

THE HOME
EDUCATION SERIES

VOLUME 3

SCHOOL EDUCATION

CHARLOTTE MASON

'Home Education' Series

VOLUME III.

School Education

By

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School Education

CHAPTER I

DOCILITY AND AUTHORITY IN THE HOME AND THE SCHOOL

Better Relations between Children and their Elders.—All of us who have accepted education as our *métier* are keenly alive to the signs of the times as they are to be read in the conduct and manners of children. Upon one thing, anyway, we may congratulate ourselves with unmixed satisfaction: the relations between children and parents, and indeed between children and their grown-up friends generally, are far more intimate, frank and friendly than such relations used to be. There does not seem to be any longer that great gulf fixed between child thought and grown-up thought, which the older among us once tried to cross with frantic but vain efforts. The heads of the house, when we were little, were autocratic as the Czars of all the Russias. We received everything at their hands, from bread and milk to mother's love, with more or less gratitude, but with invariable docility. If they had stubborn questionings as to whether was better for us, this or

that, they kept them to themselves. For us, everything was decreed, and all decrees were final. There were rebellious children, perhaps, as one in a score, or one in a hundred, but then these were rebellious with the fine courage of Milton's Satan: they dared everything and set themselves up in bold opposition. These were the open rebels who would, sooner or later, come to a bad end; so we were told and so we secretly believed. For the others, there was no middle course. They were brought under rule, and that rule was arbitrary and without appeal.

The Elder Generation of Parents, Autocratic.

—This is how children were brought up some forty or fifty years ago, and even young parents of to-day have, in many cases, grown up under a *régime*, happy, loving and wise very likely, but, before all things, arbitrary. There were what the Scotch would call 'ill-guided' homes, where the children did what was right in their own eyes. These will always exist so long as there are weak and indolent parents, unconcerned about their responsibilities. But the exceptions went to prove the rule; and the rule and tradition, in most middle-class homes, was that of well-ordered and governed childhood. Every biography, that issues from the press, of the men and women who made their mark during the first half of the century, is a case in point. John Stuart Mill, Ruskin, the Lawrences, Tennyson, almost everyone who has made for himself a distinguished name, grew up under a martinet rule. Only the other day we heard of an instance, the recollection of which had survived for seventy years. A boy of twelve or thirteen had been out shooting rabbits. He came home in the early darkness of a bitterly cold winter evening. His father

asked him by which gate he had entered the park. 'By (such a) gate,' 'Did you shut it?' 'I don't recollect.' 'Go and see'; and the boy went, though he was already tired out, and the gate in question was more than a mile from the house. Such an incident would scarcely happen to-day; the boy would protest, plead his own benumbed fatigue, and suggest that a man should be sent to shut the gate, if, as did not appear from the story, it was important that it should be shut at all. Yet this was a kind father, whom his children both loved and honoured; but arbitrary rule and unquestioning obedience were the habits of the household. Nor is this notion of domestic government quite obsolete yet. I heard the other day of a Scotch father who confined his daughter of eighteen to her room for a week on account of some, by no means serious, breach of discipline. The difference is, that where you find an arbitrary parent now, he is a little out of touch with the thought and culture of the day; while, a few decades ago, parents were arbitrary of set principle and in proportion as they were cultivated and intelligent.

Arbitrary Rule not always a Failure.—It cannot be said that this arbitrary rule was entirely a failure. It turned out steadfast, capable, able, self-governed, gentle-mannered men and women. In our less hopeful moments, we wonder as we watch the children of our day whether they will prove as good stuff as their grandfathers and their fathers. But we need not fear. The evolution of educational thought is like the incoming of the tide. The wave comes and the wave goes and you hardly know whether you are watching ebb or flow; but let an hour elapse and then judge.

But truer Educational Thought results in Worthier Character.—After all allowances for ebb and flow, for failure here and mistake there, truer educational thought must of necessity result in an output of more worthy character. For one thing, this very arbitrariness arose from limitations. Parents knew that they must govern. Righteous Abraham, who ruled his house, was their ensample; and it is far easier to govern from a height, as it were, than from the intimacy of close personal contact. But you cannot be quite frank and easy with beings who are obviously of a higher and of another order than yourself; at least, you cannot when you are a little boy. And here we have one cause of the inscrutable reticence of children. At the best of times they carry on the busy traffic of their own thoughts all to themselves. We can all recollect the pathetic misgivings of our childish days which a word would have removed, but which yet formed the secret history of years of our lives. Mrs Charles, in her autobiography, tells us how her childhood was haunted by a distressing dream. She dreamed that she had lost her mother and hunted for her in vain for hours in the rooms and endless corridors of a building unknown to her. Her distress was put down to fear of 'the dark,' and she never told her tender mother of this trouble of the night. Probably no degree of loving intimacy will throw the closed doors of the child's nature permanently ajar, because, we may believe, the burden of the mystery of all this unintelligible world falls early upon the conscious soul, and each of us must beat out his conception of life for himself. But it is much to a child to know that he may question, may talk of the thing that

perplexes him, and that there is comprehension for his perplexities. Effusive sympathy is a mistake, and bores a child when it does not make him silly. But just to know that you can ask and tell is a great outlet, and means, to the parent, the power of direction, and to the child, free and natural development.

