

ON THE TRAINING OF PARENTS.

FORTY or fifty years ago, when the middle-aged and old people of the present day were children or young people, the parent occupied a position in the family so entirely different from that in which we find him to-day, that the subject of his training was not perhaps of sufficient importance to receive attention from those engaged in the promotion of education. The training of the child by the parent, both as a necessary element in the formation of its character and as a preparation for its education in the schools, was then considered the only branch of family instruction and discipline to which the thought and the assistance of workers in social reform should be given.

But now that there has been such a change, especially in the United States, in the constitution of the family, when the child has taken into its own hands that authority which was once the prerogative of the parent, it is time that we should recognize the altered condition of things, and give to the children of the present day that assistance and counsel in the government and judicious training of their parents which was once so freely offered to the latter when their offspring held a subordinate position in the family and household.

Since this radical change in the organization of the family a great responsibility has fallen upon the child; it finds itself in a position far more difficult than that previously held by the parent. It has upon its hands not a young and tender being, with mind unformed and disposition capable, in ordinary cases, of being easily molded and directed, but two persons with minds and dispositions matured, and often set and hardened, whose currents of thought run in such well-worn channels, and whose judgments are so biased and prejudiced in favor of this or that line of conduct, that the labor and annoyance of their proper training is frequently evaded, and the parents are remanded to the position of providers of necessaries, without any effort on the part of the child to assist them to adapt themselves to their new condition.

Not only has the child of the present day the obvious difficulties of its position to contend with, but it has no traditions to fall back upon for counsel and support. The condition of family affairs under consideration did not exist to any considerable extent before the middle of the present century, and there are no available records of the government

of the parent by the child. Neither can it look to other parts of the world for examples of successful filial administration. Nowhere but in our own country can this state of things be said to prevail. It is necessary, therefore, that those who are able to do so should step forward in aid of the child as they formerly aided the parent, and see to it, as far as possible, that the latter receives the training which will enable him properly to perform the duties of the novel position which he has been called upon to fill. It is an injustice to millions of our citizens that the literature of the country contains nothing on this subject.

Whether it be done properly or improperly, the training of which we speak generally begins about the fifth or sixth year of parentage, although in cases where there happens to be but one trainer it often begins much earlier; but in these first years of filial rule the discipline is necessarily irregular and spasmodic, and it is not until the fourteenth or fifteenth year of his parental life that a man is generally enabled to understand what is expected of him by his offspring, and what line of conduct he must pursue in order to meet its views. It is, therefore, to the young people who have lived beyond their first decade that the great work of parent-training really belongs, and it is to them that we should offer our suggestions and advice.

It should be considered that this revolution in the government of the family was not one of force. The father and the mother were not hurled from their position and authority by the superior power of the child, but these positions have been willingly abdicated by the former, and promptly and unhesitatingly accepted by the latter. To the child then belongs none of the rights of the conqueror. Its subjects have voluntarily placed themselves under its rule, and by this act they have acquired a right to consideration and kindly sympathy which should never be forgotten by their youthful preceptors and directors. In his present position the parent has not only much to learn, but much to unlearn; and while the child is endeavoring to indicate to him the path in which he should walk, it should remember that the feet of father or mother are often entirely unaccustomed to the peculiar pedestrianism now imposed upon them, and that allowance should be made for the frequent slips, and trips, and even falls, which may happen to them. There is but little

doubt that severity is too frequently used in the education of parents. More is expected of them than should be expected of any class of people whose duties and obligations have never been systematically defined and codified. The parent who may be most anxious to fulfill the wishes of his offspring, and conduct himself in such manner as will meet the entire approval of the child, must often grope in the dark. It is, therefore, not only necessary to the peace and tranquillity of the family that his duties should be defined as clearly as possible, but this assistance is due to him as a mark of that filial affection which should not be permitted entirely to die out, simply because the parent has voluntarily assumed a position of inferiority and subjection. It is obvious, then, that it is the duty of the child to find out what it really wants, and then to make these wants clear and distinct to the parents. How many instances there are of fathers and mothers who spend hours, days, and even longer periods, in endeavoring to discover what it is that will satisfy the cravings of their child, and give them that position in its esteem which they are so desirous to hold. This is asking too much of the parent, and there are few whose mental vigor will long hold out when they are subjected, not only to the performance of onerous duties, but to the anxiety and vexation consequent upon the difficult task of discovering what those duties are.

Among the most forcible reasons why the rule of the child over the parent should be tempered by kind consideration, is the high degree of respect and deference now paid to the wants and opinions of children. In this regard they have absolutely nothing to complain of. The parent lives for the benefit of the child. In many cases the prosperity and happiness of the latter appears to be the sole reason for the existence of the former. How necessary is it, then, that persons occupying the position of parents in the prevalent organization of the family should not be left to exhaust themselves in undirected efforts, but that the development of their ability and power to properly perform the duties of the father and mother of the new era should be made the subject of the earnest thought and attention of the child.

