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The Country Homemakers

Continued from Page 9

viously a truant—with shoes muddy from tramping a forbidden Road of Vagabondia; with coat torn from a war-like encounter with some Knight of the Road. She hadn't said one word to him in the way of reproach; he almost wished that she had scolded. Instead, she had helped him to take off his mud-caked shoes and had bathed face and hands with her own special soap, the perfume of which breathed reproach—it was Sunday soap and Jimmy knew it. Then she had carried the torn coat up to the sewing room to mend, as she said, with a smile, "Jimmy, dear, I wish you would stay in and play with Sister a while. She's so tired and fretty, and I am ever so busy."

Not another word about the truant afternoon had dropped from her lips. Not a word, but this praise had stung Jimmy's conscience like barbed arrows. Jimmy buried his face in his pillow and sobbed the tears of remorse that neither his father's prospective "licking" nor the teacher's "keeping in" tomorrow could wring from him. He was making up his mind never to play truant again. His mother's appreciation of his ounce of goodness had so sweetened his lump of life that it had absolutely overpowered the bitterness of his pounds of wrongdoing.

Maybe the plan of noting and emphasizing a child's little goodnesses instead of blaming him for the wrong things he does, will not always work, but ordinarily it does. Children are such impressionable creatures of the spirit, quick to smiles and quicker to tears; they are so easily discouraged by continual blaming, and so readily caloused by scolding, that it soon has no effect upon their conduct; while a word of praise is, to them, like a breath of air to the bird's pinions. Buoyed up by its kindly force, they soar to heights of goodness as naturally and spontaneously as the bird flies. Children need praise for their soul food; they starve, spiritually, without it.

A mother expecting a noted guest who was to spend several days in the family, warned her children beforehand as to the conduct during the visit.

"Don't interrupt the bishop when he's talking," she said, "and don't ask for a second helping at table, and don't make any noise in the playroom, and don't—" The "don'ts" fairly flooded the children, until the oldest child, a boy, stemmed their tide.

"Mother," he entreated, "we'll be good if you'll only not talk so much about not being good. You don't need to worry about us."

The boy was right. Half the child's misdoing today comes from our looking for it, expecting it, and suggesting it. We laugh over Mrs. Ruggles' fruitless efforts at making the little Ruggleses behave as she seats them in a dolorous row in the kitchen the day of the eventful party at the Birds, and lectures them on their manners to be at the party. We know, tho, as we laugh at the ridiculousness of it all, that the small Ruggleses will forget all about their lecture and misbehavior. We realize that we are reading one of the author's human homilies on child training. The children did just what Mrs. Ruggles expected they would do; they forgot their manners. If she had told them that they were going to be good, they wouldn't have disappointed her.

Praising a child for effort and even the smallest achievement does more than help him to ethical everyday conduct. It helps to carry him to God, if we lead him, thru our daily appreciation of the good in him, to God's continual expectation of human righteousness and His divine joy at human effort.

Your child's first conception of God's appreciation of human effort and the divine optimism of the faith comes thru the medium of the Bible passages having for their themes, comfort and praise of God's appreciation, which you carefully select and read to him. The Book of Isaiah is overflowing with word pictures that carry a child into the sphere of divine prodigality of praise.

"He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:

"But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: . . .

"And righteousness shall be the girdle for his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . .

"Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with a recompense; he will come and save you.

"The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.

In the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, a child finds the tender comfort of God's unfailing appreciation of the thing that is weak.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: . . .

"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.

"Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

In the New Testament almost every one of your child's favorite stories is an example of God's miraculous optimism epitomized in the life of His Son here on earth.

A child is thrilled by the account in the Gospel of Saint Matthew of Christ's wonderful descent to the city after the Sermon on the Mount; he hears the wondering whispers of the crowd, sees the valiant centurion surrounded by all the glory and color of his station; marvels at the miraculous stilling of the tempest; the healing of Jairus' beloved little girl. Then comes the climax when, after forgiving the sins of the man sick of the palsy, Christ sits at meat with publicans and sinners.

Why does He do this? Why does He cheer and encourage these wayfarers, Christ is asked, and the ready answer comes in clear truth:

"They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

So a child sees that Christ's unfailing method was one of encouraging, stimulating praise of the least effort in His followers. Read to your child the plaint of the centurion.

"Lord, I am not worthy—" and Christ's ringing assurance:

"Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Tell him how Christ found a kindly excuse for his disciples who were hungry and invaded a cornfield on the strictly observed Hebrew Seventh Day; how He praised the crowding, jostling little ones who forgot each other's welfare in struggling to reach His side; how He used His last breath to commend the thief who hung beside Him.

Helping a child to this realization of his parents' and God's willingness to see beyond the failures of a day, and to pierce into its starry fields of well-meant effort, is the best means of reducing his failures to the minimum. We adults accomplish but little, achieve with difficulty for the Master who has eyes for our mistakes only, and no word of praise for the good we do. This is even more characteristic of child life.

Overpraise, if you like; it doesn't do Jimmy any harm. On the contrary, it helps him to live up to your ideal of him now, and later leads him to try to reach God's pattern of living when he outgrows yours.

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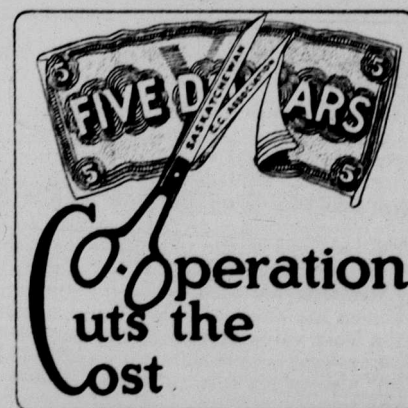
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