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Responsibility of Parents.

By HEMAN C. SMITH.

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RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS.

How grand are the possibilities presenting themselves at mention of these words, but how fearful the consequences sure to follow the exercise of parental authority by those who fail to comprehend the duties and responsibilities of this sacred trust. How peacefully sublime must be the declining years of those who have taken in trust the tender, unfolding mind when they see it develop into usefulness and leading in all that is honorable, virtuous, noble, and good. To whom could it be more fitly said, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? But how sad and remorseful must be the life of those who for any cause have failed to properly lead their offspring, when they see all their hopes blighted, their fond anticipations not realized, but instead their own lives disgraced and their loved ones dragged down to infamy, shame, dishonor, and death. Many well-meaning people fail; many tender, loving, parental hearts are broken and bleeding to-day because of these failures. Is there no remedy? Oh! must these conditions always obtain? In this world of wisdom and order, is this and only this governed by chance? Oh! parents, think of it; carefully, prayerfully, seriously, humbly think of it! Is it not because we fail to understand the laws governing our being? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." This being true there should be no false delicacy, no

reluctance in using every proper means to become acquainted with the laws governing the physical being, the laws of procreation, etc., as well as the art of teaching and training the tender, confiding mind. If it were possible that our influence could be limited to the home circle, O what a grand and extensive field of labor would be left us still! In fact, were we allowed to make choice, others might enjoy, if they could, the praise, the honor, the applause, and congratulations of a hurried world, but give us the honor and pleasure of removing the rough stones from the path of those we love, and leading the tottering feet over the rough paths of life.

Humble parent, why should you regret though your name never reaches the rolls of fame? If you do well your duty towards those tender plants, through them you will reach the great world, and the effects of your gentleness and love will sweep majestically down the ages, sweetening the lives of many who may never hear your name, and when the effects shall have reached the farther shore they will bear you triumphantly upon the tidal wave of everlasting peace and overwhelm your freed spirit with ecstatic joy. Think of it, tired, careworn mother; you have not only launched your barque upon the wave which will, if you are faithfully wise, waft you into the haven of perpetual bliss, but each coming generation will feel the sweetness of your life of love, and even now you are gently touching a responsive chord which will thrill the hearts of the ransomed host with whom you are destined to dwell.

Parental responsibility should be assumed only after careful thought, and wise inquiry into its importance. Yet it is a blessing, and not a curse. It should not be considered a duty only, but also an exalted and pleasurable privilege. She who despises motherhood is unworthy to be a wife; and

the husband who would scorn the loving relation of father is but a lustful and degraded brute. Yet there may be conditions which would render frequent births, or the care of a large family, unwise. In such cases the only legitimate and justifiable preventive is self-control and self-sacrifice, mutually agreed upon. Any other is destructive to mind and body, and a burning shame, disgrace, and sin to the perpetrators of this crime against nature; and entails misery upon others, who are not responsible, but who will surely rise up in judgment to condemn.

The first responsibility of the parent is prospective, and begins with the selection of a companion. Much depends upon this selection; for, remember, other natures are to be formed which will be a commingling of the physical and mental of the parents. If one possesses a peculiar weakness the other should be especially strong in that particular point, that the weakness of one may be overcome by the strength of the other, and so a balance be struck in the future body or mind. However, if we are careful not to be led by love of lust, position, or wealth, nature will usually prevent the evils arising from unwise selections, by gently and tenderly drawing together only those who are by nature adapted to each other.

When two hearts, minds, and souls blend in perfect harmony, neither is again him or herself, but from that hour are changed beings. They are one; he in her, and she in him; a blissful, happy condition. They should be united by legal bonds. From this union of souls characters may be formed with happy results, and the foundation for future success in a parental capacity laid. But the uniting of hands and lives where this blissful union of hearts does not obtain is deceitful, hypocritical, cruel, and sinful, and can

but produce in the fruit of marriage a character of low order. She who sells her body to a *dozen men* for the sake of gain, that she may enjoy the luxuries their money will buy is called by a despised and hateful name; while she who sells herself to *one man* for the same purpose, is honored and congratulated. But where is the difference in the principle? Who has committed the greater sin? The evil effects of the sin of the former usually cease (so far as this world is concerned) with her miserable, loathsome life; but too often the latter leaves offspring to suffer with that innate corruption, the seeds of which her folly has sown. Nor would I shield the man guilty of this, or other sexual sins. May God hasten the time when society shall be so educated that the cowardly wretch can no longer sneak under the cloak of sex to shield himself from merited scorn.