Doctrine of the Infallible Reason.—With the advance of one line of educational insight, we have, alas, to note the receding of another and a most important principle. Early in the century, authority was everything in the government of the home, and the docility of the children went without saying, that is, always excepting the few rebellious spirits. However little we may be aware of the fact, the direction of philosophic thought in England has had a great deal to do with the relations of parents and children in every home. Two centuries ago Locke promulgated the doctrine of the infallible reason. That doctrine accepted, individual reason becomes the ultimate authority, and every man is free to do that which is right in his own eyes. Provided, Locke would have added, that the reason be fully trained, and the mind instructed as to the merits of the particular case; but such proviso was readily lost sight of, and the broad principle remained. The old Puritanic faith and the elder traditions for the bringing up of children, as well as Locke's own religious feelings and dutiful instincts, were too strong for the new philosophy in England; but in France there was a soil prepared for the seed. Locke was eagerly read because his opinions jumped with the thought of the hour. His principles were put into practice, his conclusions worked out to the bitter

end, and thoughtful writers consider that this religious and cultivated English gentleman cannot be exonerated from a share of the guilt of the atrocities of the French Revolution.

Leads to the Dethronement of Authority.—

We in the twentieth century have lost some of the safeguards that held good in the seventeenth, and we have our own, perhaps greater, philosopher, who carries the teaching of Locke to the inevitable conclusions which the earlier thinker shirked. Mr Herbert Spencer proclaims, as they did in France, the apotheosis of Reason. He sees, as they saw in France, that the principle of the infallible reason is directly antagonistic to the idea of authority. He traces this last idea to its final source and justification. So long as men acknowledge a God, they of necessity acknowledge authority, supreme and deputed. But, says Mr Spencer, in effect, every man finds his own final authority in his own reason. This philosopher has the courage of his convictions; he perceives, as they did in France, that the enthronement of the human reason is the dethronement of Almighty God. He teaches, by processes of exhaustive reasoning, that-

“We sit unowned upon our burial sod,
And know not whence we come nor whose we be.”

From the dethronement of the divine, follows the dethronement of all human authority, whether it be of kings and their deputies over nations, or of parents over families. Every act of authority is, we are taught, an infringement of the rights of man or of child. Children are to be brought up from the first self-directed, doing that which is right in their own

eyes, governed by the reason which is to be trained, by experience of right and wrong, in the choosing of the right course. Life has its penalties for those who transgress the laws of reason, and the child should be permitted to learn these laws through the intervention of these penalties. But 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' are to be eliminated from the vocabulary of parents. So complete and detailed is Mr Spencer's scheme for the emancipation of children from rule, that he objects to the study of languages on the ground that the rules of grammar are a transgression of the principle of liberty.

Authority not Inherent, but Deputed.—Mr Spencer's work on education is so valuable a contribution to educational thought that many parents read it and embrace it, as a whole, without perceiving that it is a part, and a carefully worked out part, of a scheme of philosophy with which perhaps they are little in sympathy. They accept the philosopher's teaching when he bids them bring up children without authority in order to give them free room for self-development; without perceiving, or perhaps knowing, that it is the labour of the author's life to eliminate the idea of authority from the universe, that he repudiates the authority of parents because it is a link in the chain which binds the universe to God. For it is indeed true that none of us has a right to exercise authority, in things great or small, except as we are, and acknowledge ourselves to be, deputed by the one supreme and ultimate Authority. When we take up this volume on education, small as it is, easy reading as it is, we must bear in mind that we have put ourselves under the lead of a philosopher who overlooks nothing, who regards the least important

things from the standpoint of their final issue, and who would not have the little child do as he is bid lest he should learn, as a man, to obey that authority, other than himself, which we believe to be Divine.

'Quick as Thought.'—The influence of his rationalistic philosophy is by no means confined to those who read this author's great works, or even to those who read his manual on education. 'Quick as thought' is a common phrase, but it would be interesting to know how quick thought is, to have any measure for the intensity, vitality, and velocity of an idea, for the rate of its progress in the world. One would like to know how soon an idea, conceived in the study, becomes the common property of the man in the street, who regards it as his own possession, and knows nothing of its source. We have no such measures; but there is hardly a home, of even the lowest stage of culture, where this theory of education has not been either consciously adopted or rejected, though the particular parents in question may never have heard of the philosopher. An idea, once launched, is 'in the air,' so we say. As is said of the Holy Spirit, we know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes.

