

Are Parents Responsible for the Character of their Children?

[An Essay read before the State Sunday School Convention, at Santa Rosa, Cal., by Mrs. Angie B. Martin.]

The responsibility of parents is a theme fraught with momentous interest, and, every way, fitting the consideration of Sunday school workers. Indeed, when we speak or think of the responsibilities to be met in this short life, in any direction, I fear we do not comprehend the awful import of the word.

We come into this world helpless, innocent, irresponsible; years come to us bringing strength, temptation, responsibility; then death bids us leave the scene of conflict, and, standing in the presence of the Awful Judge, render an account of the successes and failures of life.

Three score years and ten are allotted us, and the deeds, words and thoughts of every day, nay, of every hour, are chronicled in the books which are to be opened for inspection in the great day of judgment. What a quailing and shinking will there be before that fearful record! And will parents there find registered against them the character of their children? Will the "Judge of all the earth" require at the hands of parents, an account not only for every idle word which they shall speak, but hold them responsible for all the idle, yea more, the profane words of their children? These are fearful questions, comprehended in the scope of the question before us. They are questions reaching away into the great beyond, where human eyes may not search; but, questions which, in the light of God's beautiful truth, parents can, parents must answer.

This question of responsibility is simply a question of accountability, for we are responsible only for that for which we are liable to be called to account. Then the question before us is—Will parents be called upon in the judgment to account for the character of their children?

Were I to give this question an absolute affirmative answer, every parent would involuntarily shudder; were I to give it an absolute negative, the intuitions of every parent would be against me, for every thinking parent feels that he is, in some way, responsible for his child. Then how imminent the necessity for parents to search and know just how much, in this direction, God does, and will require of them.

Is it not, indeed, a fearful thing to be a thinking responsible being in God's universe? Is it not a perilous thing to be made stewards of the interests and destinies of others?

But, right here, like the cooling sea-breeze to the heated brow of the tired sailor, I am refreshed with the thought that "Our Father" lays no burdens upon his children, which they are not able, by his grace, to bear. With every responsibility, his mercy has provided capability; and, as we learn for what we are accountable, so may we learn for what we are accountable, so may we learn just how he would have us prepare our accounts. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, for they shall have right to the tree of life, and shall enter in through the gates into the city." Parents and children, husbands and wives, yea, all persons will be judged according to their doings. In God's book, we are told what to do as parents. "If we obey the Almighty mandate, blessed shall we be; if we disobey, eternity alone shall measure our remorse."

The duties of parents are clearly pointed out in that Bible, which, in these enlightened days, is in every hand. God holds us accountable for the discharge of those duties. Just how far the effect of our conduct upon the character of our children, is chargeable to us—just where the line between the parents' responsibility and the child's accountability, is

drawn we may not be able to say; we may, however, find out what God requires at our hands, and, in his fear, discharge our duty, leaving the consequences with him who cannot err.

Children are plants from God's vineyard. He has not thrown them carelessly into this world so full of briars and thorns, but, knowing their tenderness, dependence and susceptibility, he has carefully planted them in the garden of home, where they are to be tenderly cultured and fitted to bear fruit in life.

We, parents, are God's gardeners, entrusted with the care of these tiny plants. "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

There is, to me, some significance in the fact that this command is given to fathers. I would not detract from the duties and responsibilities of mothers; but, if I might be allowed, I would impress upon fathers that the weight of responsibility rests upon the head.

In the olden time, the little ones were nursed and cared for by the mother until they were five years old—then the training and education of the sons went into the hands of the father, while the daughters remained under the immediate care of the mother.

God's way is always the best way. How wonderful his wisdom!

To the mother is given the tender little one. Upon the tablets of its young heart she stamps the impress of her own—and who shall say, if the destinies of eternity hang upon the impressions made upon the child, ere it reaches the age of five years.

But it is not enough that we teach our children—they are to be trained, kept in the right course, commanded, and this governing power belongs pre-eminently to the father. Have not many fathers neglected their duty, and left too much of this work, too much of this responsibility upon mothers?

The Lord said of Abraham that "he shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him, for I know him that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."

Christian fathers, are ye children of faithful Abraham, then must ye command your children to "keep the way of the Lord," while the mother fills their young hearts with the love of that way, both by example and teaching. Can you, dare you go about your daily avocations, seeing your children only at meal-time, never pausing to even ask the care-worn mother, whether she has discharged her duty, and yours too, to the children? In the seager-race after this world, improperly termed "an effort to make an honest living," are you at liberty to ignore this command of God, at the peril of the eternal destiny of your child?