In a properly mated pair there should be, as in all nature, "unity in diversity." If there were no diversity both would possess the same weakness, and of course their children would inherit the same intensified, nor would they be benefited by the union. This being the case it follows that great care should be used after marriage lest one's old self assert itself, and thus lose the influence of the other and the benefit to be derived from association. The man or woman who is not changed by marriage surely is not benefited, and marriage to such is a failure. Remember, a love that was worth gaining is worth retaining, and do not neglect the little acts of kindness and deeds of love through which you gained the heart so dearly prized. Make each other your confidants. There should absolutely be no secrets between husband and wife. If one has a thought, a desire, a hope, a feeling, an impulse not shared by the other, then they lack that much of being one, and the lack of oneness will be

intuitively felt, and strangeness and distrust will be the result.

Under no circumstances should husband or wife be morally inferior to the other. The husband should be as pure and chaste as he expects his wife to be. The saying of Portia to Brutus is full of meaning and is true. "Tell me, Brutus, is it expected I should know no secrets that appertain to you? Am I yourself but, as it were in sort or limitation, to keep with you at meals, comfort your bed, and talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs of your good pleasure? If it be no more, Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife."

A child born in love, the fruit of the blessed union of kindred souls, should be in its nature as pure as the blushing rosebud when first it opens its dewy lips to receive the warm kisses of the morning sun. A child thus born is well born, and inherits a legacy of priceless value. The parents of such a child have comparatively an easy task; easy compared with the care of a child born in and inheriting a legacy of lust, deception, and crime. However, it will not be perfect for the very natural reason that its parents are not perfect. So it will need to be carefully trained. Its degree of perfection depends largely upon the thoughts and desires of the parents. It will partake of their passions and tastes. So we must be careful, if we would not have our child given to excessive passion, we must guard against this ourselves. If we harbor hate towards any our child will be disposed to hate, and through that disposition may commit an act which will bring it to the gallows, and us to disgrace and shame. When the divine One instructed us to love our enemies, it was not chiefly for the purpose of benefiting the enemy. If so, we might love in vain, for our every proffer

of kindness might be spurned. But the effect of love is never lost upon him who possesses it, and so we are advised to love that we might be blessed and purified by the softening, elevating influence of love upon our own hearts. It renders us better qualified for usefulness in any department of life work. But in nothing is its influence more desirable than in qualifying us as parents. So if we do not wish our child to be full of hate we must learn to practice this precept: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

If we would not have our child a thief we should not desire or covet that which is not or cannot legitimately be ours, but learn to be satisfied with our lot in life, or with what our lot may be with industry, frugality, and economy. Would we have our child free from that sexual lust which overrides the legitimate restrictions of love, of honor, and decency, and renders so many creatures loathsome and unclean? then we should not only avoid an illegitimate act, but also avoid an illegitimate desire. Be satisfied with each other, and wholly absorbed in each other's love. It is our innate desire and disposition that stamps the character of the child.

Would we save our child from a drunkard's loathsome grave? Then we should avoid cultivating a taste for intoxicants; yea, more; avoid the cultivation of taste for any unnatural and useless stimulant. We may possess a desire for stimulant and satisfy that desire with something milder but transmit that desire to our child, and he may gratify it only in the damning bowl, and in the judgment day we will know that we have cursed our child. He or she who cannot or will not crucify the taste and lust of the flesh for the good of his or

her posterity is unworthy to be called by the sacred and honored title of "father" or "mother." Fathers, remember that nature has not released you from this responsibility. The tastes and lusts of the father are as often transmitted as are those of the mother.

I will not discuss the, to me, useless subject as to whether the qualities of the father are transmitted to the son, and the qualities of the mother to the daughter; or *vice versa*. It matters not to us which of these positions are correct; when we remember that the qualities of the wife depend largely upon the treatment and attention she receives from her husband; and the qualities of the husband also depend in great measure upon the manner of the wife towards him. So whether the child be son or daughter, or whether the one position or the other be true, both parents share, as they should, the responsibility of formative character. How great is this responsibility! But it is imperfectly understood, and much prejudice has existed against the study of it. Let us as wise men and women, lay aside our prejudice and strive to become better acquainted with ourselves, our possibilities, and responsibilities.

