The Threefold Girl.

Neglect of Parents to Educate Their Daughters Morally as Well as Mentally.

Overloading Young Minds with Knowledge—Mistake of Thinking Girls are Angels—Forgetting the Animal Nature Which Should be Watched and Directed—Coachmen Loving Maidens—Unlike Women—The Bridge Between Childhood and Womanhood—The Dangerous "Old Family Friend" and the "Perfect Gentleman."

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It seems to be the prevalent idea among American parents that girls need only mental guidance in this age; that if the daughter of the family is only "given a chance" to study, and has her mind crammed with knowledge, her future is assured.

If you tell them that their daughter is a three fold being, with a moral and a physical nature which needs careful guidance, they will assure you that church influences and good companions surround her morally, and that, as she is endowed with excellent health, there is no anxiety about her physically.

In consequence of this one-sided and shortsighted influence of parents, we have a vast number of astonishingly well-educated girls—as far as book education goes—who are erratic, hysterical, ailing, and totally unfitted for the exigencies and demands of wifehood and maternity when these relations came to her.

Beside this, our daily papers teem with accounts of, girls who stay away from home in moods of melancholy, or who permit themselves to be "kidnapped" by vicious people, or who conceive morbid and unaccountable passions for coachmen and inferiors, or otherwise develop propensities as distressing as unexpected to their loving but blind parents.

The moral nature of a girl needs something more than a Sunday service to prepare it for the exactions of duty. Morality means more than keeping the ten commandments.

A man may be driven to marital unfaithfulness and children to disrespect and folly through the dour of a disorderly and uncomfortable home.

The religious convert who attends church service with holes in her stockings and rags on her underwear, leaving an untidy room behind her, is not on the road to correct moral training.

Order was Heaven's first law, and it should be the first lesson taught a child, especially a girl. Not by scolding and preaching, but by persistent example, cheerful tact, and frequent praise. Now and then a grown person may be taught a memorable lesson by a round scolding; but I doubt if it ever taught a child anything except distaste for the neglected duty and the scolder. I once knew a man who, by a series of misfortunes—shipwreck, illness, and loss—had become very poor. He was reduced to one suit of clothes, which he wore many months while seeking for employment; yet he always bore the appearance of a well-dressed gentleman. Indeed, he failed to obtain one position for which he applied during his dark days (a position much below his station) on the grounds that he "was too well dressed."

After he again grasped the reins of prosperity I asked him how he had managed to present such an appearance during that time. "It was all due to my early training, he said. "A more careless, disorderly child than I never lived. My mother saw this, and made it her duty to overcome the habit. No sooner was I ever allowed to hang up or brush a garment for me after I reached a reasoning age. I was taught how to fold, hang, and care for my clothing, and I was quietly told that I could have no replenishing of my wardrobe until I learned to take proper care of what I had. If, through hurry or laziness, I wore a creased and dusty garment out among my playfellows, my mother expressed her mortification at seeing me present such an appearance, and I was shamed into tidiness while an orderly act met with her warm praises. As I grew older my own pride came to the rescue and spurred me to the care of my belongings, and it has proven a priceless blessing to me all my life." If this habit of neatness was so valuable to a man, how much more valuable is it to a woman! for on woman depends the comfort of an orderly home. An untidy woman is a monstrosity to me.

A fervent young convert recently asked me to tell her how she could become more like Christ. "By darning your stockings, hanging up your clothes, and keeping your room in order, so that your parents are not ashamed to have it seen by visitors," I replied. "He that is faithful in little is faithful in much; show your love for Christ by making those about you comfortable and happy, and no one can be comfortable or happy with a slatternly woman about."

It is not only in the visible results of material comfort that a girl is benefited by this training, but the habit of systematic thought will follow her through all the small and great matters of life.

Disorderly habits produce a disorderly mind and conduct.

