habit of brushing one's teeth; of shining one's boots; of speaking distinctly; . . . of repressing the desire to yawn, the impulse to strike, and a hundred other impulses that nature never intended to be repressed, yet the habitual repression of which is essential to civilized life."[3]

DEWEY and TUFTS: "Character is whatever lies behind an act in the way of deliberation and desire, whether these processes be near-by or remote."[4]

SYMONDS: "There seem to be two essential features of conduct that go to make up the highest character. One is uniformity of response. . . . The other is universality of response to the

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[1] Part I in Durant Drake, "The New Morality," The Macmillan Company, 1928, presents the contrast between "the Old Morality and the New."

[2] For an excellent detailed analysis see Chap. VIII, General Conduct-Confacts, and Chap. XV, Character and Personality, in P. M. Symonds, "The Nature of Conduct," The Macmillan Company, 1930. Chapter III, Character Education, "Tenth Yearbook" of the Department of Superintendence, National Education Association, 1932, presents still other ways of describing character.

[3] BAGLEY, W. C., "Classroom Management," pp. 228–229, The Macmillan Company, 1907.

[4] DEWEY, J., and J. A. TUFTS, "Ethics," (rev. ed.), p. 203, Henry Holt & Company, 1932.

element from which it occurs" (the perfection of confacts—or generalized conduct).[1]

WATSON: "Real character growth comes in proportion as either children or adults face their own problems frankly, predict consequences, make their decisions, and in practice suffer the consequences."[2]

KILPATRICK: "I seem to see three things in the working of a good moral character: first, a sensitivity as to what may be involved in a situation; second, a moral deliberation to decide what should be done; and third, the doing or the effecting of the decision so made."[3]

HARTSHORNE: "Character is thus the art of living. It is won through participation in social and cosmic functioning, through the performance of daily activities in the light of their meaning for the largest or most inclusive reality of which one can conceive. The man of character is one who functions well as a human being, who follows in his own contacts with others the divine strategy he has discovered at work in the world, providing for others conditions through which they may themselves achieve selfhood, forgetting himself in this adventure into the creative life of the universe in which he finds himself always and everywhere at home."[4]

After listing a considerable number of similar definitions of character, Symonds analyzes them and suggests the following summary:[5]

1. Character has to do with those phases of man's behavior other than the intellectual.

2. Character is observed in the crystallization of definite traits.

3. Character represents an organization of behavior.

4. Character is related to conduct. Some claim that character is a summation of conduct; others claim that conduct issues from character.

[1] SYMONDS, P. M., "The Nature of Conduct," p. 291, The Macmillan Company, 1930.

[2] WATSON, G. B., "The Project Method," *Y. M. C. A. Forum Bulletin*, March, 1924.

[3] KILPATRICK, W. H., "Foundations of Method," p. 337, The Macmillan Company, 1925.

[4] HARTSHORNE, H., "Character in Human Relations," pp. 249–250, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.

[5] SYMONDS, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

5. Character in a limited (and usual) sense refers to moral character, that is, one's behavior relative to the conventions and standards of society.

6. Character is the result of an evaluation.

7. Character has to do with the outward expression of inner attitudes or dispositions.

8. Character in a limited sense refers to socialization, self-seeking, and social participation.

Enough has been presented to indicate a general definition and description of character but there remain two important points that must be emphasized, integration and direction.

Integration.—One of the characteristics most easily noticed in a pleasing personality or a strong character is consistency. In all of us there is not one self but several selves, each of which emerges under varying conditions. The simplest illustration of this is to be found in the case of the individual who is courteous, kind, truthful, loyal, or punctual in one setting and the opposite in another. We lack confidence in him because of his inconsistent actions and we say that he is unreliable and undependable. We cannot depend upon him because we cannot predict, with any degree of certainty, his future actions. He displeases us. Just the opposite is true of the individual whose actions regularly follow a definitely established pattern. Consistency is an important element of integration, but it is not the only one.

