



Around the Hearth

By JENNIE ALLEN MOORE

"Who fed me from her gentle breast,
And hushed me in her arms to rest,
And on my cheek sweet kisses prest?
My mother.

Who ran to help me when I fell
And would some pretty story tell,
Or kiss the part to make it well?
My mother."

MOTHER AND BABE.

MY mother! What visions of bygone days your memory recalls! Emphasize the *my*, and it is *your* mother, a halo of light clinging to the recollections. They may have been entirely different types of women, may have moved in circles far separated, may have been educated or refined, or illiterate and uncultured, may have had no two features of similarity, no matter from what standpoint they were judged, but the tenderness of my memories, and the sweetness of your impressions, places them both on a pedestal, around which everything that is good and lovely, pure and angelic hovers, and nothing on earth can ever efface the influence that emanated from their lives, and moulded itself into our character.

The boy may go far wrong, may drink the dregs of this world's most sinful cup, may drown the thoughts and prayers of mother in the polluted cesspool of vice and wickedness; the girl may wander far from home and mother, may sink into sloughs so deep and dark, she is lost sight of; but they never get beyond the mother love. The world may cast them out, the father may in sternness denounce them forever, but the longing, loving heart of a mother reaches out and beyond all bolts and bars, down and into the deepest abyss, waiting to forgive and embrace, for, oh, the strength of her boundless love! Well has the poet immortalized it in these words: "Hast thou sounded the depths of yonder sea, And counted the sands that under it be; Hast thou measured the height of heaven above? Then might thou mete out a mother's love."

HAPPY should be that woman who is blessed with the trust of little human beings, who has the privilege of directing the infantile thoughts, who can lead and guide the little minds! I can conceive of no work more beautiful, more ennobling, than training the baby tongue to lisp its first words, the little tottering feet to walk, and the innocent and unstained little soul to "walk in wisdom's pleasant way." Empty must be that woman's heart who has never looked into the depths of baby eyes, all her own, nor felt the thrill of happy motherhood as the little creature singles her out with arms outstretched; who has never pressed closely to her breast a little shining head, nor stood gazing with admiring eyes upon the sleeping darling, with chubby little limbs, and long lashes sweeping the rosy cheeks. She, who has never known motherhood has not tasted of the deepest, tenderest joy on earth, and I have often thought that we mothers do not stop to realize all we stand for to our children, those little beings that look up to us, as we look up to God, whose happiness or woe depends upon our smile or frown.

"If my baby were only older," I have heard women exclaim. Now, don't; just try and enjoy every stage of that little life, from the tiny, helpless, red-faced stranger, all through the interesting evolution, until they are able to wait upon themselves. Every moment of their existence reveals attractions hitherto unknown; so do not be sighing, and wishing them older. We often hear the expression, "You are having your best time with them right now." To a woman who is struggling along with five or six little ones, all, perhaps, under ten years of age, that sounds discouraging. I remember when my inward ejaculation at such a speech could be interpreted thus: "Well, if *this* is my happiest time, Lord help me, later on."

I look back upon those days and, believe me, they were my happiest days, and yours, too. You washed and fed the little flock, and tucked them safely in bed, and they were pleased with whatever mother thought best, the toys, the new clothes, but that changes and a new era dawns. They grow away from the nest, have their own

ideas of what they like and dislike, they decide that they are very capable, and we know that they really need us more than ever. So, we realize that our best time, after all, is when they look to us as an all-wise authority, to whom they appeal to settle their vexed questions.

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AND what diversity of character we meet in the members of a family, each requiring a different method of treatment! How necessary that we be cheerful and patient, kind yet firm withal, dealing out justice tempered with mercy, making allowance for the disposition, for who can understand the heart of a child as the mother? It takes the keenest diplomacy and tact to solve the well-springs of conduct in a family of children, to look beneath the surface and see their reasoning, to view matters from the child's standpoint. Sometimes they are not so far wrong as they seem, for the unformed character can not discriminate as to right and wrong; they need the teaching which only a faithful, earnest mother is in a position to give.

In my mind are four young sisters, the eldest of whom could not be moved once having decided she would not do a thing. Her attitude was: "I have said I won't, and I won't." The second sister could be reasoned with, the fourth could be coaxed into doing what she had declared she would not, but that third case seemed to me the oddest little girl I ever met. You could reason, debate, coax, all to no avail, but start a good brisk scolding, berate her soundly, and she was won. I am often asked if I believe in whipping. You will be puzzled if I answered both "yes" and "no." So I will relate a little story that has given me many a laugh, and expresses my sentiments fairly well.

It was in a railway depot, passengers waiting for the train. A small boy was making it lively for his mother, and interesting to the impatient travellers, by wanting everything he could think of, asking innumerable questions, pulling and hauling at his mother, kicking her shins, and slapping her face, and "got off without even a pinch." I will give the rest *ad verbatim*.

