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"Mamma, what makes the blocks tumble down when I build them up that way?"

"Oh, I don't know. Ask your father."

"I did, but he says don't bother him; he's reading."

"Well, I'm busy, too. Go and play."

Sir Isaac Newton first asked that question, and asked it seriously. That he found the answer is one of the reasons why his name will be remembered so long as men have to do with the force of gravity. You cannot make the child's mind grasp the idea of attraction, the weight of a cubic inch of air and how it differs in specific gravity from the material of which his blocks are made, but you can tell him all he wants to know and give him a practical illustration. You can show him how a pile of blocks can be made to stand up so long as the center of gravity is maintained, how one will fall off another if too much of its weight is on the unsupported side, unless the effect is nullified by another block so placed that the pending weight is overcome, or bound fast. You can give him a very interesting fifteen minutes and he will ever after build his houses with more intelligence and better results—and he will know how and why. Instead, too often, father is reading the paper and mother is washing the dishes. Neither occupation would suffer for a few minutes of neglect; but the child will. On the other hand, if engaged in work that cannot be stopped, what is easier than to say:

"Pretty busy just now, Son. Go ahead with your play and I'll tell you all about it before you go to bed."

Children deal in futures, and just that kind of a promise will be as satisfactory to him, if you train him properly, as an immediate answer.

"But he keeps on asking," you say. Certainly. Why not? He asks a perfectly legitimate question, or at the worst, one that seems so to him, and gets no answer. What is the little mind to do? Think it out for himself? It can't any more than you can evolve an elephant from your own consciousness. If you answer him, giving him the information he seeks, he will think it over in his own way, apply it and be busy with it for some time before his mind turns to something else. Lacking this, and being a thinking animal, he finds another problem and asks about that, continuing the operation until, in impatience, you find it is his bedtime and get rid of him by tucking him in between the sheets. You would not put him to bed with his bodily hunger unsatisfied, but you have no hesitation at all about sending him off to sleep with his brain craving knowledge.

Children differ very little from grown people in exercising the faculty of asking questions, and the quality of them is established only by their comparative mental equipment. Suppose, for a moment, that you had gone no further than vulgar fractions in mathematics and should ask a mathematician to explain to you an intricate proposition in

Euclid. Could he do it? Rather not. But if he were interested in your development, as every parent should be in the development of the child for which they are responsible, he could tell you something about it and use the opportunity of your inquiry to carry you a step further in arithmetic. So with children. Their questions give you the chance to carry them further.

I know a family in which existed an unwritten, undeclared and even unconscious rule that every question of the children should receive careful attention. It was answered, when possible, definitely, tentatively or speculatively, and both parents showed that they were as much interested as the inquiring child. When an immediate answer was not forthcoming, another plan was pursued. Sometimes a question was asked during the day that the mother could not answer. The formula then ran something like this:

"I can't tell you, my boy. Perhaps Dad can when he comes home this evening. Ask him. Now, don't forget it, because while I want to know myself, I want you to do the asking. Dad likes you to ask questions. Here. Put this block (or some other small object) beside your place at the table; then when you see it at dinner it will remind you to ask about what you want to know."

Then it was up to Dad. Many questions forced him to dig up long forgotten lore, and many he was unable to answer "right off the bat." The latter was an occasion for frank admission, and administering a good lesson.

"I guess I can't tell you as much about that as I'd like, Son, but after dinner we'll try to look it up. There is a way of looking up most things, and probably we can find it if we search diligently enough."

After dinner it was looked up, as sure as the promise was made. But they looked it up together; and this long before the child could read well. If Dad found the subject in a cyclopedia, the little fellow, or his sister, sat right beside him while the matter was being read. "I've got it," Dad would say. "Now, wait until I have read this—showing the page or the column—and I'll tell you about it. Dad must find out for himself before he can tell you." Then came the story in such shape that the little fellow could grasp it. And more than that came. Digging and searching, almost always something else was found that interested the child, and so an added bit of information was contributed to his little store of knowledge.

Suppose Dad couldn't find it. All right: "You ask your teacher to-morrow and I'll see what I can find out myself. We'll land it somewhere. To-morrow night when I come home we'll compare notes. But we must get the answer. I want to know about that myself."

The plan worked. It worked well. Dad never posed as the repository of all knowledge, and the children never considered him as such, but they did



Gentleman (indignantly): When I bought this dog you said he was splendid for the rats. Why, he won't touch them. Dealer: Well, isn't that splendid for the rats?



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THE UNSEEN HAND

Bill—"A feller in this here paper says as we ain't fighting the German people."
Gus—"Indeed! Does the blinkin' idiot say who we've been up against all this time?"