Man's moral and social relations to the world are such that we are liable to forget that he is an animal. Especially do we forget it in regard to young girls. While they roll in the sand and take mud pies in the sun as children, and roar with hunger, we speak of them laughingly as "vigorous young animals." But when their swelling forms and blushing cheeks and drooping lids denote that the child is developing into the maiden, we forget and ignore the animal nature, and think of them as divine beings with growing minds.

Yet never was there a time in a girl's career when the animal nature needed such thought and careful direction by the parents and guardians as during the few years which bridge childhood and womanhood. Aside from wise and discreet counsels, a young girl's time and mind should be fully occupied during those years. To simply crowd her brain with a multiplicity of studies will not do; there is an excess of physical vitality which must be considered. The air she breathes, the nourishment she imbibes, the sleep she takes are all combining to supply her with the magnetic and electric qualities which form the perfect woman. You note her expanding beauty, her increased vivacity, and you are delighted; but remember such changes do not take place without disturbed emotions and an excited imagination. Outdoor duties or games in the country and gymnasium work in the town, indulged in sufficiently to produce a pleasant fatigue, are a great promoter of balance and an outlet for this extra supply of vitality. Such exercise should be imposed with religious earnestness by all judicious parents. I believe the old-fashioned prejudice against dancing has been productive of more physical and moral disaster in the world than all the high kicking ever done in our theatres. I have known an hysterical girl, suffering from insomnia and all manner of nervous troubles, to become normal and strong simply by dancing vigorously half an hour every evening before retiring.

"Oh pshaw!" you say; "let nature take her course. She will set matters right in her own time."

My dear madam or sir, you should pause and analyze the meaning of your words. Your developing child is a growing animal, but to let nature take her course would be inconsistent with the social and moral obligations resting upon her. Nature's impulses are the same from insects up to man; but man must govern impulse by reason and judgment unless he wishes to be only an animal, instead of the highest expression of divinity yet evolved from animal life.

Therefore, instead of "letting nature take its course," you must direct nature's impulses by wisdom and care into healthful channels.

Avert overwrought imaginations and excited nerves by a systematic course of exercise which produces thorough circulation of the blood.

Give her pleasures suited to her age, and divert her mind from dwelling too much upon herself.

Let her be fatigued enough to sleep when she retires, and see to it that she gets up as soon as she awakens.

"Nothing gives my daughter such pleasure as to lie and dream," said a blind mother to me once. She is no hand for outdoor romps, like other girls; just give her a book and a lounge and she will be happy all day long."

"It would be better for her health to romp outdoors and read less," I suggested.

"Oh, she is in excellent health; she never has an ache or pain; that languid way is natural to such dreamy temperaments, I fancy."

If I had told that mother what was the nature of the dreams I read in her young daughter's eyes she would have shown me the door.

But let me beg of you to be alert and avoid allowing your daughter to form this habit of languorous day-dreams. It is more fascinating than any outdoor sport, once formed, and more enervating than the hardest labor. Many a weakly woman might trace her ailments back to this period of luxurious imagination in her youth's dawn.

"But I never recollect any such dangerous period in my life, or any such diseased imagination," you tell me. Quite likely. Girls of the olden time were not brought up in such ease and luxury as are the girls of today. Household duties and the care of younger children devolved upon the daughters of the household instead of upon servants and governesses, as in the present time. Then, too, you may have been one of the exceptions to the rule; but remember that it is unsafe to expect your daughter to be exactly like you. She has a paternal inheritance. Many a calm, practical mother forgets that the father's fiery or poetic nature may or right descend to her daughter, and that it needs a more careful guarding than did her own. And the strangest fact of all is that the father forgets or ignores this also. It is well to keep the fact before his eyes.

It is well to make him realize that a certain amount of social amusement, where games and dancing predominate, among carefully selected companions, is a necessity to the physical and moral well-being of his daughter. Call his attention to the fact that a tightly closed vessel of boiling steam explodes and causes devastation and destruction if it has no outlet. A human being developing into vigorous maturity is like this vessel, and the outlet for a portion of the surging vital forces should be made in healthful pleasures and amusements.