It is difficult for those whose youth elapsed before the revolution in the family, and who therefore never enjoyed opportunities of exercising the faculties necessary in the government of parents, to give suitable advice and suggestion to those now engaged in this great work; but the following remarks are offered in the belief that they will receive due con-

sideration from those to whom they are addressed.

There can be no doubt that it is of prime importance in the training of a parent by the child that the matter should be taken in hand as early as possible. He or she who begins to feel the restrictions of filial control, in the first years of parental life, will be much less difficult to manage as time goes on than one who has not been made aware, until he has been a parent for perhaps ten or twelve years, that he is expected to shape his conduct in accordance with the wishes of his offspring. In such cases, habits of self-consideration, and even those of obtrusive self-assertion, are easily acquired by the parent, and are very difficult to break up. The child then encounters obstacles and discouragements which would not have existed had the discipline been begun when the mind of a parent was in a pliant and moldable condition. Instances have occurred when, on account of the intractable nature of father or mother, the education intended by the child has been entirely abandoned, and the parents allowed to take matters into their own hands, and govern the family as it used to be done before the new system came into vogue. But it will nearly always be found to be the case, in such instances, that the ideas of the parent concerning his rights and prerogatives in the family have been allowed to grow and take root to an extent entirely incompatible with easy removal.

The neglect of early opportunities of assuming control by the child who first enables a married couple to call themselves parents, is not only often detrimental to its own chances of holding the domestic reins, but it also trammels to a great extent the action of succeeding children. But no youngster, no matter how many brothers and sisters may have preceded it, or to what extent these may have allowed the parents to have their own way, need ever despair of assuming the control which the others have allowed to elude their grasp. It is not at all uncommon for the youngest child of a large family to be able to step to the front, and show to the others how a parent may be guided and regulated by the exercise of firm will and determined action.

If, as we have suggested, parental training is begun early enough, the child will find its task an easy one, and little advice will be needed by it; but in the case of delayed action there is one point that should be kept in mind, and that is that sudden and violent measures should, as far as possible, be avoided. In times gone by it used to be the custom of many parents, when offended by a child, to administer a box to the culprit's ear. An un-

expected incident of this kind was apt to cause a sudden and tremendous change in the mental action of the young person boxed. His views of life, his recollections of the past, his aspirations for the future, his ideas of nature, of art, of the pursuit of happiness, were all merged and blended into one overwhelming sensation. For the moment he knew nothing on earth but the fact that he had been boxed. From this point the comprehension of his own status among created things, his understanding of surrounding circumstances, and of cosmic entities in general, had to begin anew. Whether he continued to be the same boy as before, or, diverging one way or the other, became a better or a worse one, was a result not to be predetermined by any known process. Now, it is not to be supposed that any ordinary child will undertake to box the ears of an ordinary parent, for the result in such a case might interfere with the whole course of training then in progress; but there is a mental box, quite as sudden in its action, and as astounding in its effect upon the boxee, as an actual physical blow, and it is no uncommon thing for a child to administer such a form of correction. But the practice is now as dangerous as it used to be, and as uncertain of good result, and it is earnestly urged upon the youth of the age to abolish it altogether. If a parent cannot be turned from the error of his ways by any other means than by a shock of this kind, it would be better, if the thing be possible, to give him into the charge of some children other than his own, and let them see what they can do with him.

We do not propose to liken a human parent to an animal so unintelligent as a horse, but there are times when a child would find it to his advantage, and to that of his progenitor, to treat the latter in the same manner as a sensible and considerate man treats a nervous horse. An animal of this kind, when he sees by the roadside an obtrusive object with which he is not acquainted, is apt to imagine it a direful and ferocious creature, such as used to pounce upon his prehistoric ancestors, and to refuse to approach its dangerous vicinity. Thereupon the man in charge of the horse, if he be a person of the character mentioned above, does not whip or spur the frightened animal until he rushes madly past the terrifying illusion, but, quieting him by gentle word and action, leads him up to the object, and shows him that it is not a savage beast, eager for horseflesh, but an empty barrel, and that the fierce eye that he believed to be glaring upon him is nothing but the handle of a shovel protruding above the top. Then the horse, if there is any good in

him, will be content to walk by that barrel; and the next time he sees it will be likely to pass it with perhaps but a hasty glance or two to see that its nature has not changed; and, in time, he will learn that barrels, and other things that he may not have noticed before, are not ravenous, and so become a better, because a wiser, horse. We know well that there are parents who, plodding along as quietly as any son or daughter could desire, will suddenly stop short at the sight of something thoroughly understood and not at all disapproved of by his offspring, but which to him appears as objectionable and dangerous as the empty barrel to the high-strung horse. Now, let not the youngster apply the mental lash, and urge that startled and reluctant parent forward. Better far if it take him figuratively, by the bridle, and make him understand that that which appeared to him a vision of mental or physical ruin to a young person, or a frightful obstacle in the way of rational progress, is nothing but a pleasant form of intellectual recreation, which all persons ought to like very much, or to which, at least, they should have no objections. How many such phantasms will arise before a parent, and how necessary is it for a child, if it wish to carry on without disturbance its work of training, to get that parent into the habit of thinking that these things are really nothing but phantasms!