The Notion of the Finality of Human Reason Intolerable.—But, because philosophic thought is so subtle and permeating an influence, it is our part to scrutinise every principle that presents itself. Once we are able to safeguard ourselves in this way, we are able to profit by the wisdom of works which yet rest upon what we regard as radical errors. It seems not improbable that the early years of this very century may thus see the advent of England's truly great philosopher, who shall not be confined by the limita-

tions of rationalistic or of materialistic thought. Men have become weary of themselves. The notion of the finality of human reason has grown an intolerable limitation. Nothing less than the Infinite will satisfy the spirit of a man. We again recognise that we are made for God, and have no rest until we find Him; and philosophic thought, at home and abroad, has, to some degree, left these channels high and dry, and is running in other courses, towards the Infinite and the Divine.

Authority and Docility, Fundamental Principles.—One of the first efforts of this reconstructive thought, which is building us once more a temple for our spirits, a house not made with hands, is to restore Authority to its ancient place as an ultimate fact, no more to be accounted for than is the principle of gravitation, and as binding and universal in the moral world as is that other principle in the natural. Fitting in to that of authority, as the ball fits the socket to make a working joint, is the other universal and elemental principle of Docility, and upon these two hang all possibilities of law and order, government and progress, among men. Mr Benjamin Kidd, in his *Social Evolution*, has done much for the recognition of these two fundamental principles. Why a football team should obey its captain, an army its commanding officer; why a street crowd should stand in awe of two or three policemen; why property should be respected, when it is the many who want and the few who have; why, in a word, there should be rule and not anarchy in the world—these are the sorts of questions Mr Kidd sets himself to answer. He turns to Reason for her reply, and she has none to give. Her favourite argument is that the appeal to

self-interest is final; that we do, individually and collectively, whatever is shown to be for our advantage. But when that company went down in the 'Royal George,' standing at 'Attention!' because that was the word of command; when the Six Hundred rode 'into the valley of death' because-

"Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die,"

—the subtlest reasoning can find no other motive than the single and simple one of authority acting upon docility. These men had been told to do these things, and, therefore, they did them. That is all. And that they did well, we know; our own heart is the witness. We speak of such deeds as acts of heroism, but it is well to notice that these splendid displays of human nature at its best resolve themselves for the most part into acts of obedience to the word of authority. The abuse of authority gives us the slave and the despot, but slavery and despotism could not exist except that they are founded upon elemental principles in human nature. We all have it in us to serve or to rule as occasion demands. To dream of liberty, in the sense of every man his own sole governor, is as futile as to dream of a world in which apples do not necessarily drop from the tree, but may fly off at a tangent in any direction.

Work of Rationalistic Philosophers, Inevitable.—What is Authority? The question shows us how inevitable in the evolution of thought has been the work of the rationalistic philosophers. It is to them we owe our deliverance from the autocrat, whether on the throne or in the family.

Their work has been to assert and prove that every human soul is born free, that liberty is his inalienable right, and that an offence against the liberty of a human being is a capital offence. This also is true. Parents and teachers, because their subjects are so docile and so feeble, are tempted more than others to the arbitrary temper, to say—Do thus and thus because I bid you. Therefore they, more than others, owe a debt of gratitude to the rationalistic school for holding, as they do, a brief for human freedom, including the freedom of children in a family. It would seem to be thus that God educates the world. It is not only one good custom, but one infallible principle, which may 'corrupt a world.' Some such principle stands out luminous in the vision of a philosopher; he sees it is truth; it takes possession of him and he believes it to be the whole truth, and urges it to the point of *reductio ad absurdum*. Then the principle at the opposite pole of thought is similarly illuminated and glorified by a succeeding school of thought; and, later, it is discerned that it is not by either principle, but by both, that men live.

Authority, vested in the Office.—It is by these countercurrents, so to speak, of mind forces that we have been taught to rectify our notion of authority. Easily within living memory we were upon dangerous ground. We believed that authority was vested in persons, that arbitrary action became such persons, that slavish obedience was good for the others. This theory of government we derived from our religion; we believed in the 'divine right' of kings and of parents because we believed that the very will of God was an arbitrary will. But we have been taught

better; we know now that authority is vested in the office and not in the person; that the moment it is treated as a personal attribute it is forfeited. We know that a person in authority is a person authorised; and that he who is authorised is *under* authority. The person under authority holds and fulfils a trust; in so far as he asserts himself, governs upon the impulse of his own will, he ceases to be authoritative and authorised, and becomes arbitrary and autocratic. It is autocracy and arbitrary rule which must be enforced, at all points, by a penal code; hence the confusion of thought which exists as to the connection between authority and punishment. The despot rules by terror; he punishes right and left to uphold his unauthorised sway. The person who is vested with authority, on the contrary, requires no rigours of the law to bolster him up, because authority is behind him; and, before him, the corresponding principle of docility.

