

BRINGING UP FATHER AND MOTHER

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:1-4.

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." Colossians 3:20-21.

Psalm 127:3 says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord." This is one of many passages in the Bible which teaches that children are gifts and blessings from the Lord. No home is entirely complete without a baby. A married couple enters into the true glory of love when that love is blended and centered in a little child. It is God's plan that marriage should be completed and sanctified in the high privilege of parenthood. The baby is God's gift that enriches and deepens the love of a man and woman for each other as nothing else can. This is the high, holy and divine purpose in the institution of human marriage.

There is always a fascination about a new baby. The fond parents naturally think that either he is the only baby that was ever born or that there never was another like him, and the latter is always the case. One secret of this fascination is that the baby is a creature of mystery. Luke 1:66 raises the question, "What manner of child shall this be?" When one looks into the face of a baby he does not know the answer to that question. The baby is a bundle of amazing possibilities. It is a pent-up package of power. His hands may sway the future of a nation, his lips may speak the living message for God or he may lower the moral temperature of the world. Another thing about the baby that is so fascinating is his helplessness. His clinging and adorable weakness gives us a chance to do something Godlike. God is always helping the weak. The baby is also fascinating because he has such marvelous power. His power is not that of physical strength but of love. One cannot help loving a baby. A child can work a revolution in the life of a father or mother, and sometimes both. What children are and become will determine what civilization will be. Our Lord said, "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones." To despise means to undervalue.

From the human standpoint three factors determine the future of a baby--heredity, environment and training. Heredity has much to do with the future of a child. Every baby has a right to be well-born. Some babies have the great misfortune of coming into the world with poisoned blood in their veins. Just as it is much harder to grow beautiful flowers in a shaded back alley than it would be in a fertile open garden, it is far more difficult for a child to become the right sort of person if reared in a bad environment than it would be if he had the advantage of a good one. Training is the most important factor in determining the future of the child. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." What manner of child one shall be depends largely upon the kind of training which he receives in the home. God will hold any and all parents responsible for the kind of training which they give or fail to give to the children with which He has blessed them.

To the child, the home is the first training-ground of life, the place where the foundation of religion, ethics and morals is laid. It is in

the home and usually at the mother's knee that the tiny infant learns to lisp the name of Jesus, and, as Christ grew in wisdom and stature with God and man, so does a child under proper Christian influence also develop into strong manhood or womanhood. Childhood impressions are the most lasting. I am sure that each of us cherishes many fond memories of our childhood homes. Everywhere we go we find people who are lovers of home. No matter where one is born, home is home, and there is no other place like it. Children never outgrow the influence of their homes. Home has a charm that abides and thrills. In our homes our aspirations, dreams, visions and yearnings were born. Who does not love his home? It is the dearest spot on earth.

"Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam
Be it ever so humble there's no place like home!
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere."

This is an age, however, which is assiduously devoted to bringing up father and mother. No other generation has ever had its parents quite so well trained. Even a two-year-old knows the art, and, by the time he is in his teens, he is an adept at it.

The day was when children were taught to have respect for parental authority. The method was much like that of the old colored mother who, when asked how she managed to raise two such well-behaved boys, replied, "I raised 'em wif a barrel stave, an' I raised 'em frequent." Fathers used to be men of authority. When they said "come," their sons came; and, when they said "go," their sons went. In these later years when a son says to his father "come," the father comes; and, when he says "go," the father goes, and on the run.

One of the methods which is employed today in the bringing up of father and mother is the nuisance technique. A little boy who had been sent to bed pestered his mother for drinks of water. When she told him that if he asked for another drink he would be spanked, he called out, "Mother, when you come upstairs to spank me, will you bring me a drink of water?" He was a master of the nuisance technique.

It is interesting to watch and hear a modern daughter dealing with her mother. The mother has some very definite notions regarding the right and wrong of certain things. So, the daughter sets herself to the task of bringing up her mother to the more modern ways of looking at things. Very skilfully she employs the nuisance technique by saying, "Mother, you are behind the times, out-of-date, old-fashioned and a citizen of the sixteenth century." These are the magic words with which she works the miracle of modernizing her mother. What mother wants to be thought of as a back number, as out-of-date or as being an old fogey? If this line of attack fails to produce the desired effect, the daughter advances another idea with this argument, "Oh, why not? Everybody's doing it!" To the daughter this is a sufficient reason for any course of action. Another argument that is used quite often is, "Mother, I can never get into society or keep company with the best people unless I am allowed to do as others are doing." Isn't that a paradox? The very idea of letting down the moral standards in order to keep company with the best people is a moral absurdity. Yet, more mothers are brought up on this argument than on any other.