When your daughter reaches the age of twelve years at latest you should instruct her that it is not modest to allow gentlemen guests and friends to take her upon their knees and caress her. Let no false idea of keeping her "a child as long as possible" render you careless in this matter. And do not make the foolish blunder of thinking that all your men friends are "perfect gentlemen," who could not entertain an unworthy thought toward your daughter.

In your quiet domestic role you know very little of what is going on in the minds of men. You think of your twelve-yearold daughter as a child—they think of the woman she is soon to be. Their thoughts and feelings are contagious. One of the most carefully reared and severely chaperoned girls I ever knew told me that her first knowledge of evil came to her at the age of thirteen through a lifelong friend of her family—a man old enough to be her grandfather, and a man occupying a high social position. While she was not allowed to associate with boys of her own age, she was permitted to receive the caresses of this "one old family friend" until her own modesty gave the alarm. You can not put an idea of dignity and womanly reserve into your little daughter's mind about these matters without destroying her innocence; but even so you must startle her somewhat out of her childlike ignorance and freedom of contact, it is better that the experience should come through you than through the man who frequent your house.

Make yourself her confidant, that she may avoid revealing herself in ignorance to dangerous companions of either sex. You tell me with great dignity and some severity that "your daughter is not allowed to associate with dangerous companions of either sex, that you know her mates thoroughly, and they are exceptional young people." My dear madam, your words are empty air. You know no more of the secret thoughts and feelings of your daughter's mates than you know of the man in Mars.

You might be startled and shocked should you think aloud in your presence once. They are not vicious, but they are in the unformed chaotic state of which I am trying to warn you in regard to your own daughter, and their mingled curiosity, ignorance, and dawning knowledge render them unsafe confidants for one another unless there is a sympathetic, wise counsellor back of them.

Again your dignity asserts itself, and you tell me your daughter has no curiosity on forbidden subjects and no dawning knowledge and no dangerous impulses. Then, dear madam, your daughter is not a normal being. She is not in good health; she is an anomaly. To build her into a woman fitted for domestic duties she needs iron tonics and blood foods.

The world will be much better off when we get over the romantic idea that a young girl is an angelic creature who consumes with scruples in the privacy of her room, and who is to be guarded to the very altar steps from any knowledge of evil. Such girls sometimes exist, but they are not normal beings, and they do not make good wives and mothers.

And, again, girls who have shown what you would term a precocious tendency to vicious thought have, when properly guarded and guided over the dangerous chasm, made ideal wives and the most perfect mothers in life.

The wise mother, when discovering this tendency in a young girl, does not strive to expel, punish, and shame her into reform; she does not say to her: "This is a poison weed; root it out of your mind at once, pray to God to aid you in casting out this noxious weed;" instead she says: "This is the root of a beautiful vine, God-implanted, which by and by will make your life sweet and fair; but if you indulge it now it will be tearful or hideous. Think of it with reverence, and pray God to guide it wisely in its growth." Then she gives her plenty of healthful books to read and enough study, and occupies all her leisure time with physical exercise alongside with agreeable companionship, until nature has accomplished its revolutionary work and the chaotic period has passed and the girl is a woman.

But alas! alas! for the scarcity of such mothers.

The average American girl dwells alone with her imaginations and the confidences of equally inwise companions through these years, exposed to all the dangerous freedom of association with the flapping wings of our American eagle proclaim to all the world to be her right.

If she goes wrong in ever so slight a measure her parents are crushed to the earth by surprise and sorrow; but that she ever goes right is an increasing wonder to me the more I see of the world and the deeper I study human nature. Indeed, it speaks well for the level head and the good heart of the American girl that so few, comparatively speaking, make serious mistakes; but this is due to her own innate worth and not to the wisdom of her parents.

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