CHAPTER II

DOCILITY AND AUTHORITY IN THE HOME AND THE SCHOOL

PART II.—HOW AUTHORITY BEHAVES

Mistakes made on Principle.—Mr Augustus Hare has, apparently, what somebody calls a *bad* memory, *i.e.* one which keeps a faithful record of every slight and offence that had been done to him since the day he was born! For this reason *The Story of My Life*¹ is not quite pleasant reading, though it is full of interesting details. But all is fish that comes to our net. We have seldom had a more instructive record of childhood, even if we must allow that the instruction comes to us on the lines of what not to do. The fine character and beautiful nature of Mrs Augustus Hare have been known to the world since the *Memorials of a Quiet Life* were published by this very son; and when we find how this lady misinterpreted the part of mother to her adopted and dearly beloved son, we know that we are not reading of the mistakes of an unworthy or even of a commonplace woman. Mrs Hare always acted upon principle, and when she erred, the principle was in fault. She confounded the two

¹ *The Story of My Life*, by Augustus Hare (George Allen).

principles of authority and autocracy. She believed that there was some occult virtue in arbitrary action on the part of a parent, and that a child must be the better in proportion as he does as he is bidden—the more outrageous the bidding the better the training. Here is an example of what a loving mother may force herself to do:—"Hitherto, I had never been allowed anything but roast mutton and rice pudding for dinner. Now all was changed. The most delicious puddings were talked of—*dilated* on—until I became, not greedy, but exceedingly curious about them. At length *le grand moment* arrived. They were put on the table just before me, and then, just as I was going to eat some of them, they were snatched away, and I was told to get up and carry them off to some poor person in the village. I remember that, though I did not really in the least care about the dainties, I cared excessively about Lea's wrath at the fate of her nice puddings, of which, after all, I was most innocent." Here is another arbitrary ruling:—"Even the pleasures of this home-Sunday, however, were marred in the summer, when my mother gave in to a suggestion of Aunt Esther that I should be locked in the vestry of the church between the services. Miserable, indeed, were the three hours which—provided with a sandwich for dinner—I had weekly to spend there; and, though I did not expect to see ghosts, the utter isolation of Hurstmonceaux church, far away from all haunts of men, gave my imprisonment an unusual eeriness. Sometimes I used to clamber over the tomb of the Lords Dacre, which rises like a screen against one side of the vestry, and be stricken with vague terrors by the two grim white figures lying upon it in the

silent desolation, in which the scamper of a rat across the floor seemed to make a noise like a whirlwind. . . . It was a sort of comfort to me, in the real church-time, to repeat vigorously all the worst curses in the Psalms, those in which David showed his most appalling degree of malice, and apply them to Aunt Esther & Co. As all the Psalms were extolled as beatific, and the Church of England used them constantly for edification, their sentiments were all right, I supposed."

And yet how wise this good mother is when she trusts to her own instinct and insight rather than to a fallacious principle:—"I find in giving any order to a child, it is always better not to *look* to see if he obeys, but to take it for granted that it will be done. If one appears to doubt the obedience, there is occasion given for the child to hesitate, 'Shall I do it or no?' If you seem not to question the possibility of non-compliance, he feels a trust committed to him to keep and fulfils it. It is best never to repeat a command, never to answer the oft-asked question 'Why?'"

Authority distinguished from Autocracy.—Mrs Hare, like many another ruler, would appear to have erred, not from indolence, and certainly not from harshness, but because she failed to define to herself the nature of the authority she was bound to exercise. Autocracy is defined as independent or self-derived power. Authority, on the other hand, we may qualify as not being self-derived and not independent. The centurion in the Gospels says: "I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, 'Go,' and he goeth; to another, 'Come,' and he cometh; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he doeth it."

Here we have the powers and the limitations of authority. The centurion is set under authority, or, as we say, authorised, and, for that reason, he is able to say to one, 'go,' to another, 'come' and to a third, 'do this,' in the calm certainty that all will be done as he says, because he holds his position for this very purpose—to secure that such and such things shall be accomplished. He himself is a servant with definite tasks, though they are the tasks of authority. This, too, is the position that our Lord assumes; He says: "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." That is His commission and the standing order of His life, and for this reason He spake as one having authority, knowing Himself to be commissioned and supported.

Behaviour of Autocracy.—Authority is not uneasy; captious, harsh and indulgent by turns. This is the action of autocracy, which is self-sustained as it is self-derived, and is impatient and resentful, on the watch for transgressions, and swift to take offence. Autocracy has ever a drastic penal code, whether in the kingdom, the school, or the family. It has, too, many commandments. 'Thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not,' are *chevaux de frise* about the would-be awful majesty of the autocrat. The tendency to assume self-derived power is common to us all, even the meekest of us, and calls for special watchfulness; the more so, because it shows itself fully as often in remitting duties and in granting indulgences as in inflicting punishments. It is flattering when a child comes up in the winning, coaxing way the monkeys know how to assume, and says, 'Please let me stay at home this morning, only this once!' The next stage is, 'I don't want to go out,' and the next, 'I

won't!' and the home or school ruler, who has no principle behind his own will, soon learns that a child can be autocratic too—autocratic and belligerent to an alarming extent.

