

LOOK TO YOUR CHILDREN ALWAYS

They say that the race goes forward on the feet of children; and next to the children themselves, you are the chief factors in the march, sharing the responsibility for "every false step they take, every sin they commit, every pain they suffer," no less than for their goodness, happiness and health. You and your children,—all of us indeed,—live in a world fraught with possibilities of joy and pain, of good and evil, and the dangers of the pilgrim's progress are not to be avoided but to be faced and overcome. There is the Slough of Despond, Doubting Castle, Vanity Fair, as well as the Palace Beautiful, the Interpreter's House, the Delectable Mountains. How can you help the young pilgrims—your child, your children—in the early stage of their journey to the heavenly City?

Perhaps we need not say to-day with 16th century Ascham that "More care is had even amongst very wise men to find a cunning man for their horse than a cunning (i.e. skilful, competent) man for their children. . . so that in the end they find more pleasure in their horse than comfort in their children," but motors and movies seem to threaten the home and are like to turn home dwellers into "roomers" and "mealers", making home itself little more than a convenient point of departure for external operations. Some people are tempted even to apologize for home. Yet though home suffers from counter-attractions and the pressure of "the other children" and their ways, it has not really lost its power. In this age of specialization, you are perhaps tempted to give up to outsiders what is meant for home, and to hand over the training of your own children to Church, school, holiday camps and other agencies. Perhaps it is that you seek more leisure for your own pursuits and interests of business and pleasure; more likely that your modesty persuades you that these other agencies will do the work better. But among specialists remember that you are the home specialists, and though other agencies have their rightful place, none of them can do your work. Canon Underhill of Liddon House, London, speaking from a wide experience, especially among boys, says: "It is impossible to foresee what is going to be the effect on our civilization of this decay of religious training in the home. The family is not only the oldest thing on earth, but far the most powerful. No institution, however strong, can in the end rival the home, and therefore the loss of training or bad training in the home is the greatest of all failures. In 19 out of 20 cases of those who have fallen away from religion (I speak from my own experience) whatever the school teaching may have been, there has been no religious influence at home. In 19 out of 20 of those who have kept firm, there has been a father or a mother who cared about spir-

itual things. Teachers and priests may do their best or their worst. It is the home that counts."

Is it not clear that God means it to be so, from the fact that He has built the social organism upon the union of man and woman and has conditioned the heritage and gift of children upon that union?

Every person—and your child, each of your children, is a person,—is compounded of body, soul and spirit, and is subject to those influences we call heredity and environment. The balance between authority and freedom is a very delicate one, and to find it is perhaps the great problem of training; too much and it develops into tyranny, too little and it weakens into anarchy. You find the balance by degrees, partly by instinct, partly by intention. Your children must be studied in their various actions and reactions. To understand ever so little is difficult, who of us really understands anyone else, or even himself? But your own desire and insight will lead you on adventures in understanding and your child's confidence may be the reward.

What do you really want for your child? Or has that anything to do with it? Of course you cannot help wanting certain things, but you must beware of trying to mould your children to your own desires or turn them into the path of your own choice, and this is one of the great temptations to some very faithful parents. But no doubt you desire, and rightly desire your child to be healthy, useful and happy, to be trained in body, soul and spirit; to learn to love God and man; to be made ready for that state of life into which it shall please God to call him,—not necessarily which you have chosen for him.

Let the children see that you care for the things of God; let them not imagine that you are merely imposing upon them something which is good for them now, but which you have outgrown (and which they will outgrow too). Study your children and their questions, and never give an answer that you know to be false. It is a crisis in your child's life and in your own when he first asks: "Where is God?" or "How did I get here?" You must make ready for the opportunity. If you make ready for these moments in the relationship of yourself and your child, you may trust the Spirit of light to give you what to say.

Lastly or firstly, pray for your children, or say rather, talk with God about them, so that His grace may flow to them and find a channel through your prayers. Will not the angels ascending and descending upon the Ladder, carry your prayers up to God and return with the blessing which He means to give. If there shall never be one lost good, there shall never be one lost prayer. No one can tell you what to pray, but one good prayer for all lovers of children—(and there are many of them who are not parents after the flesh)—may well be: "That they may be followers of God as dear children, and walk in love." —G.B.R.E.

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