When the child is born there is, or should be, not only *one* new existence, but *three*. The parents have passed another milestone in life's journey. Their surroundings, their duties, their trials, their pleasures are different. They are moving in a new element, their future life destined to be more happy, or more sorrowful, than in the past. To watch with prayerful solicitude the developing of that tender mind and diminutive body should not only be a duty, but also a pleasure. The body must be clothed and fed, or the parents are considered unworthy. Are they any less unworthy who fail to provide for the mind? Under the laws of nature's

God they have been instrumental in forming a character. It is an imperfect one. Nature has done her part and done it well, but the human instruments used were weak, and the production is correspondingly weak. Thank God for the provision made whereby this imperfect work can be improved, the good developed and the evil suppressed. By careful and wise training the irregularities may be outgrown and the weak places be made strong.

But oh! how much wisdom will be needed! No detailed rules can be given which will apply to all. Each young mind and nature must be studied separately, and the parents should have wisdom to adapt themselves to the wants of each case: for where one needs restraint another needs encouragement. In this as well as in all else Jesus the Christ gives us a practical illustration of duty and possibility. While retaining his character as a God, and capable at all times of rising to the dignity and superior excellency of his Godhead, he condescended to become one with us; partaking of our nature, sharing in our trials, sympathizing with us in our sorrows, always ready to lend an ear to our complaints and petitions, and competent to rise as we rise, still pointing onward to nobler thoughts and upward to grander heights. So should a parent be with a child; while retaining all that is noble in the character of manhood or womanhood, and capable of rising to the highest pinnacle of virtue and goodness, yet condescending to descend low enough to be one with the children; partaking of their nature, sharing in their childish joys and trials, sympathizing in their sorrows, and ready to hear and consider their petitions and complaints, yet competent to lead on as the young mind develops. He who cannot condescend to be a child, reason from the child's standpoint, and see as a child sees, is unfit to be

a parent. Yet parents should retain the authority to decide all matters of controversy, and should exercise firmness enough to enforce order and discipline. This should be done in meekness and love, and by such conduct as will cause the child to recognize the superior wisdom of the parent.

If we undertake to rule by physical force, we will drive any child who has the sense of right it should have into rebellion, and we will be able to enforce respect so long as our physical power is greater, but no longer. Besides to arbitrarily rule by virtue of superior physical force is tyrannical and cowardly. When we feel disposed to chasten, because of the exercise of some freak of nature, we should remember that we gave that child its nature, and are in a measure responsible for that unruly or rebellious proclivity. I am not advocating the entire abandonment of corporeal punishment; but I would have you remember, as I once heard Prof. O. S. Fowler say, "If you have any little devils incarnate around your hearthstone remember they came honestly by it, and nobody has lost anything either;" and so be wise, merciful, and considerate in your corrections. Who can without remorse, shame, and mortification punish a child for the purpose of correcting evils for which themselves are responsible? It is an old proverb: "He that spareth the rod spoileth the child;" but if I were permitted to write a proverb on this subject, I would write it thus: "He that spoileth the child should spare the rod."

We should remember that in the family we have absolute authority; for from our decision there can be no appeal. If we make a mistake those little ones placed in our care must abide the consequences, and are required to do so without complaint. We cannot afford to thus wrong them by hasty action. We should be sure that we are right. But how can

we be sure unless we understand our child? The writer of this has not had many years experience as a parent, but he has had enough to make him feel humiliated and chastened in spirit, when he remembers that sometimes he has misunderstood and misjudged the motives and intentions of the little ones, accusing them of design where only accident had occurred. In law a man is not permitted to act as judge or juror where he is the accuser, the law presupposing his unworthiness; but as a parent no one questions the right to act as accuser, judge, and executioner; and that too where there is no court of appeal. No chance to have wrongs made right, but the accused must endure the penalty; no voice must be raised in his defense. If he venture to speak he is often refused a hearing and punished for the attempt. In the very nature of things such authority must exist. But Oh! parents, are we *prepared* for such great responsibility? Are we qualified to assume the high prerogatives with which we are endowed?

I have reason to believe that many children go through child life suffering from unjust criticism and unjust judgment, simply because those invested with power to accuse, judge, and execute judgment have failed to qualify themselves for their high prerogatives; failing to enter into the life and nature of the child, and study its disposition. Is it any wonder that they chafe under the restraint of parental government, and seek to find congenial company elsewhere than around the home hearth? We said there was no court of appeal, but will not God hold us responsible for the exercise of the high prerogatives with which he has endowed us? Then if we fail to know our children, consequently fail to understand their need, can we expect to hear, "Well done good and faithful servant"?

