

A Talk To Mothers

NEARLY a year ago, in the Department of Baby Welfare, we discussed the subject of the best age at which to send a child to school, and in the June number of the Journal, we considered the subject of Venereal Disease.

At first glance one would not suppose that these two subjects had any connection with each other, yet I hope to show in the following paper that underneath all other remedies proposed for the relief and cure of the plague, that burdens the whole civilized world to-day, the teaching of the child is the remedy paramount that will by the mercy of God eventually deliver the world from this curse.

Those of you who read the article a year ago will possibly recall that my final conclusion as regards the right age to send the ordinary child out from home protection was to be judged by what the parents had been able to teach him or her at home. That is, a child should not be sent into the mimic world of school till certain truths concerning life, and its origin, had been truly and lovingly explained at home.

It is logical rather than Utopian to conclude that the man or woman who has been trained from infancy to understand some of the beauty of life and its beginnings, to glimpse the mystery of that Eternity from which we come and to which we go, to realize the truth of life that we carry from Eternity to Eternity, and bequeath beautified or sullied to countless generations—that such a man or woman will not wantonly wreck the life that has been given into his or her keeping.

That this is not a mere dream has been proven even now by the reverent living of those, comparatively few though they be, who have had the good fortune to have been so taught or to have imbibed from some source a pure conception of the Creator's plan of propagation of life.

A few generations of such reverent lives would cause the curse of venereal disease, and all the network of misery consequent on a wrong conception of God's Greatest Thought, to pass from the world as some of the so-called "medical" practices of the dark ages have done.

The practical question that faces the parent first, and the teacher of children second, is the best form in which to help the child to understand the truth that is his.

Much has been written and taught along this line, and a perusal of some of this, most of it painstaking, and careful work, lies within the power of every person who is able to read. It is no more difficult to understand than some of the instructions given as to the making of a child's dress, or the intricacies of the published recipes and menus for "war-time saving." It is vastly more interesting and instructive reading.

In my own experience the child itself almost invariably points out the way to help, and the path of instruction to follow; if the parent is wise and patient enough to watch for the turning of the little mind in that direction. Yes, and the parents need to be industrious enough to be ready for question or remark when it comes, and not find themselves in a suddenly embarrassed position on unfamiliar ground, or ground that has only been considered by them in the coarse or ignorant vocabulary of lazy and unbeautiful minds.

In a foot note at the end of this article I hope to append a list of some of the latest and best books on these subjects, trusting that my readers will select those that fit their particular need.

To a little child that has not been in some way injured or hurt mentally, its own beautiful little body is one of the very first things that awaken a curious interest. And right here on the part of many thoughtless people comes one of the very first sins against the child, and against God's Beautiful Thought. No baby should ever be given the ghost of a thought that any part of that exquisite little body is unclean, or unholy, or needful of concealment. Drop that poison in, and you have already turned the child's face toward the regions of death.

The contrary should be persistently taught, yes, and insisted on, in the face of much opposition and many stumbling-blocks deliberately placed by the giant Ignorance in your own and the Baby's path. You will have to watch the nurse and the washer woman, your grandmother and your best friend. But after a while your "very peculiar ideas" will be respected, and before that time your child's ideas will have taken some form. See to it that that form is clear and correct in regard to function, and nomenclature, in so far as the child can understand. Otherwise, teach him physiology and hygiene.

Little lessons from Nature probably come next, and in that the parent teacher of to-day is vastly better off than the parent of even a decade ago. Books of all grades, of great beauty of form, and so inexpensive as to be within the reach of any purse may be had at any good store or from any publisher.

Here let me say a word along the line of the purchase of literature for little children, or any children for that matter. The buying of good books, not haphazard, nor even according to the Sunday school selection, is absolutely necessary in every home. Books should be purchased corresponding to the need of each particular child, and containing the information required by each special occasion. I have in mind now one very happy ordinary home, where the young mother is ambitious that her boy should have the best in moral, and mental, as well as physical development. But every book that she requires to purchase to prepare her mind to meet the opening needs of that new mind, has to be obtained through friends, on the quiet as it were, because her husband considers the buying of books

Teaching Truths Concerning The Beginnings of Life

By
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on such subjects as an extravagance for people in their position. Yet you will never go into that home but what you may see a novel or new magazine lying around that he has bought for his own recreation. He has no intention of being selfish, or, mercy, *stupid!*—but let me whisper it softly, he being a man with the best intentions in the world, is both, where it comes to understanding the needs of a very little child. Could we as men and women only meet and face, and then endeavor to provide for our limitations, even as we put on an extra wrap to provide against a drop in temperature, how much more wisdom we would show.

Little lessons in hygiene, little lessons in physiology and anatomy, little lessons in Nature study, little lessons in love and reverence to God (the favorite portion of the Bible of "the man of the house"—aged six—which he found after hearing it read, laboriously read himself and then learned to recite, is the first ten verses of the first chapter of the Gospel of John). Other little lessons at the house and kitchen, when fish or fowl are being prepared for cooking. Then one day all the different parts of the puzzle will slip one by one into place, and not suddenly, or fearfully, but gladly, beautifully, reverently, tenderly, the child mind will get its conception of the whole of God's Beautiful Thought. And best of all that he himself is part of that Beautiful Thought.

Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful World
With the wonderful water round you curled,
And the wonderful grass upon your breast—
World, you are beautifully drest.

The wonderful air is over me,
And the wonderful wind is shaking the tree,
It walks on the water, and whirls the mills,
And talks to itself on the tops of the hills.