There are limits, in development, to the usefulness and desirability of the elements of character. We value the ideals and habits of thrift, kindness, and courage, yet there is a possible development of each of these that is anything but desirable. The individual who saves in a miserly manner and does not spend enough to provide himself with proper food and protection lacks judgment, as does the one who listens sympathetically to every beggar's pitiable tale and indiscriminately hands out a coin, or the one who courageously charges an armed burglar. Each may have the highest development of that particular trait, but certainly a mere collection of these and similar highly developed elements would not constitute character.

Moreover, such a maximum development of these and other characteristics would not even be possible for the reason that each of them acts as a check upon the others. The exercise of good judgment and self-control (two other traits) would tend to limit

the undesirable development of thrift, kindness, and courage indicated above. And they should. Reason helps to determine just when a person should be thrifty and when he should not be thrifty, when he should give and when he should not give, when he should exhibit courage and when he should not.

In short, there are underlying principles, based upon knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and reason, which determine the limits of the development of particular characteristics, as well as their relationships to each other. Character is not merely a bundle of highly developed separate characteristics, but an organization of them in such a way that they function together as a unit. This fusion we call *integration*. And the integrated personality or character is the one in which conduct represents the most reasonable and useful combinations of these elements and is expressed in consistent patterns.

This integration is important, from a practical point of view, for two good reasons. In general, no elements are overdeveloped and none are underdeveloped; all are properly developed to somewhat maximal usefulness and organized into a well-balanced pattern that tells us what to expect in the future. From this past record it is easy to predict future conduct. In the second place, as Charters says, " . . . integration yields a sureness and effectiveness which enable the person to place behind his actions his full force and drive. He is not hindered by unnecessary vacillation and indecision born of dissensions among his operating traits, . . . he can drive through to a decision and beyond that, into action with force and vigor."[1]

Direction.—The thing that makes a man "strong in character," as we usually consider it, is not merely an accumulation of integrated traits, but also a worthy and desirable motive, purpose, or ultimate objective, judged from the point of view of society as a whole. He must have the traits, of course, but they must be used to campaign in the proper direction. A man possessing a fine array of abstract virtues may be likened to a loaded, properly functioning revolver, which may be used to kill a mad dog or assassinate a president. The direction in which it is fired is certainly as important as the fact that it is a loaded, efficient

[1] CHARTERS, W. W., "The Teaching of Ideals," p. 339, The Macmillan Company, 1927. See also the discussion on pp. 62–63 of this volume.

weapon. The other side of the picture is equally true; a worthy or desirable objective without the traits that assist in its realization is as useless as an unloaded, out-of-order revolver pointed at a mad dog.

In short, an array of properly integrated elements may represent either good character or bad character. Everyone has character—the integrated total of his characteristics, good or bad, or both. A partial evaluation of Lindbergh, taken from the files of the War Department, describes him as "intelligent, industrious, energetic, dependable, purposeful, alert, quick of reaction, serious, deliberate, stable, efficient, frank, modest, congenial." It is possible for this description to fit, equally well, the most vicious gangster.[1] We often speak of "lack of character" when, in reality, we do not mean that at all; we really mean "lack of good character," or, in short, "bad character." A successful gangster must have just about the same traits as a successful business or professional man. The higher the development of these traits and the more complete their integration, the greater the possibility of the individual's attaining eminence, either as a feared criminal or as a respected business or professional man.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

One of America's best known business men was recently asked this question, "What do you consider the most important single quality or characteristic essential to a man's success?" He answered instantly, "Integrity." Then he continued, "I can buy all of the technical skill, ability, or knowledge that I want for five or six thousand dollars a year; but I'll gladly pay several times this amount for the same skill, ability, or knowledge combined with integrity."

Integrity is a simple sounding term, until it is analyzed into its multitude of important elements such as honesty, truthfulness, fairness, cooperation, and reliability, and appreciated, as Diderot says, as "the evidence of all civil virtues."