If we are to provide for them, we must know them as they are. Could we provide food and raiment if their necessities were unknown to us? How then can we provide food for the mind unless we know the demands of the mind? We must provide proper amusement, proper instruction, and suitable company for them. We must guard them against obnoxious influences, especially upon weak points. To do so we must know their weak points. We should confide in them, and teach them by precept and example to confide in us. To confide in them and let them know that we trust in their faithfulness and integrity will beget in them a pride of character which will cause them to scorn to betray our trust. If we can induce them to always confide in us no danger will ever threaten their purity but we will be notified of it. But if we would have them esteem us as friends we must be friendly. Do not laugh at their sorrows and trials, nor scold them for being troubled. Their troubles may appear light and trifling to us, but if of sufficient magnitude to grieve those little hearts, or tax those inexperienced brains, they are worthy our attention. We should lend a sympathizing ear, come down to their level, suggest remedies, plan means of escape, and at the same time carefully suggest advance thought, as they are able to comprehend, thus enabling them to rise above, and finally triumph over these petty troubles. If we succeed in leading them out of one trouble we will be their hero or heroine in the next, and to us they will always come in trouble. But if we treat lightly that which to them is of great weight, they will seek counsel and sympathy elsewhere. So we need not be surprised, nor blame anyone but ourselves if in after years our counsel is not sought, and our advice not heeded.

Right here parents have made and are constantly making a fatal mistake. They love their children, give them good and wise counsel, but it apparently falls on heedless ears, and in sorrow they go down to the grave unheard. In after years the child recalls that counsel, understands and appreciates it and bitterly regrets the years of folly spent; often remarking: "This might have been avoided had I heeded the counsel of a pious father or saintly mother, but, alas! I did *not understand it then.*" What was the matter? Simply this; the parents failed to meet the requirements of the hour. They expected the child to arise to their standard, see as they saw, and feel as they felt. They should have descended to the level of the child, helped it to solve the problems of life as they occurred to it, and thus have led it to comprehend the more advanced lessons of life. Had they done this they might have ended their days in peace, and the child been saved a life of folly; instead of having to wait till years of bitter experience brought a comprehension of the parents' teaching.

Christ, our ensample, made no such mistake. He did not expect men to rise to the level and comprehension of a God, but he descended to the level of man. Practically and theoretically he solved the problems of life as they occurred in the struggles of humanity, and thus he leads man to higher and nobler life. Such should be the effort of every teacher of men, and more especially should it be the policy of the instructor of children. We may admire and praise the agility and daring of the man who scales the rugged heights far above us, but he is of but little practical benefit. He who would help us, while he has the ability to ascend rapidly when the occasion requires, must in time of need be so near that he can reach us the helping hand; not simply

beckoning from some high eminence, but ready to sustain our tottering feet and encourage our despondent spirit by a constant presence. Such a Teacher, such a Friend *we* have in Jesus. Have our children, incapable of comprehending him, a suitable substitute in us,—one whose teaching and example will lead them to him, when they have passed from under our control? O, let us learn from him to be the loving companion and constant counselor of our children in matters of life as *they* have to meet them.

Again, if we would have the unqualified confidence of our children we must never deceive them, never betray their trust. Keep every promise and be punctual in every engagement made with them.

I have purposely avoided suggesting any special rules for government, first, because of the difficulty of suggesting rules that will apply under all circumstances. Second, I wish only to bring forward prominently two points; viz., the responsibility of transmitting hereditary qualities of character, and the necessity of parents equalizing themselves with their little ones and helping them to meet life's trials from their own standpoint.

I am satisfied that if we avail ourselves of the benefit to be derived from these two principles all necessary details will be suggested to the careful student of child nature; and we shall be able to lead them in virtue, wisdom, purity, and prosperity, and through them bless the world, the kingdom of God on earth, and assist to intensify the ecstatic pleasures of the ransomed hosts above. In nothing is the benefit of religion more desirable than in this. By communing with God we partake of his nature, and in turn transmit that divine nature to our children; and thus will the next generation be nearer heaven than this, and the problem of the world's redemption be partially solved.