Behaviour of Authority.—Authority is neither harsh nor indulgent. She is gentle and easy to be entreated in all matters immaterial, just because she is immovable in matters of real importance; for these, there is always a fixed principle. It does not, for example, rest with parents and teachers to dally with questions affecting either the health or the duty of their children. They have no authority to allow children in indulgences—in too many sweetmeats, for example—or in habits which are prejudicial to health; nor to let them off from any plain duty of obedience, courtesy, reverence, or work. Authority is alert; she knows all that is going on and is aware of tendencies. She fulfils the apostolic precept—"He that ruleth (let him do it), with diligence." But she is strong enough to fulfil that other precept also, "He that showeth mercy (let him do it), with cheerfulness"; timely clemency, timely yielding, is a great secret of strong government. It sometimes happens that children, and not their parents, have right on their side: a claim may be made or an injunction resisted, and the children are in opposition to parent or teacher. It is well for the latter to get the habit of swiftly and imperceptibly reviewing the situation; possibly, the children may be in the right, and the parent may gather up his wits in time to yield the point graciously and send the little rebels away in a glow of love and loyalty.

Qualities proper to a Ruler.—Nobody understood this better than Queen Elizabeth, who contrived

to make a curious division of her personality and be, at the same time, a model ruler and, as a woman, full of the weaknesses of her sex. It has been well said that she knew when to yield and how to yield. Her adroitness in getting over many a dangerous crisis has been much praised by historians; but, possibly, this saving grace was not adroitness so much as the tact born of qualities proper to all who are set in authority—the meekness of one who has been given an appointed work, the readiness to take counsel with herself and with others, the perception that she herself was not the be-all and the end-all of her functions as a queen, but that she existed for her people, and the quick and tender open-minded sympathy which enabled her to see their side of every question as well as her own—indeed, in preference to her own. These are the qualities proper to every ruler of a household, a school, or a kingdom. With these, parents will be able to order and control a fiery young brood full of energy and vitality, as Elizabeth was, to manage the kingdom when the minds of men were in a ferment of new thought, and life was intoxicating in the delightfulness of the possibilities it offered.

Mechanical and Reasonable Obedience.—It is a little difficult to draw the line between mechanical and reasonable obedience. ‘I teach my children obedience by the time they are one year old,’ the writer heard a very successful mother remark; and, indeed, that is the age at which to begin to give children the ease and comfort of the habit of obeying lawful authority. We know Mr Huxley’s story of the retired private who was carrying home his Sunday’s dinner from the bakehouse. A sergeant

passed by who recognised the man's soldierly gait, and was bent on a practical joke. 'Attention!' he cried, and the man stood at attention while his mutton and potatoes rolled in the gutter. Now, this kind of obedience is a mere question of nerves and muscles, a habit of the brain tissue with which the moral consciousness has nothing to do. It is a little the fashion to undervalue any but reasonable obedience, as if we were creatures altogether of mind and spirit, or creatures whose bodies answer as readily to the ruling of the spirit as does the ship to the helm. But, alas for our weakness! this description fits us only in proportion as our bodies have been trained to the discipline of unthinking mechanical obedience. We all know the child who is fully willing to do the right thing so far as mind is concerned, but with whom bodily *vis inertiae* is strong enough to resist a very torrent of good intentions and good resolutions; and if we wish children to be able, when they grow up, to keep under their bodies and bring them into subjection, we must do this *for* them in their earlier years.

Response of Docility to Authority, a Natural Function.—So far as the daily routine of small obediences goes, we help them thus to fulfil a natural function—the response of docility to authority. It may be said that a child who has acquired the habit of involuntary obedience has proportionately lost power as a free moral agent; but, as the acts of obedience in question are very commonly connected with some physical effort, as, 'Make haste back,' 'Sit straight,' 'Button your boots quickly,'—they belong to the same educational province as gymnastic exercises, the object of which is the masterly use of the body as a machine capable of many operations.

Now, to work a machine such as a typewriter or a bicycle, one must, before all things, have practice; one must have got into the way of working it involuntarily, without giving any thought to the matter: and to give a child this power over himself—first in response to the will of another, later, in response to his own, is to make a man of him.

The Habit of Prompt Obedience.—It is an old story that the failures in life are not the people who lack good intentions; they are those whose physical nature has not acquired the habit of prompt and involuntary obedience. The man who can make himself do what he wills has the world before him, and it rests with parents to give their children this self-compelling power as a mere matter of habit. But is it not better and higher, it may be asked, to train children to act always in response to the divine mandate as it makes itself heard through the voice of conscience? The answer is, that in doing this we must not leave the other undone. There are few earnest parents who do not bring the power of conscience to bear on their children, and there are emergencies enough in the lives of young and old when we have to make a spiritual decision upon spiritual grounds—when it rests with us to choose the good and refuse the evil, consciously and voluntarily, because it is God's will that we should.