During Mr. Untermeyer's interrogation of the late J. P. Morgan, in the Congressional Money Trust Investigation of 1912, this

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[1] See the short biographies of thirteen well-known racketeers under the caption, Men of Action, *New Outlook*, November, 1933.

great financier stated that "commercial credits depend upon money, or property, or character, but the first thing is character. . . . It comes before money or anything else. . . . Money cannot buy it. . . . When a man gets credit in business, he gets it on his character." Note, too, how the National Surety Bureau, which is the largest bonding company in the world, has organized the National Honesty Bureau for the purpose of teaching school children the vital importance of this virtue.

Even in the organization of a board of directors for a bank, life insurance company, or other commercial enterprise in which the public, in general, is financially interested, those men are selected who enjoy impeccable records in their personal, social, and professional relationships, because those in charge know very well that the public must have confidence in the promotion and management of the company's business. The greater this confidence, the greater the possibility of the success of the concern.

Coolidge evaluated character in these words, "It is not only what men know, but what they are disposed to do with what they know that will determine the rise and fall of civilization." Later, Herbert Hoover stated in similar vein, "Social values outrank economic values. Economic gains, even scientific gains, are worse than useless if they accrue to a people unfitted by trained character to use, and not abuse them."[1]

It is striking to note the extent to which character is placed ahead of technical skill or knowledge by employers. The Bureau of Vocational Guidance of Harvard University recently completed an analysis of the actually recorded reasons for the discharge of 4,375 employees. These reasons were carefully classified into two main headings, "Lack of Skill or Technical Knowledge" (incompetency, slowness, physical unadaptability, etc.) and "Lack of Social Understanding" (insubordination, general unreliability, absenteeism, drinking, carelessness, dishonesty, trouble making, etc.). In the first group were placed 34.2 per cent of those discharged, while in the second group were placed 62.4 per cent.[2] Approximately twice as many were dis-

[1] *Journal of the National Education Association*, vol. 15, p. 105, April, 1926.

[2] 149 cases, or 3.4 per cent of the total number were not classified. See *Religious Education*, vol. 25, pp. 39–41, January, 1930.

charged for deficiencies in character as were discharged for deficiencies in skill or ability.

In all of our dealings with others faith plays a most important part. Note, for instance, the confidence displayed by the purchaser buying his goods directly over the counter or more or less indirectly through the mail; the banker placing his loans; the patient visiting his physician; the bride accepting her bridegroom; the telephone subscriber calling a number; the client employing an attorney; the building committee letting a contract; the contractor employing a mason; the mason purchasing his tools from the retailer; the retailer buying them from the wholesaler; the wholesaler buying from the manufacturer; the manufacturer placing his order for the raw materials with the collector of raw materials; the collector contracting for their production and delivery. And even, in fact, the confidence of the producer in his own ability to find, grow, or manufacture these raw materials and his confidence in the ability of the carrier to deliver them.

Consider for a moment the relatively small amount of real money there is in circulation in the United States as compared with the enormous volume of business carried on; or the confidence of the average individual that a small bit of paper, worthless in itself, has value because his government is behind it; or the almost universal acceptance of checks and other commercial paper as substitutes for actual cash.

When such items as these are considered, the term *integrity* takes on a more complete meaning and its importance as the foundation stone of all modern relationships is easily seen.

Even in teaching there is now a consensus of opinion that more failures are due to social, moral, and ethical weaknesses than to all other causes such as deficiency in native ability, lack of knowledge of the subjects taught, or incompetency in teaching techniques.

The spontaneous world-wide reception of Lindbergh is another illustration of the average man's appreciation of character. Lindbergh was not the first to fly across the Atlantic. At least nineteen others had made the trip before he did. Lindbergh was a good, but not a great, flyer; he had only a few hundred hours of flying time to his credit, while there were scores of aviators in the United States who had several times this amount. Moreover,