When it becomes necessary to punish a parent, no child should forget the importance of tempering severity with mercy. The methods in use in the by-gone times, when the present condition of things was reversed, were generally of a physical nature, such as castigation, partial starvation, and restrictions in the pursuit of happiness; but those now inflicted by the children, acting upon the mental nature of the parents, are so severe and hard to bear that they should be used but sparingly. Not only is there danger that by undue severity an immediate progenitor may be permanently injured, and rendered of little value to himself and others, but there is sometimes a reaction, violent and sudden, and a family is forced to gaze upon the fearful spectacle of a parent at bay!

The tendency of a great portion of the youth who have taken the governing power into their own hands is to make but little use of it, and to allow their parents to go their own way, while they go upon theirs. Such neglect, however, cannot but be prejudicial to the permanency and force of the child-power. While the young person is pursuing a course entirely satisfactory to himself, doing what he likes, and leaving undone what he does not like, the unnoticed parent may be

concocting schemes of domestic management entirely incompatible with the desires and plans of his offspring, and quietly building up obstacles which will be very difficult to overthrow when the latter shall have observed their existence. Eternal vigilance is not only the price of liberty, but it is also the price of supremacy. To keep one's self above another, it is necessary to be careful to keep that other down. The practice of some fathers and mothers of coming frequently to the front, when their presence there is least expected or desired, must have been noticed by many children who had supposed their parents so thoroughly trained that they would not think of such a thing as causing trouble and annoyance to those above them. A parent is human, and cannot be depended upon to preserve always the same line of action; and the children who are accustomed to see their fathers and mothers perfectly obedient, docile, and inoffensive, must not expect that satisfactory conduct to continue if they are allowed to discover that a guiding and controlling hand is not always upon them. There are parents, of course, who never desire to rise, even temporarily, from the inferior positions which at the earliest possible period they have assumed in their families. Such persons are perfectly safe; and when a child perceives by careful observation that a parent belongs to this class, it may without fear relax much of the watchfulness and discipline necessary in most families, and content itself with merely indicating the path that it is desirable the elder person should pursue. Such parents are invaluable boons to an ambitious, energetic, and master-

ful child; and if there were more of them the anxieties, the perplexities, and the difficulties of the child-power among us would be greatly ameliorated.

Even when parents may be considered to be conducting themselves properly, and to need no increase of vigilant control, it is often well for the child to enter into their pursuits, to see what they are doing, and, if it should seem best, to help them do it. Of course, the parents are expected to promote and maintain the material interests of the family, and as their labor, beyond that necessary for present necessities, is generally undertaken for the future benefit of the child, it is but fair that the latter should have something to say about this labor. In the majority of cases, however, the parent may in this respect safely be left alone. The more he gives himself up to the amassing of a competency or a fortune, the less will he be likely to interfere with the purposes and actions of his children.

One of the most important results in the training under consideration is its influence upon the trainer. When a child has reduced its parents to a condition of docile obedience, and sees them day by day, and year by year, pursuing a path of cheerful subservience, it can scarcely fail to appreciate what will be expected of it when it shall itself have become a parent. Such observation, if accompanied by accordant reflection, cannot fail to make easier the rule of the coming child; and, in conclusion, we would say to the children of the present day: Train up a parent in the way he should go, and when you are old you will know how to go that way yourself.

Frank R. Stockton.

THE REPROACH.

WITH my silence thou dost task me,
 Why I sing no more dost ask me:
 "Once," thou say'st, "in lavish fashion
 Love poured out his lyric passion;
 When I oped my door, upon it
 I was sure to find a sonnet;
 Blossoms took I, white or rosy,—
 There'd be verse within the posy;
 If I rode, or read, or slumbered,
 I was mightily benumbered;
 If I frowned, dear love, on thee —
 Straight, behold, an elegy!
 Has some beauty, then, outshone me,
 Since thou mak'st no rhymes upon me?"

Ah! thou little needest telling
 That this heart is ne'er rebelling; —
 After one proud, short endeavor
 It was lost,— and lost forever.
 But, though I'm thy slave and poet,
 What's the need I still should show it?
 Shall I sing my songs thrice over
 To so well-besung a lover?
 Nay, I'm too serenely quiet
 For the pulses' rhyiming riot,
 Of my frenzy now I'm cured,
 Of thy constancy assured;
 Song is pain, and perfect pleasure
 Gloats in silence o'er its treasure.

Edmund Gosse.