You friendly Earth! how far do you go,
With the wheat-fields that nod and the rivers that flow,
With cities and gardens, and cliffs, and isles,
And people upon you for thousands of miles?

The marvel to me always has been that parents deliberately, or carelessly, depute other persons, teachers, Sunday school teachers, school mates, or even chance acquaintances on the street to give to that mind which is their own creation its first conceptions of the Life Truths.

Nature works slowly and "by degrees." So does Nature's Master. The human mind does not receive readily or with good results those impressions given with sudden violence. Such are apt to be lasting or to produce results entirely different from what was intended.

Therefore, all such teaching is best done as I have described, gradually, and slowly. Let me illustrate two examples of the result of the opposite course.

The mothers in both these cases were thoughtful, cultured women, both able and willing to teach what was right to their respective children, but somehow each had missed just the psychic moment. The fathers I was not acquainted with.

In the first instance the boy was about seven years old, when his mother discovered, to her horror, that he was practicing the habit of self-injury. The child was perfectly innocent of wrong doing, but already his nerves were showing the results of the habit. He told his mother quite frankly that he had been shown how by another little boy a few years older living on the same street. This older child was the son of a somewhat prominent church officer, a man with a high, narrow forehead, and anxious large eyes, who exercised himself greatly as to the experience and regularity of attendance of his fellow church members. I subsequently discovered that his son had

instructed in a similar manner several more of his playfellows on the street, the thing being for a time like an epidemic, all traceable to the one source.

This mother, in her horror and disgust, gave her boy such a deep impression of the wrongness and awful results of the habit, that as she regretfully told me in relating the incident, she almost reduced him to nervous prostration, he being a sensitive, high-strung child, and it was months before he would trust himself for any time away from her protecting presence.

Now such an experience is painful for both child and mother, and it seems to me that the little lad might have been taught the twenty-fourth Psalm, and the need for "clean hands," obedient hands that do not meddle with sacred things, and a pure heart that "the King of Glory might come in." This, together with the knowledge that God had given him as a trust certain organs, to do a certain work in this body, that work being to manufacture fluids that would make him strong and fit and a man, that these little organs would do their work surely and well as he grew older, if he took good care of them, did not hurt or meddle with them, kept his hands clean and himself unashamed. Had the child been taught something thus tenderly and truly, no other lad could have taught him an evil habit.

The other was one of a large family, and the little lad in question had somehow just been missed in this particular teaching. So he reached eleven years without any definite knowledge of himself. Then in the public school he came under the care of one of those truly good and great teachers who are endeavoring to make up for what parents neglect, and if it be possible to warn the little ships that set out from their harbor of dangers ahead.

It was so well known that Mr. X. instructed every boy ere he left his class along these lines that parents had come to accept it as a matter of course. In the special case I refer to the boy got "such a big dose all at once" that the shock of the knowledge almost made him ill, and the usefulness of the much needed instruction was greatly nullified by the child's unpreparedness, for which I do not think the teacher was in the least to blame.

This instance only is one of many that go to prove that such first impressions should be given slowly and by degrees in the shelter and language of home.

A peculiarity so marked that it might almost be called a characteristic of much of the literature for instruction of little children along the lines we have been considering is the elaboration of the mother function, and either complete omission of or very cryptical allusion to that of the father. Stories, allegories, and illustrations of the egg, and the work of the mother abound; the father is dismissed with a few if any words at all.

This is not fair. It may give the girls all the instruction they need. It does not do the same for the little father to be. I was brought up against this some time ago in reading a nature study story to a couple of little boys, both under seven. After listening patiently and expectantly for some time one of them looked at me and asked eagerly in regard to the making of that new baby. "Well, but what does the daddy do?" He was such a little lad I felt for an instant as if I were standing on a height, but those frank, eager eyes were fixed unwaveringly on mine. Then I made the plunge, and in a perfectly casual tone I told him. "The daddy has the little new life from God first in his keeping, and he gives it to the mother to take care of for him." It was perfectly satisfactory. We have talked about the matter several times subsequently. The logical result the following shows: We were walking, the small boy and I, along one of the main thoroughfares of the city the other day, when we met a group consisting of a huge, heavily built, muscular man, strolling with his pipe in his mouth, his hat on the back of his head, on the inside of the pavement. Beside him wearily trailed a little, slight, pale, worn woman, evidently his wife. One child dragged at her skirt. She pushed a heavy baby carriage containing another in front of her. It was up grade, too. Her steps were very burdened, for unknown to my small escort she carried yet another "close beneath her heart." But he had seen enough. With indignation growing in his eyes he gazed at the man till at last he burst out with, "What's the matter with him? Why doesn't he help her? *They were his children first.*" A little later we met them again. Now places were exchanged, the man wheeled the carriage with one hand and carried the tired toddler on the other arm, oh, so easily. "Look, look," said the boy eagerly, as if to vindicate his sex "He is a gentleman after all."

But isn't my point proved? "*They were his children first.*" With such a knowledge as this, where were the deserted baby? Where the prostitute girl? Where the man who would "murder his own children" by wanton living, or by contracting or giving venereal disease? Is not this the solution underlying all other of the social problems of to-day? Does not the fact that public opinion permits me to write as I am now doing show that "the light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world" is gradually penetrating our darkness, which hitherto has indeed "comprehended it not."

Nothing of the various forms of evil connected with "sins of the body" need ever be taught to little children, unless, as in the case of the child taught the evil habit, it has been thrust upon them by outside influences, and then it should be dismissed as

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