What are some of the contributing factors to the success of bringing up father and mother? One is the natural and inevitable result of the modern educational theory. Parents have been told: "Let the child follow his own inclinations and impulses. Do not try to restrain or discipline him, or you may cause him to have an inferiority complex." This theory sends the parent to school to the child instead of having the parent teach the child. It should not be necessary for a child to learn from experience that fire will burn him or that water will drown him.

Illustration: baby sitter instructed to let a child have anything he wanted. When he got it, the wasp stung him.

Another contributing factor to the successful bringing up of father and mother is the parents themselves. Because they have left off the training of their children, the children have proceeded to train their parents. Parents have neglected to discipline their children, and the children have taken up the task of disciplining their parents. We are in need of parents who will look after their children with the same degree of care that they give their cat or their dog. They will fasten up the bulldog at night, lest he associate with the strange curs of the street, but they will let their children run at large. Parental authority has not disappeared; it has only changed hands. Children have taken it over.

Finding fault with the younger generation has always been a favorite indoor sport, though perhaps never indulged in quite so much as now. Without defending what young people do that is wrong, it can be said that much of the criticism hurled at them is unfair. This younger generation has come into a world and a civilization for which it is in no sense responsible and finds itself in an environment it had no part in creating. When the youth of today are reading such degrading literature, it should be said that it is written, published and sold by an older generation. The generation in power has been careless about the kind of an environment that has been developed in which young life is to be developed.

People speak of the unspanked generation as though it were to blame for not getting spanked. Not the spankee but the spanker is responsible if there is an unspanked generation. Millions of fathers and mothers have been so busy trying to make money, attending to social matters and pursuing pleasure that a generation has grown up without the precepts, the examples or the disciplines that make for noble manhood and womanhood. If there is an unspanked generation, it is because another generation has failed in its duty.

Parental neglect, or the lack of proper home training, causes at least ninety per cent of the alarming amount of juvenile delinquency. Many a youngster has done as he or she pleased from infancy. He has learned that, if he would stamp his foot hard enough, cry and argue long enough, he could have his own way. He has never known what it is to forego his own personal wishes in the interest of others. He has never learned that others have rights. Then, here is a girl who has been brought up after the same fashion--petted, pampered and spoiled. She has been brought to believe that all roads lead to Rome and that she is Rome. They meet and marry. Naturally both want to have their individual ways as they have done always, so it is not difficult to imagine what will take place.

When parents encourage self-expression, children learn to do absolutely as they please, and domestic anarchy results. Lawlessness in any community, state or nation always gets its start by the fireside. A child who does not respect the authority of his parents will not respect the authority of school teachers, the leaders and workers in the church and its organizations, the officers and laws of the land or the authority of God when he reaches manhood.

Dr. R. G. Lee related a story of his visit in a home where the little boy insisted on picking up a kitten by the tail. The kitten squirmed and squalled. The mother said, "Put the kitten down!" But, the boy did not do so. She said, "If you don't put the kitten down, I'll switch you!" But, he held onto the kitten as though it were a purse with many shining dollars in it. Then she said, "If you don't put the kitten down, the preacher will bite you!" But, he didn't put the kitten down, and Dr. Lee did not bite the boy. As he left he remarked to himself, "A criminal career is being started in that home."

Discipline must begin somewhere, if we are to have an organized society and if civilization is to be sustained and advanced. If the home does not discipline the child, then sooner or later the state will have to do so. Somewhere along the way, all of us must learn the lesson of obedience, if we are to become citizens upon whom society, the state and the nation may build safely. The lack of parental discipline is the greatest contributing factor to the increase of crime and the lowering of the age of present-day criminals. Children who have no regard for authority in the home are not likely to have any respect for authority in the school, the church or the state.

One of the most difficult and yet most glorious tasks in the world is the proper rearing of children. The chief reason why this is true is that example is so much more important than precept. Can parents lie about a child's age and then teach it to be truthful? Can parents habitually absent themselves from church and expect their children to evaluate properly and to love the church as they should? When will homes cease to handicap churches by telling children that they are not old enough to trust Christ and be saved? Parent, what is your chief concern for your children? Is it health, education, pleasure, position, prestige, success or spiritual welfare?

It is no small matter to be responsible to God for the rearing of a child which a couple has brought into the world. But God will hold each parent strictly to account to grow a life and character which is submissive to Him. The only answer to the problem of juvenile delinquency is to conform to God's will in growing Christian men and women. Parents must bring up their children in the discipline, nurture, correction, chastening and admonition of the Lord.