"Please, Johnnie, be good. See how they are all looking at us," she entreated.

"I don't care if they are," he shouted, making a kick at an old man whose feet he had walked over several times. And then the curtain went up on the play. With one twist and two motions he was seized, whirled over a pair of knees, and before he could squawk once the spanking machine began its work. If ever a boy of seven was neatly wound up, and the ugly taken out of him inside sixty seconds, the work was no more complete than in this case.

"Thar!" said the spanker, as he up-ended the boy, and placed him on a seat. "You'll feel better—a heap better. Hated to do it, you know, but saw that you was a-sufferin' for it. Beg your mother's pardon for interferin' in fam'ly matters, but you set right thar till the train comes in."

The boy "set," and a calm stole over the crowd. The old man turned to his neighbor and said: "He puts me in mind of my Willyum when he was a kid. Thar was times when nothin' on aithr would put good natur' into him, but a good, sound spanking."

So there you have my opinion. There are some natures that seem to positively suffer for a good castigation occasionally. Nothing else can take the place of it, and if you "spare the rod you spoil the child."

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BUT never for accidents, no, nor for mischief when it is not wilful, would I slap a child. They break a dish, tear their clothes, fall into the mud. Surely we all encountered those things in our childhood, and how grateful we were when we escaped punishment. A rod is cruelty in those cases; the child is sufficiently punished by the results. A dark closet, and being sent supperless to bed will never confront me when I am called to account for my stewardship. The horrors of the first on a nervous disposition, and the ruined health of the second, on a child's craving stomach for food! Put them into a light

room if their offence deserves isolation, and feed them with bread and water, but never be guilty of letting a child suffer the pangs of hunger to mete out a merited punishment, or draw upon their imagination terrors that are stamped there for life.

The tone, the look, should have a meaning. "Baby, come, mother wants you," should mean exactly that, and teach baby that he must give heed to that call. It takes patience to enforce these little things, but a few lessons impress the fact on the little mind that they *must* put things back, that they *must* come when called, and the way is paved for all future years. A path of obedience has been hewn out, and they do not expect to swerve from it, but make it a purpose in life to follow in the straight line of authority.

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I THINK the greatest compliment I ever received, at least the one I most appreciate as a mother, came through a remark made by one of my children. A neighbor told me of it. She had made this observation: "Oh, but your mother may have forgotten about it." She said he looked her straight in the eye, and said: "Do you think my mother ever forgets her promises? She is not that kind of a mother; she'll do it, because she said she would."

It is often difficult to keep a promise, but with children, so much depends upon the non-fulfilment. Their trust is gone, the confidence shaken, they hesitate to believe in the future. I have heard mothers console little ones who fretted at their departure, assuring them with a good-bye kiss that if they dried their tears, and remained at home, they would bring them some candy, a promise they never thought of again until they spied the expectant little face at the window or gate. I did that once, but when the eager little ones ran to meet me, I punished myself to the extent of going back, tired as I was, to the nearest store, and purchasing the promised treat.

We cannot be too careful about keeping our word. A child misbehaves on the street, or in church. They know better, and you whisper that you will punish them when you reach home. Do you do it? Invariably you do not; good conduct has been re-established, your own annoyance has passed, and why renew the unpleasant episode? Let it go, it is surely the quietest way. Yes, it certainly is much easier to condone a fault when it is all over. But what about the child's faith in mother and her promise? More than once I astonished the members of my household by quietly taking by the hand a perfectly good-natured looking child into the privacy of mother's room, and administering what was to me a very heart-rending but necessary punishment, for a wilful disobedience that I felt it was no kindness to my child to overlook. Oh, yes, mother, if the rule works one way, it is also good in the other.

It need only be a serious talk, a reprimand, or perhaps confinement in a room for an hour, mayhap a hand held out for a couple of slaps, but if you have promised a punishment, fulfil it, and in future they will know exactly what you mean, as well as what to expect if they ignore your commands.

There is no time a mother is placed at such a disadvantage, as when she is away from home visiting or travelling. It is then the home-training counts, and the mortification that mothers endure is largely that of their own making. The faults are not so glaring seen at home, but when confronted with them before strangers, and the inability, so apparent, to make any impression upon their child outside of a downright whipping, makes them resolve that the future enforcement of obedience will be exacted to the last toll.

But that is soon forgotten, the rigid system relaxes in time, it is really too much trouble to always insist, and thus the character of the child suffers, as well as the nerves of mother. Whenever I see such mistaken indulgence—really arising from indolence in persisting—I always say to myself, "Poor woman, she is preparing a rod for her own back." Sooner or later, she understands that she has spoiled a naturally good child by the lack of a gentle firmness which should be a prominent virtue in a wise mother.