

HOW MOTHER IS EDUCATED.

BY MRS. WALTERS.

MY only excuse for daring to speak before so many mothers this afternoon is, that I have been mothering my own or other people's children for nearly 40 years, and therefore, perhaps, have had more problems to meet than usually falls to the lot of a mother, and that I am hoping there will be such a good discussion at the end of my paper that I may gather many fresh and helpful ideas for my work.

If ever there is a time when we may talk freely about the deep things of life, it is when mothers are gathered together in council to help each other in the training of their little ones; therefore, when I take as my foundation stone in the education of a mother, a real, practical, hourly reliance on God, I know I will have your real sympathy, for deep down in every mother's heart is the memory of our feeling of unworthiness when we thought of the responsibility of training our wee babies aright, and the unspoken earnest prayer that we should never be a hindrance to them on their way through life. Somehow with our very own little one in our arms we seemed to understand as we never had done in quite the same way before the protecting love of the Father of all.

I think we shall all agree that the three most important lessons for a mother to learn are Unselfishness, Patience and Love, and if these lessons are well and truly learnt and practised, those that develop from them, Tact, Justice and Humility, are not hard to learn.

I begin with unselfishness because I think it really is the first lesson a mother has to learn. In the first joy of our new delightful possession, especially if we have always been baby lovers, how sorely we are tempted to nurse our baby off to sleep, pick him up directly he wakes, disturb him "just for once" to show his eyes, walk him about when he ought to be lying still and vegetating, and generally develop a demon of unrest that will take years to exorcise. Please do not think for one moment that babies are not to be nursed and loved and snuggled, for that would be to deprive both mother and child of one of the greatest and purest joys of life (a love that can never be expressed is a pathetic thing), but let it be done at

the proper time, and when he should be lying still don't pick him up just because he cries. It is not just to our children, our *husbands* or ourselves to allow ourselves (unnecessarily) to be physically worn out, and therefore incapable of being patient, loving and just. A tired-out woman is invariably a cross one, especially if a tiresome little thought at the back of her brain whispers "It is your own fault."

Just here let me put in a plea for father. We are so apt to think that it is only mother who is capable of understanding and managing children. No greater fallacy exists. Fathers are every whit as capable if they are allowed and *encouraged* to begin early. We have no right to deprive them of the joys of fatherhood, and make them feel that they are out of place in babyland, clumsy and awkward. Let them develop side by side with mothers. God certainly intended them to help each other in the training of the child when he gave it two parents. If we begin as we should, and talk over our difficulties as well as our joys with each other, it would not only lighten the burden that we in our pride make so heavy, but it would help to prevent the building of that terrible barrier that so often grows up between father and son, and renders so impossible the heart-to-heart talks that would be such a tremendous help to both. Do you remember Mrs. March's wise advice to worried little Meg? It has helped me many a time. While no *wise* woman will rush to pour out all her troubles to a tired husband, nothing of real importance should ever be kept from him. In the busiest life there are many occasions when we can and must discuss the character and training of our children, and the mere fact that the father is not able to be with them so much enables him to take a wider view. I seem to have made a wide digression, but it really is part of a true mother's training to be willing to work with others for the good of her children.

When baby grows older, don't put everything out of his reach, but train him lovingly and patiently to know that there are things he may not touch. I know only too well how difficult it seems to find time and patience to enforce this lesson, but with love to help you, it is surprising to find how comparatively quickly he learns his first lessons in obedience and self-restraint, and you have saved him and yourself many a nerve strain and storm when he realises that your "No" means "No," although you may be laughing. The fewer rules we make, the

better for both mother and child; but when a rule has been carefully considered and established we should be just, and not allow it to be broken one day when we are slack, and rigidly enforced at another time. A child has a very keen sense of justice. It is very important to try to see from the child's point of view when you are dealing with what seems like disobedience or untruthfulness. A child's reasoning is often very difficult to follow. I really do not think many children are deliberately disobedient unless they have been so hemmed in with "dont's" that they feel it impossible to exist without breaking the law; nor untruthful unless their word has been so continually doubted when in their own minds they knew they were being perfectly truthful, that the habit of lying has actually been suggested to them. Many imaginative children live in such a little world of make-believe that I think they very often find it almost impossible to distinguish fact from fancy. Also I know from personal experience that a very vivid dream has seemed to be a reality. When children seem to be deliberately romancing, help them by suggesting that they should say "Let's pretend." When it really is a fiction, don't call them naughty and make them feel wicked; let them have the gift of escaping from the sameness of everyday life into the delightful land of make-believe. If used aright, it is quite as refreshing as a story book.

