

Spectator, which insists that the trouble originates in a sort of parental hallucination, children being pretty much what they were fifty years ago, while the parents have become meantime so much more nervous and high-strung that they cannot endure children as they could formerly. "As far as we can see there is only one substantial cause of the complaints which are undoubtedly rife as to the decay of children's manners. The nerves of the parents are no doubt far more highly strung than they used to be. For one person who fifty years ago went half-crazy over a racket, there are now a hundred. We think that our children's manners have declined because we are so much more irritated than we were by petty worries and strident noises. . . . Our children don't make more clatter, but we endure it less easily."

But bad manners do not necessarily consist of noise. While all offensive and avoidable noise is bad manners, children may display great rudeness without making any noise at all. A child who omits to say "please" and "thank you," who remains seated in the presence of older people, and makes faces behind their backs, who is habitually inattentive when spoken to, contributes just as little to the total volume of noise in the world, or even less, than the child properly brought up in these respects. Except where rudeness consists of making a noise, no parental hallucination of the kind supposed could be produced by decline of nerve-endurance on the part of parents.

There is another objection to the explanation still more serious, and that is that the theory runs counter to generally observed facts about modern parents. Nobody who has given any attention to the relation of parent and child can doubt that patient and uncomplaining endurance is the distinguishing modern parental

trait. From the cradle and the perambulator on, what is the modern parent trained in if not endurance? In what else does he find true parental happiness?

In the earlier days of the century it was not so. Down to perhaps 1850 there lingered on the old-world view of the child, partly Roman, partly Saxon, partly Biblical, of which perhaps the best modern expositor was the excellent author of "Parent's Assistant." The very title of the book throws a strong light on the history of the matter. The stories contained in it are all meant to inculcate the old view—that politeness, like all other good traits, was the result of deliberate training; that with reference to manners the child should be made considerate of its elders. It should, for instance, if noisy, be rebuked, and if necessary punished; this would disconnect in its mind the idea of noise from its natural childish association with pleasure, joy, and excitement, and connect it with the idea of fear of disagreeable consequences and parental disapproval, and consequently with unhappiness and depression. The same theory was kept in view with reference to politeness of speech and address. Gradually, in accordance with what was believed to be the law of habit with reference to human beings, and is still believed to be such with reference to dogs and horses, the new associations grew so strong that the child was polite of its own accord.

The existing theory is exactly the opposite of this. It is that the child is born into the world with good instincts, tends naturally to become respectful, thoughtful, and polite, and will become so if the parents are very patient and considerate, and occasionally remind it of the rules which Solomon would have enforced with the rod and Miss Edgeworth with penalties of greater ingenuity and refinement.