The Effort of Decision.—But it has been well said by a celebrated preacher that the effort of decision is the greatest effort of life. We find it so ourselves; shall we take this line of action or the other, shall we choose this or the other quality of carpet, send our boy to this or the other school? We all know that such questions are difficult to settle, and the wear and

tear of nervous tissue the decision costs is evidenced often enough by the nervous headache it leaves behind. For this reason it is, we may reverently believe, that we are so marvellously and mercifully made that most of our decisions arrive, so to speak, of themselves: that is, ninety-nine out of a hundred things we do, are done, well or ill, as mere matters of habit. With this wonderful provision in our tissues for recording repeated actions and reproducing them upon given stimuli—a means provided for easing the burden of life, and for helping us to realise the gay happiness which appears to be the divine intention for us so far as we become like little children—it is startling and shocking that there are many children of thoughtful parents whose lives are spent in day-long efforts of decision upon matters which it is their parents' business to settle for them. Maud is nervous, excitable, has an over-active brain, is too highly organised, grows pale, acquires nervous tricks. The doctor is consulted, and, not knowing much about the economy of the home, decides that it is a case of over-pressure. Maud must do no lessons for six months; change of air is advised, and milk diet. Somehow the prescription does not answer, the child's condition does not improve; but the parents are slow to perceive that it is not the soothing routine of lessons which is exhausting the little girl, but the fact that she goes through the labour of decision twenty times a day, and not only that, but the added fatigue of a contest to get her own way. Every point in the day's routine is discussed, nothing comes with the comforting ease of a matter of course; the child always prefers to do something else, and commonly does it. No wonder the poor little girl is worn out.

Authority avoids Cause of Offence.—On the other hand, children are before all things reasonable beings, and to some children of acute and powerful intelligence, an arbitrary and apparently unreasonable command is cruelly irritating. It is not advisable to answer children categorically when they want to know the why for every command, but wise parents steer a middle course. They are careful to form habits upon which the routine of life runs easily, and, when the exceptional event requires a new regulation, they may make casual mention of their reasons for having so and so done; or, if this is not convenient and the case is a trying one, they give the children the reason for all obedience—"for this is right" In a word, authority avoids, so far as may be, giving cause of offence.

Authority is Alert.—Another hint as to the fit use of authority may be gleaned from the methods employed in a well-governed state. The importance of *prevention* is fully recognised: police, army, navy, are largely preventive forces; and the home authority, too, does well to place its forces on the Alert Service. It is well to prepare for trying efforts: 'We shall have time to finish this chapter before the clock strikes seven'; or, 'we shall be able to get in one more round before bedtime.' Nobody knows better than the wise mother the importance of giving a child time to collect himself for a decisive moment. This time should be spent in finishing some delightful occupation; every minute of idleness at these critical junctures goes to the setting up of the *vis inertiae*, most difficult to overcome because the child's will power is in abeyance. A little forethought is necessary to arrange that occupations do come to an end at the right moment; that bedtime does not

arrive in the middle of a chapter, or at the most exciting moment of a game. In such an event authority, which looks before and after, *might* see its way to allow five minutes' grace, but would not feel itself empowered to allow a child to dawdle about indefinitely before saying good-night.

Who gave thee this Authority?—We need not add that authority is just and faithful in all matters of promise-keeping; it is also considerate, and that is why a good mother is the best home-ruler; she is in touch with the children, knows their unspoken schemes and half-formed desires, and where she cannot yield, she diverts; she does not crush with a sledge-hammer, an instrument of rule with which a child is somehow never very sympathetic.

We all know how important this, of changing children's thoughts, diverting, is in the formation of habit. Let us not despise the day of small things nor grow weary in well-doing; if we have trained our children from their earliest years to prompt mechanical obedience, well and good; we reap our reward. If we have not, we must be content to lead by slow degrees, by ever-watchful efforts, by authority never in abeyance and never aggressive, to 'the joy of self-control,' the delight of proud chivalric obedience which will hail a command as an opportunity for service. It is a happy thing that the 'difficult' children who are the readiest to resist a direct command are often the quickest to respond to the stimulus of an idea. The presentation of quickening ideas is itself a delicate art, which I have, however, considered elsewhere.

I am not proposing a one-sided arrangement, all the authority on the one part and all the docility on

the other; for never was there a child who did not wield authority, if only over dolls or tin soldiers. And we of the ruling class, so far as the nursery and school-room go, are we not fatally docile in yielding obedience to anyone who will take the trouble to tell us we had better do this or that? We need not be jealous for the independence of children: that will take care of itself.

To conclude: authority is not only a gift, but a grace; and,

“As every rainbow hue is light,
So every grace is love.”

Authority is that aspect of love which parents present to their children; parents know it is love, because to them it means continual self-denial, self-repression, self-sacrifice: children recognise it as love, because to them it means quiet rest and gaiety of heart. Perhaps the best aid to the maintenance of authority in the home is for those in authority to ask themselves daily that question which was presumptuously put to our Lord—“Who gave Thee this authority?”

