

HOW TO TRAIN A CHILD MENTALLY.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



IN a former paper I spoke of the physical development of children, and if my memory serves me aright, I condemned in measured terms what I call the hot-house plan of rearing children. I may here just add that while as a rule the offspring of the middle classes in England are over-daintily fed and

over-coddled, those children that are born beyond the silvery Tweed, and especially those who live in the far North, are brought up somewhat too much on the hard. The words of the proverb, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," are construed in a way which I feel sure that wisest of men never meant them to be, and consequently corporal punishment, both at schools and in family circles, is carried out to the verge of cruelty. In Scotland both parents and teachers are often more feared than loved, and I do not

wonder at it, for the punishment meted out to a poor child is often out of all proportion to the fault that has been committed. And not only is this the case, but children are very often punished, and that, too, severely, for what was no fault, but simply a misfortune.

Let us now ask ourselves what are the qualities that we feel ourselves justified in trying to develop in the minds of our children. As I have already said, they are those that will be found most useful to them and to the world at large, when they go forth all alone and unaided to take their rank and position in the great battle of life. But we must remember at the very outset that if a child is mismanaged *corporally*, he will have but little chance of ever becoming a man *mentally*—a man and a gentleman. You can never make a man of a milksop, and a child that is over-pampered, luxuriously fed, indulged in every whim and fancy, and never permitted to rough it in the least, will grow up selfish in the extreme, and mayhap a bully and a coward, and altogether useless in this brave, bustling, work-a-day world of ours. Be ever careful of the health of a child; and to be this you must yourself know something about the common laws of health, and the benefits to be derived from fresh air, exercise, sunshine, temperance in food, and—listen, pray—temperance in dress, for over-clothing means over-coddling, and over-coddling kills. Coddling not only kills the individual, but it undermines the strength of nations; it is the axe that lies at the root of its manhood. Remember that the Romans were the most glorious people in the world until they took to effeminate habits and self-coddling. Then they went down-hill gradually but surely.

To children as to us all, but to children especially, is example better than precept. What a good thing for both ourselves and them if we could always bear this in mind, and order our actions and our lives as

we would have them order theirs! Their eyes are ever on their parents, not to criticise, not to censure or blame, but to try to imitate. To a child, whatever is, is right, if father or mother does it; and he will grow up, not acting as you have told him to act, but, in a very great measure, the same as he has seen you act. What a beautiful trait in a child's character, for instance, is candour and truthfulness! How poor a figure a sneaky child, who has made some excuse, or even told a lie, to hide a fault, looks beside the bold little fellow who at once admits a wrong action! And yet the child is just what the mother makes him. Can she expect her child to be truthful if she herself be not so—if she is heard to lie before him, even in little matters, or to force into a breach a lame excuse, where the truth would have acted better and more boldly? Women themselves do not nor cannot be expected to know the amount of misery and wretchedness that untruthfulness and want of candour cause in this world. But men could tell them. Among the poorer classes, I am sorry to say, truth does not shine as a virtue; but in middle-class life, that life with which we have most to do, it ought to and does, and a man who has been found untruthful cannot, if he possesses a spark of feeling, hold his face up before the sun of society. Untruthfulness has blighted many a life, and broken many a friendship 'twixt man and man. Now, we should not only be most truthful in our conversation before children, but we should be truthful towards them. We should never, on any account, deceive them, nor make promises to them which we do not mean sacredly to fulfil—even if it be the promise of punishment. This latter is sometimes necessary, though but seldom; yet the habit of threatening a child with no intention of fulfilling such threat is greatly to be deprecated.

Never teach a child to be vain. Vanity is ruinous to young girls, and it leads to boastfulness in young men, and this again to untruth. A girl is rendered vain of her looks and in matters of dress; a boy generally of his deeds or acquirements. A boy who is made to believe he is clever very often becomes insufferably rude and impertinent, and will grow up a vulgar man.

From truthfulness to bravery or courage, the transition is easy. What bravery really is in the abstract, however, or whether it be almost entirely an attribute of the mind, or dependent more on physical development, I must not stop to inquire. Sufficient to say that it is something which we like to see a child evince signs of possessing, sufficient to believe and know that it is something which can be largely developed wherever the germ already exists. Then comes the question, "How?" You cannot beat bravery into the brains of a child, that is certain; but you can beat it out of him. If, even when learning to walk, you run

to pick him up, with coddling words and frightened looks, instead of laughing at him, and letting him raise himself if he can, you are assuredly guilty of quenching the flame of courage which otherwise would burn up in his heart. Given two boys, No. 1 and No. 2: No. 1 gets a nasty tumble; his mother, much as she feels for him, pretends it is nothing, and laughingly encourages him to rise, and though his little face is red with pain, his little lips compressed, and a big swelling on his brow, he will be romping and screaming five minutes after. No. 2 gets down, and nurse and mother run; he is pitied and petted, and put to bed with lollipops. Ah! mothers, depend upon it, No. 1 will be No. 1 all his days, and No. 2 always in the rear of the battle of life.

