

A Mother's Observations

By Alice C. Schweigert

THERE IS JUST one question that I have often desired to put to the mothers of young girls, when I hear them say that their daughters have been staying out late, and that they have no knowledge of where their daughters were when they did not arrive home until long after midnight, and other things of like import—and that question is, "Why did you not know where your daughter was at that time of night?" If a girl twelve years old has a mother, that mother is the one person to know where the daughter is every day and night of her life. There is none other that can or should take the place of a mother in the protection of a daughter, and it is the mother's duty to accompany her daughter wherever she goes, or to see that she is accompanied by some other trustworthy person. There should be no taking for granted in matters of this kind. How often we hear mothers say, "Oh, dear, I can't do a thing with her; she doesn't mind me at all any more." That mother has reached the danger line, and if she doesn't form a determination and act on it, to control her child, she is rapidly approaching the time when she will receive the "shot in the back" that all mothers get who so betray the sacred trust reposed in them. It may not indeed be the leaden bullet carrying death to the physical body, but it will be a "shot" just as deadly and much less merciful. It would be interesting to inquire of that mother in California, who was recently struck down by the hand of her daughter, why she did not know where her daughter was and who her associates were, when at the age of twelve she was not at home nights. There is no excuse for such negligence and it invariably brings its own punishment.

There seems to be an exaggerated restlessness in the youth of today, a tendency toward lawlessness, a sort of breaking away, as it were, from past traditions and customs, and they do many unaccountably wild things that startle many people who have their preconceived notions of how young people should conduct themselves, with the result that almost everybody is asking, "What is the matter with the young people?" No one seems to be able to answer the question and everybody just keeps on wondering about it.

It has become the custom in searching for answers to problems that have arisen during the last four or five years to look back to the World War and there read the reasons for many things as they now are. It is, to say the least, a convenient thing to do and we will grant that present conditions are affected in result by many influences arising from that event.

Someone has said that "Youth must be served." It sounded good to us. We have repeated it over and over, until it has been accepted into our mental attitude toward our young. Now, upon calmer reflection we can see no reason why youth should be served during this epoch any more than at any other time. We have come to the realization that we have so generously served youth that we have served it to its own undoing. That, we take it, is one of the reasons why they have become such an enigma as to conduct.

We have been working on the presumption that if conditions were made ideal for children, surroundings pleasant and beautiful, every desire gratified, nothing required of them but to enjoy, that when they arrived at maturity we should have perfect men and women, of high ideals and character. The pity of it all is that we have missed it so far. The theory sounds well, but the application has been a miserable failure. It must be acknowledged that the noblest characters in history, and the persons we have personally known to be worthy of honor and emulation, have not been those who have had every desire gratified, but rather the unconquerable ones—those who have risen in spite of what seemed insurmountable difficulties.

It is undeniably the duty of the older generation to endeavor to the best of its ability to make for the younger conditions as perfect as may be for right living and formation of character. But it is also the right of the older generation to demand of youth something in return. Probably the attitude of parents toward their children in this respect is too lax. Where they have expected little, they should demand much. Where they have suffered insult, they should demand respect. No parent should expect a teacher to control a child if he or she has failed to do so. Too many parents expect teachers to supply what they have lacked, and thus make up for their carelessness or deficiency. Many incidents, with which all are familiar, have occurred during the last year that have impressed upon us that it is not always the children of the slums or those living in dirt and squalor that are criminals, but just as many in luxurious surroundings have been spoiled and pampered into criminality. Parents, it is just "up to you." There is no other agency that can take your place. It is for you to know where your sons and daughters spend their time and who are their associates. There is no use throwing up your hands and saying it can't be done. **It can be done.** It will doubtless cost some sacrifice of time and money, but no price is too great to pay. Give up any pleasure of your own to keep an eye on the boy or girl, and seek companionship with him or her. Mothers, give up your clubs or other activities if need be and take your place at your daughter's side, at the show, at the dance, or wherever she finds her pleasure. If you find out that she is deceiving you, never relax your vigilance a moment. Fathers, make it your chief business to so guard your boy that he may grow to be the greatest pride of your life. Never weary in this and success is sure to crown your efforts. This is the most patriotic service parents can render our country. "Youth should serve," should give a little in return for all that has been given to them by a generous Commonwealth. If more had been trained for **serving** we would hear less of law infractions and debauchery. Service should ever be the glory of youth.

Wouldst thou possess thy heritage, essay,
By use to render it thine own!
What we employ not, but impedes our way,
That which the hour creates, that can it use alone!
— Goethe.