CHAPTER III

'MASTERLY INACTIVITY'

Increased Sense of Responsibility.—It would be an interesting task for a literary expert to trace the stages of ethical thought marked by the uses, within living memory, of the word *responsibility*. People, and even children, were highly responsible in the fifties and sixties, but then it was for their own character, conduct, and demeanour. It is not at all certain that we hold ourselves responsible in this matter to the same degree. We are inclined to accept ourselves as inevitable, to make kindly allowance for our own little ways and peccadilloes, and are, perhaps, wanting in that wholesome sense of humour, 'the giftie' which should "gie us

"To see oursels as ithers see us."

A Sign of Moral Progress.—If we take ourselves more easily, however, we take other people more seriously. The sense of responsibility still rests upon us with a weight 'heavy as frost'; we have only shifted it to the other shoulder. The more serious of us are quite worn with the sense of what we owe to those about us, near and far off. Men carry the weight more easily than women, because, for most of

them, each day brings work that must be done, and they have less time than women to think anxiously about their relations with, and duties to, others. By the way, it is rather a note of the time that the translators of the Revised Version have given us—'Be not *anxious* for your life,' instead of the older rendering. But, if women feel the wear of responsibility for others more constantly, let but a burning question arise—the condition of East London, Home Rule, massacres in Armenia—and men feel it more intensely and passionately. This sharpened sense is not a malady of the age, but a sign of the times.

To those of us who believe we are all at school and have our lessons set as we are fit to take them in, this general sense of responsibility for others is an encouraging sign that we are being taught from above, and are, on the whole, getting on.

Parental Responsibility.—If we all feel ourselves responsible for the distressed, the suffering, the sick, the feeble in body or mind, the deficient, the ignorant, and—would that we all felt this particular burden more—for the heathen, there is one kind of responsibility which is felt by thoughtful people with almost undue acuteness. Parental responsibility is, no doubt, the educational note of the day. People feel that they *can* bring up their children to be something more than themselves, that they *ought* to do so, and that they *must*; and it is to this keen sense of higher parental duty that the Parents' Union owes its successful activity.

Anxiety the Note of a Transition Stage.—Every new power, whether mechanical or spiritual, requires adjustment before it can be used to the full. In the scientific world there is always a long pause between

the first dawn of a great discovery—as the Röntgen rays, for example—and the moment when it is applied to the affairs of everyday life with full effect and without the displacement of other powers whose functions are just as important and as necessary. We should regard with suspicion any attempt to make the Röntgen rays supply the place of stethoscope, thermometer, and all other clinical apparatus. Just so is it in the moral sphere. Our keener sense of responsibility arises from a new development of altruistic feeling—we have greater power of loving and wider scope for our love; we are more leavened by the Spirit of Christ, even when we do not recognise the source of our fuller life. But to perceive that there is much which we ought to do and not to know exactly what it is, nor how to do it, does not add to the pleasure of life or to ease in living. We become worried, restless, anxious; and in the transition stage between the development of this new power and the adjustment which comes with time and experience, the fuller life, which is certainly ours, fails to make us either happier or more useful.

A Fussy and Restless Habit.—It is by way of an effort towards this adjustment of power that I wish to bring before parents and teachers the subject of 'masterly inactivity.' We ought to do so much for our children, and are able to do so much for them, that we begin to think everything rests with us and that we should never intermit for a moment our conscious action on the young minds and hearts about us. Our endeavours become fussy and restless. We are too much with our children, 'late and soon.' We try to dominate them too much, even when we fail to govern, and we are unable to perceive that wise and

purposeful letting alone is the best part of education. But this form of error arises from a defect of our qualities. We may take heart. We *have* the qualities, and all that is wanted is adjustment; to this we must give our time and attention.

'Masterly Inactivity.'—A blessed thing in our mental constitution is, that once we receive an idea, it will work itself out, in thought and act, without much after-effort on our part; and, if we admit the idea of 'masterly inactivity' as a factor in education, we shall find ourselves framing our dealings with children from this standpoint, without much conscious effort. But we must get clearly into our heads what we mean by masterly inactivity. Carlyle's happy phrase has nothing in common with the *laissez aller* attitude that comes of thinking 'what's the good?' and still further is it removed from the sheer indolence of mind that lets things go their way rather than take the trouble to lead them to any issue. It indicates a fine healthy moral pose which it is worth while for us to analyse. Perhaps the idea is nearly that conveyed in Wordsworth's even more happy phrase, 'wise passiveness.' It indicates the power to act, the desire to act, and the insight and self-restraint which forbid action. But there is, from our point of view at any rate, a further idea conveyed in 'masterly inactivity.' The mastery is not over ourselves only; there is also a sense of authority, which our children should be as much aware of when it is inactive as when they are doing our bidding. The sense of authority is the *sine quâ non* of the parental relationship, and I am not sure that without that our activities or our inactivity will produce any great results. This element of strength

is the backbone of our position. 'We could an' if we would,' and the children know it. They are free under authority, which is liberty; to be free without authority is license.