Do not, though, let your child be foolhardy; a brave man, or a brave boy either, *knows* his danger, but does not shrink from it. And a brave boy is never unkind to those he can rule. Laugh at a boy for such apparently trivial acts as beating his nurse or behaving roughly to a cat, and you will very likely make him a bully.

Kindness to the lower animals should always be inculcated—more, mind you, by example than precept. A child cannot have a better playmate than a dog or a cat; but he should be taught to love it, taught that it has feeling and feelings, and can hunger and thirst, and suffer, and love, and be grateful. Nay, but I am wrong in speaking of teaching children to love animals; you do not require to do this; you need only let them have their companionship—the animals themselves will do all the teaching.

What is true of animate is true of inanimate nature. Let your child be as much as possible among plants and flowers. They have a language of their own, a language which cannot be taught, but which may be learned, and the tongue with which they speak is divine.

The mind of a child is cultivated by the reading of well-chosen books, or by being read to before he himself is able to read. What kind of books are the best? In my opinion, books to make your boy laugh and think and imagine, but not think too deeply. Nursery rhymes and stories by the dozen, if you choose, but pray do not let there be anything of the dismal or horrible about them. Encourage the love of music. Do not bother them with instruments, however, until their fingers gather sufficient strength. Better they should listen to others playing, listen and listen, listen and learn, until something within them makes them exclaim mentally, "Oh! I feel sure that I, too, could play." But as to singing, that is another thing. Let them sing from their babyhood.

The exercises of both writing and drawing enlarge the mind and conceptions. And when a child is old enough, and can write tolerably distinctly, let him or her begin to cultivate descriptive powers. Thus, suppose you ask a child to write down the description of a walk he has had, if only in a garden, or of some incident which he has witnessed, though the task be hard at first, it is wonderful how soon it becomes both

easy and pleasurable to him. But discourage all attempts at high or flowing language; let him write only what he sees and feels, and that in the simplest language of his every-day life.

Children think much more deeply than we imagine; we should, therefore, answer their questions to the best of our ability, unless evidently asked in a spirit of frivolity, and try to explain to them reasons for things they see occurring around them, and for the acts which you yourself perform. But gain their confidence in every way in your power. A mother should be more of a monitor than a teacher, or rather she ought to be both combined.

You like to see your boy clever, doubtless, but do not make a show-child of him. Do not even let him know you think him clever, and discourage all pertness in conversation, for this too often borders on impertinence. Never permit him to contradict you. If he contradicts his mother, may he not, when old enough to go out, be guilty at table of very great rudeness? At the same time, mothers should never deserve contradiction. When you have occasion to reprove, beware of doing so angrily. It is far better to speak gently, and make the child feel ashamed of himself, because shame breeds sorrow and contrition, and this in its turn the desire to behave far better in the time to come.

The love of duty cannot be too early instilled into the mind of a child. The sacred nature of duty requires, however, to be fully appreciated by parents themselves before they can teach it to their children.

Teach your child to be courteous and obliging. This you can do in the nursery by precept; but you can also point out to him when abroad the courteousness of other gentlemanly boys, and show him how much you admire it.

An unselfish and non-self-indulgent boy will generally grow up a gentleman in manners; at all events, the converse is true.

Teach your child to be honest and honourable, in all his doings and dealings with his brothers and sisters; and teach him, too, that rare virtue, charity, which ever follows at the heels of truth.

Order and regulation are no mean acquirements. If they be not taught early they will never be learned. A child should be made to put his toys away each in its proper place, and even to know where he puts his clothes, so that he could find them in the dark. So will he be tidy in his person, tidy in the apartment he occupies, and orderly and tidy in life.

I need not tell you to teach your child to pray, nor remind you how religion softens one's path through this world, and lengthens life itself by giving hope and calm in the hour of peril or sickness.

And now I am at the end of my space, and the feeling uppermost in my mind is that the Family Doctor has said so little where he meant to have said so much. I shall have done some good, however, if any single sentence I have penned causes some mother to think.