If we wish our children to respect us, we must respect them, and neither reprove nor laugh at their little romances. Of course, deceit is quite another thing, but this again often arises from nervousness, and must be wisely and lovingly met. We must never forget that mother is a daily object lesson of intense interest. We are never "off duty." While they are awake our words, actions, smiles, frowns, habits, are closely watched and often faithfully reproduced. As our little ones grow day by day, we too must be growing, for as they begin to use their reasoning power intelligently they will be very quick to note any inconsistencies. Let us preach little, but practice much; let the lesson of humility, as well as patience, be well studied, and never, never be so misguided as to erect a pedestal either for yourself or father. They are most uncomfortable and unstable edifices, and are sure to let you down heavily when you least expect it! Let our children see that we too have our problems to work out, and the very thought that our victories or defeats are being watched with very critical eyes

will stimulate us to greater zeal, and consequently better results than we in our false humility thought possible. Let your children learn to help you, even if things are occasionally spoilt. We are so apt to depreciate their help when we are busy, and so make them grow up with a self-distrust that is very hard to eradicate; and when the little person burning with a desire to help in house or garden works dire destruction, try hard to be patient, it really is one of our examinations; don't fail, and give poor baby a sad and lasting lesson in impatience. Never let us think our days too full, our environment too unsuitable, for proper growth. We are, each one, in just the very spot the Head Gardener thought best for us, and just here if we work faithfully and prayerfully we shall develop the very best that is in us. I am sure from practical experience that some of our strongest and finest growths come in the time of greatest stress—I mean daily common household stress. We all know the days when it seems that everything means to go wrong, and the duties throng and little extra things crop up, and we don't know what to do first. Well, now is our opportunity for testing ourselves and seeing how much of our lessons we have really mastered. If we have remembered that it is just as weak and foolish to think of beginning our day without spiritual food as it is to begin without material food we shall have a reserve of strength that will *never* fail us. I know how well nigh impossible it will seem at times to get even five minutes, and the temptation that will come to us to try to fit it in later on, but if we are in real earnest the way will be made clear for us; we must have a clear sense of the ever present, ever active, ever operative power of Divine Love, and then when the stress comes we shall realise the promise, "Lo! I am with you always," and instead of being overwhelmed we shall conquer. There *may* be a *physically* tired woman at the end of the day, but there will also be a very happy one, thanking the Father for giving her another chance of proving His love.

Every day brings fresh problems, especially when our children get to the school-going age and begin to develop odd new ways, habits of independence, hero worship for some older child or mistress, very pronounced ideas as to the proper fashion for their clothes, etc. We all know the stage, and although we laugh at it when it has passed it is not a pleasant stage. No sensible mother wishes her children to be tied to

her apron strings all their lives, but I think every mother gets a foolish little pang when the strings must be untied, and the only way to cure it is to take an intelligent interest in all *their* interests, especially their lessons. If we begin when they first go to school we shall soon grasp the newer methods. It is a simply fatal mistake to let children think their mother an ignoramus only fit to minister to their physical needs. Keep their genuine respect for your attainments, and when they are grown up they will love to discuss with you, not only books and topics of the day, but the deeper things of life. In this way you will gain a much deeper and truer insight into their real characters and opinions than you could possibly do in any other way, and at the same time thoroughly enjoy your talk with them and the wider interests it brings into your own life. We are so apt to grow "housey" unless we have something to dig us out of ourselves.

Then we must cultivate the art of listening, especially with our boys; even the swaggerers are very humble and shy about their deeper thoughts, and if we want to gain their confidence we must not try to invade therein. I am quite sure that they feel it really indecent to be turned inside out and cross questioned as to their thoughts and feelings, but let them once feel that mother can be trusted to keep their confidence, and let them choose their own time for giving it, even if to you it may seem an oddly inappropriate one, and you will reap your reward and be able to give your boys, big as well as little, just the help they need most and to save them from many a sorrow. And if at any time their confidence seems to you rather a sad one, thank God that your boy can come to you, and pray for wisdom and a right judgment in all things, so that you may never grow hard and unsympathetic because his temptations are different from yours.

I think one of the hardest lessons we elderly mothers have to learn is that "The old order changeth giving place to new, and God fulfils Himself in many ways." We are so used to the old way that we forget that stagnation means death, and that if we would keep, not only the love but the respect and admiration of our children, we must keep our sympathies and enthusiasms young, we must keep in touch with the thought, the literature, and the growth of the day; if we do not we shall richly deserve the pang that we shall surely get when we hear our growing up boys and girls say, "Oh! mother

doesn't understand, things were so different when she was young." We have no right to let ourselves grow so slack and ease-loving, or irritable and over anxious, that we fail to give or receive the help that is needed.

I sometimes think that on the whole we are far more inclined to be impatient with our girls than our boys, and expect far too much of them just because we run away with the false idea that as we were girls ourselves we know all about them, whereas, as a matter of fact, we knew very little of our real selves, and we fret and worry ourselves and them (unless we keep a very tight rein on ourselves) by trying to make them into a copy of what we think we were; instead of letting them develop naturally and watching with loving interest the new personality forming. Especially is this the case when school days are past or passing, and they are in the stage (so common to us all) when they feel so old and wise and for a time some other woman seems to fill their lives and that miserable little fiend, jealousy, has many a dart for us; but if we are loving and never antagonistic the phase soon passes and "My daughter is my daughter all the days of her life."

How often we elderly mothers think if we had the training of a certain child we could do so much better than its own mother, and then if we have brought up children of our own we look back at our early days and go down into the Valley of Humiliation, until we realise that when we were honestly and prayerfully doing our best a loving hand was making "all things work together for good"; therefore when I see the young mothers making the same old mistakes I know they will be helped in just the same loving way.

"God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world."

(Browning.)