God required, of his Hebrew children, diligence in instructing the children in his laws. They were to talk of them when sitting in the house, when walking in the way, when lying down, and when rising up. Does he require less of us? Dare Christian mothers talk to their daughters while sitting in the house or while walking by the way, only of fashion and worldly folly? Dare Christian fathers talk only to their sons of trade, current prices, and the prospects of worldly gain? What shall the harvest be? How many professed Christian families come to mind, in which not even one hour—one-twelfth part of the day—is devoted to the moral training of the children. The father is too much engrossed in business, the mother too much occupied with pampering the taste, and cultivating the vanity of the children. Ah, what shall the harvest be. Must parents, indeed, render an account for themselves?

Perchance, some noble Sunday school worker may gather up the neglected children, and do for them some of the work God has required of parents. Whose, then, will be the reward? whose the condemnation?

It cannot be that there are any children of Christian parents, in these days of Sunday school enthusiasm, who are never seen in the Lord's house or in the Lord's school—who have not even one hour—one hundred and sixty-eighth part of the time in a week given to instruction in God's law—nay, who, on the Lord's day, while their parents are engaged in worship, are away with wicked companions learning to curse the God their father worships! This is too fearful a picture! Better for such children never to have seen the sun shine upon God's beautiful world!

Where is the responsibility? Will God say to parents, who thus neglect the little ones he has given into their charge, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make the ruler over many?"

Eli, the priest of the Most High, when he heard of the wickedness of his sons, advised them—nay, remonstrated with them, but this was not enough. "The Lord judged and condemned his house forever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

Has not God placed this restraining power pre-eminently upon fathers? Will he hold them guiltless, if they neglect his requirements? In his fear, let every father answer these questions. God will draw the line between the parents and the child's accountability.

But mothers may say the father is responsible, I am free. Did Timothy's mother and grandmother so say, or so think? Or had he learned of them those lessons which fitted him for the niche he was to fill in the church, and prepared him for the company of God, angels, and justified spirits?

The pure white pages of childhood are given to the mother, and, upon those pages, she may trace what she will. Something will surely be written there—the fair lines of truth and purity—or dark blots shaken from the pen of passion or pride. God will ask of her what, when the reckoning comes. She must sow, in the tender soil of the infant heart, seeds of love and sympathy—she must water them with her tears, and shield them with her prayers. And, oh, what a mighty tide of joy or woe may she bring by her example! The little ones catch even the shadow of an evil thought flitting across the mother's brow, and its impress, who shall erase?

Harmony characterizes the handiwork of Jehovah, and he assigns to each individually the work for which he has fitted them. The mother's work, the mother must do—the father's work can be done by none but the father. Else is God's harmony marred. There is something in that word harmony which bids me pause, earth-worn and weary, and listen to the melody of heaven. And every Christian home ought to be a miniature heaven where little hearts are attuned to angelic music.

Oh ye "God of this world," with your ugly discord, be banished thence forever! Fathers, will you banish the monster, and, in love and faithfulness command your children? Mothers, will you guard the portals of your homes from the inroads of the goddess fashion, with her pitiful delusions?

If Christian mothers could but realize the minuteness, as well as the stupendous magnitude of their work, and that the harvest of souls in eternity depends largely upon their sowing surely a different direction would be given to their energies.

If fathers could feel that the gathering of the souls of their children into the garner of heaven, is of more value than the gathering of treasure into the coffers of earth, then would we see

a mighty change in the character and condition of Christian families.

If fathers and mothers would appreciate the superiority of heaven over earth, of eternity over time, and learn to estimate the worth of the souls committed to their care, what a grand awakening would there be—what revolutions wrought—and what beautiful lines inscribed by the recording angel!

The great harvest of souls is drawing near! When the trump of God calls the sleeping millions from the four corners of earth, all the children will come, and in one glad embrace, parents will clasp their risen children, shouting victory over death and the grave.

Shall that reunion but deepen the anguish of another, a final separation? or

Shall parents and children, unite forever, Make heaven resound with the praise of the giver

Of home, where no tear shall e'er dim any eye,

And no heart be pierced by the cruel good-bye?

And does this grand climax depend upon parents? Then let us work while the day lasts, earnestly, prayerfully sowing the seed, and waiting for the harvest.

Patient Toiling.

[An essay read by Miss Alice Butler, Representative of the Ypsertine Society, at Commencement, Wednesday evening, June 16, 1880.]

How many more great and noble men and women there would be today in this world of ours, if these two words were ever kept bright and fresh in our minds; yet I fear there are too many of us who let the precious moments go by, and nothing done, nothing learned.

