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The Good Mother THE BUSINESS OF BEING A MOTHER

It's Your Character That Counts

By KATHLEEN E. STEACY

VERY gently take up your wee baby's hand and look at the palm. Of what does it remind you? Of nothing so much as a crumpled, pink rose leaf. Dainty and sweet and delicate. Now, go back to the rose from which the leaf comes and back of that again to the bud, and then to the bud before it was a bud; and back once more to the stem and then to the root; and now tell me, why didn't that crumpled, pink rose leaf, happen to be the leaf of a violet? Or even a yellow rose leaf? Why? In that tightly packed bud were all the characteristics which distinguished it from any other flower, these characteristics being the result of the elements of character which lie concealed in the root of the plant, and these elements of character are so strong and so individual of the pink rose that nothing else could result; and in this the pink rose is a type of your baby. Folded away within him and deeply hidden are the elements of what he may become, and nothing but the unfolding can show what manner of man he may be.

There was at one time a belief that a child's nature at birth was a blank page, and that on this blank page experience and training might write as fate willed and luck happened. It was something of a toss up. Every one was interested in how the child "turned out" and if he "turned out" badly the mother folded her hands and bowed her head in meek submission. The father said nothing—the problem was beyond him—but all admitted that it was "the Lord's will," and wondered what the parents had done to merit such a chastisement. Then—as now—a good many evils were laid at the door of the Lord; then—as now—it was perfectly safe, since the Lord neither answers back nor justifies Himself. But not all parents left the child to fate or luck. Some were, very much awake to a sense of their duty and undertook to do that duty and to do it most thoroughly.

They brought up the child in "the way he should go," which happened to be in the way they thought he should go—which may be a vastly different thing. They made the mistake of thinking that the Lord gave them this little one to do with him as they thought best, and to make of him what they would, whereas the Lord did nothing of the kind. He loaned them the child as a sacred trust—not as a possession. In both cases his individuality was ignored, but individuality is the determining factor; it makes for destiny both in the man and the race. Now of what is individuality composed?

Life—all human life—is like a web of many colours—warp and woof—some gay, some sombre, but all forming new combinations of bewildering variety. Life—individual life—is the warp of definite, relatively permanent strands that interweave, unite and separate, a given strand passing now into one individual, now into another; each individual presenting a new combination of strands—a new knot in the web; and the woof may very well be the environment in which we find ourselves and which changes—sometimes rough, sometimes smooth—as we pass on through life.

Thus it is that no two persons, of all the millions born since the days of Adam have been exactly alike; therefore, though many fundamental qualities are universal, each individual is a unit possessing within himself the essentials of character which are common to the whole human race, together with the numberless variations which are peculiarly his own. These essentials of character are those qualities which go to the making of man in the fullest and best sense; and, like all God's best and most priceless gifts, are free to all. It is right here that the business of being a mother begins since to her the largest part of the baby's training falls. He has within him the springs and impulses of honour, truth, love, industry, faith, courage, and to her it is given to watch and guard the wonderful unfolding of the baby character—to guide, direct, control. It is of vastly greater importance to recognize and help toward perfection, these qualities which are universal to the race—than to discover and cultivate the occasional talent for art or literature, oratory or music—valuable though these are. Yet, it often happens that these qualities are perverted through ignorance and bad management. Thus, truth may become deceit, and courage be turned into fear. To day no mother has a right to be ignorant. Education and information are within reach of all, but while instruction and information may be obtained from without, education must come from within. We can be taught, but we must learn ourselves.

"Doctor," asked the mother of a year old baby, "When should I begin to train my baby?" "Madam," replied the doctor; "you have already lost much valuable time. His training should have commenced twenty-five years ago," and this is undeniably true. The child's education must begin in the training of the parents.

Take the matter of temper—if a father cannot

control or direct his own temper, how can he blame the child for giving way to bursts of passion? And if the mother is accustomed to allowing her emotions—whether these be of joy or sorrow, of hope or despair—to have full sway, how can she expect to stop her baby's cry or to encourage his smile? It is an absolute impossibility that we exercise any more control over another, than we are in the habit of exercising over ourselves; and if we would properly discipline the child we must have disciplined ourselves so long that it is now a habit. It is clear to all thinking persons that no one can teach or instruct up to the full extent of their own knowledge, and it is equally clear that in self control and discipline the mother must be years ahead of the baby. That which she is trying to teach him must already be a well formed habit with herself. Every mother thinks her baby wonderful—and he is. There is nothing in the whole, wide world half as wonderful—or as interesting—as the gradual unfolding of the baby's life.

Watch the opening of the rosebud—so gradual as to be imperceptible, but none the less sure and true to its promise of a pink rose. The mother must watch for the first signs of the baby's individuality and must make a study of that individuality. She must encourage him in this, and gently curb him in that. She must help him develop himself towards the best and greatest of which he is capable; pointing out the way, and suggesting that which is right, and always with a touch so light—but sure—that the baby follows at his own volition. It is a serious and delicate matter, this training a human soul. The baby's individuality claims himself and he must work out his own salvation. The wisest of fathers, the most loving of mothers, can guide and direct and only to a certain extent control, then stand aside with prayers,—and it may be tears—because the soul's struggle and development is within itself.

It is well to talk this aspect of the matter over, as the mere putting it into words reduces a vague abstract intention into a very concrete resolution—or it should. The old time theory that a mother knows by instinct how to care for and train her baby is no longer held. It sounded very well in theory, but does not prove itself in fact. The only thing that is born with the baby is love—mother love—and the knowledge of how to train him must be learned largely by experience—experience lived through thoughtfully. Certainly much that is valuable may be acquired from books and otherwise, but the true essence of discipline must come from ourselves—since we grow from within, not from without.

Mother love and motherhood have been the theme of poets and writers of all ages and in all tongues. She has been lauded and extolled and worshipped—and she deserved it all. No one denies but that the business of being a mother is good, hard, exhausting, temper-wrecking work. It is no eight or ten hours a day task, but a steady, twenty-four hours a day engagement with neither Sundays nor holidays off. It is made up of endless detail, prosaic monotony, wearying commonplace—as most supremely important matters are. No man would stand it for a week, and no woman—except for love. Every mother owes much to her baby, since he is the greatest disciplinarian and educator known. He develops all that is best in her, deepens her nature and repays her devotion with a love that is found nowhere else. It is a beautiful and terrible thing that to the baby's dawning sense, the mother is the absolute pattern of perfection—and it means something to live up to that standard. How then can any mother turn the baby over to a nurse? True, some trained infants' nurses know more—that is to say, have more technical knowledge—about the proper care of a young baby, but the woman who can't learn or does not want to be taught, should not own a baby.

The nurse, however much she may know, cannot feel the same to the child, and many nurses and nurse-maids know very little. A fall may cripple him for life. Sitting him up too early may cause spinal curvature. A baby is a born imitator—it is the only way they can learn—and a bad habit formed at this impressionable age clings as a habit formed later may not. Babies cared for by their own mothers are—taking the average—healthier and happier; her eye is far keener than even that of a doctor and were she given one-fifth of a doctor's training, she would be the ideal child specialist. The mother who does not care for her baby herself, loses the happiest and most delightful experience of her life. They need each other.

The greatest work man ever accomplished—whether it be a magnificent building or a great book—has its day, passes and is forgotten. The mother alone builds for posterity—she does more, she builds for eternity. She is of to-day, her baby is of to-morrow. He it is who must carry the torch of life through all the coming ages.