"Minutes are diamonds," and all should be seized upon with eagerness and turned to good account.

No one was ever born a Newton or a Franklin. It is a patient, vigorous, and long continued application that makes the great mind.

We all have every thing to learn; the high, the low, the rich and poor, must begin with the simplest elements of knowledge.

Great natural talents are desirable; but perseverance and patient toiling are better. For they have invented, constructed, and accomplished everything that is great, good and valuable. They have "scaled the snowy cloud-capped Alps" plowed through the wilderness of the ocean, cleared the forests of a new world, "and reared in its place a community of states and nations." They have put millions of wheels in motion, harnessed thousands of iron steeds to as many cars and sent them almost flying from town to town from state to state; and as it has been beautifully said, "whitened the waters of the world with the sails of a hundred nations, navigated every sea and explored every land."

They have also reduced nature to science, measured her untrodden spaces, computed the distances, dimensions and velocities of her hosts of worlds.

But what are the productions of science and art compared with those of perseverance and patient toiling in the world of mind? What is a monument of constructed genius, when weighed against the stores of wisdom, and the treasures of knowledge that have enriched and adorned a multitude of minds during the march of a hundred generations. Yet how little can we tell, how little know, how days of toil, and how many nights of weariness, was spent to perfect in them what the world has bowed to in reverence.

Did Washington, one of the greatest and noblest men of earth accomplish his work in a day, a month, or even a year? no, but for many years of hardships and trials he toiled patiently never tiring of his work but determined to gain that one great end, the freedom of the American colonies. He justly deserves the name so appropriately given him "The father of our country." He carved his name deep

in the tablet of fame, and wreathed his brow with the brightest laurels ever given man. His name stands now, as it ever has stood, the fairest on our history's page.

Webster was years of toil and disappointments completing his works. Did Milton, Shakespeare or Bryant, become great poets without study? Prescott, the great American historian pored over his books night and day. Can any one become truly great and eminent without continued mental effort? Do they of high position today deserve honor for being better qualified than many others? no, but by patient toiling they have won their laurels. They were once no doubt common boys and girls. The patriot, the poet, and the eloquent man, all derive their sublime powers from patient toiling. The will is the way. The boy who cut his way with his pocket-knife up the almost perpendicular abutment of the "National Bridge" and left his companions behind gazing in wonder and astonishment at him as he ascended, did it not by virtue of any superior strength or ability, but only by perseverance and patient toiling. Niche by niche he cut in the rock, step by step he ascended, his eye was bent upward, and upward he went to carve his name in that mighty wall beside that of Washington.

So it is with us all in every vocation of life, if we persevere we will go up, step by step will lift us higher, each blow will make a niche for our feet. Unremitted effort is the only price of success. "Genius may make a few glorious leaps, like a blazing meteor may flash half across the horizon at once," but the common mind with perseverance for its faithful guide will finally march on and leave "genius worn out and discouraged amid its own faded glories."

They who are successful in life owe more to their hard toiling, than their natural abilities, and may we do as millions have done before us, work long and well for it is practice that brings the powers of the mind and body to perfection.

Youth is the time we should sow the seed of knowledge, plant it deep in our minds and nourish it with care.

Culture must be sought for; learning must be acquired. We must love learning if we would possess it. To realize its great value we must apply ourselves however irksome it may seem at first, and by constant endeavor and diligent application we may enroll our names among the noble band of workers and finally reach the height of our youthful aspirations.

The student burns the midnight oil in search of knowledge, in the hope that he may climb the hill of science, or stand first in the ranks of literature. A glorious future lies before him, education is but the key to unlock the classic rooms. He leaves the college halls and bids farewell to kind teachers and loved classmates, and starts out alone in the great battle field of life—it may be against misfortunes and disappointments, but if "Excelsior" is his motto, he will remove every stone from his path and finally reach the top with lasting honors.

We should all improve each passing moment, strive to acquire knowledge that may fit us for any duty assigned us in life.

As the great car of progress moves onward shall we too move onward to fill the positions of those that soon shall have passed from this stage of action? Patient toiling is the foundation of success; it is the watchword by which we should ever be guided and without it what can we accomplish? Nothing, but like drones in the hive, be a drag to society. Then let us keep these two words ever before us; yes, write them in living letters of gold upon our hearts, and cherish them deep in our memories; determine by patient toiling to reap a rich harvest of pleasure and profit back to ourselves and those with whom we may associate. And if we are patient toilers we may look upward for our reward.

"Lives of great men all remind us We can make our lives sublime, And departing, leave behind us, Footprints on the sands of time."