The Element of Good Humour.—The next element in the attitude of masterly inactivity is good humour—frank, cordial, natural, good humour. This is quite a different thing from overmuch complacency, and a general giving-in to all the children's whims. The one is the outcome of strength, the other of weakness, and children are very quick to see the difference. 'Oh, mother, may we go blackberrying this afternoon, instead of lessons?' The masterly 'yes' and the abject 'yes' are quite different notes. The first makes the holiday doubly a delight; the second produces a restless desire to gain some other easy victory.

Self-confidence.—The next element is confidence. Parents should trust themselves more. Everything is not done by restless endeavour. The mere blessed fact of the parental relationship and of that authority which belongs to it, by right and by nature, acts upon the children as do sunshine and shower on a seed in good soil. But the fussy parent, the anxious parent, the parent who explains overmuch, who commands overmuch, who excuses overmuch, who restrains overmuch, who interferes overmuch, even the parent who is with the children overmuch, does away with the dignity and simplicity of that relationship which, like all the best and most delicate things in life, suffer by being asserted or defended.

The fine, easy way of Fathers.—Fathers are, sometimes, more happy than mothers in assuming that fine easy way with their children which belongs

of right to their relationship, but this is only because the father is occupied with many things, and the mother is apt to be too much engrossed with her children. It is a little humiliating to the best of us to see a careless, rather a selfish mother, whose children are her born slaves and run to do her bidding with delight. The moral is, not that all mothers should be careless and selfish, but that they should give their children the ease of a good deal of letting alone, and should not oppress the young people with their own anxious care. The small person of ten who wishes to know if her attainments are up to the average for her age, or he who discusses his bad habits with you and the best way of curing them, is displeasing, because one feels instinctively that the child is occupied with cares which belong to the parent only. The burden of their children's training must be borne by the parents alone. But let them bear it with easy grace and an erect carriage, as the Spanish peasant bears her water-jar.

Confidence in the Children.—Not only confidence in themselves, but confidence in their children, is an element of the masterly inactivity, which I venture to propose to parents as a 'blue teapot' for them 'to live up to.' Believe in the relation of parent and child, and trust the children to believe in it and fulfil it on their part. They will do so if they are not worried.

Omniscience of Parents and Teachers.—Parents and teachers must, of course, be omniscient; their children expect this of them, and a mother or father who can be hoodwinked is a person easy to reckon with in the mind of even the best child. For children are always playing a game—half of chance, half of

skill; they are trying how far they can go, how much of the management of their own lives they can get for the taking, and how much they must leave in the hands of the stronger powers. Therefore the mother who is not *up* to children is at their mercy, and need expect no quarter. But she must see without watching, know without telling, be on the alert always, yet never obviously, fussily, so. This open-eyed attitude must be sphinx-like in its repose. The children must know themselves to be let alone, whether to do their own duty or to seek their own pleasure. The constraining power should be present, but passive, so that the child may not feel himself hemmed in without choice. That free-will of man, which has for ages exercised faithful souls who would prefer to be compelled into all righteousness and obedience, is after all a pattern for parents. The child who is good because he must be so, loses in power of initiative more than he gains in seemingly behaviour. Every time a child feels that he chooses to obey of his own accord, his power of initiative is strengthened. The bearing-rein may not be used. When it occurs to a child to reflect on his behaviour, he should have that sense of liberty which makes his good behaviour appear to him a matter of his own preference and choice.

'Fate' and 'Free-will.'—This is the freedom which a child enjoys who has the confidence of his parents as to his comings and goings and childish doings, and who is all the time aware of their authority. He is brought up in the school proper for a being whose life is conditioned by 'fate' and 'free-will.' He has liberty, that is, with a sense of *must* behind it to relieve him of that unrest which

comes with the constant effort of decision. He is free to do as he ought, but knows quite well in his secret heart that he is not free to do that which he ought not. The child who, on the contrary, grows up with no strong sense of authority behind all his actions, but who receives many exhortations to be good and obedient and what not, is aware that he may choose either good or evil, he may obey or not obey, he may tell the truth or tell a lie; and, even when he chooses aright, he does so at the cost of a great deal of nervous wear and tear. His parents have removed from him the support of their authority in the difficult choice of right-doing, and he is left alone to make that most trying of all efforts, the effort of decision. Is the distinction between being free to choose the right at one's own option, and not free to do the wrong, too subtle to be grasped, too elusive to be practical? It may be so, but it is precisely the distinction which we are aware of in our own lives so far as we keep ourselves consciously under the divine governance. We are free to go in the ways of right living, and have the happy sense of liberty of choice, but the ways of transgressors are hard. We are aware of a restraining hand in the present, and of sure and certain retribution in the future. Just this delicate poise is to be aimed at for the child. He must be treated with full confidence, and must feel that right-doing is his own free choice, which his parents trust him to make; but he must also be very well aware of the deterrent force in the background, watchful to hinder him when he would do wrong.

The Component Parts of Masterly Inactivity.

—We have seen that authority, good humour, confi-

dence, both self-confidence and confidence in the children, are all contained in masterly inactivity, but these are not all the parts of that whole. A sound mind in a sound body is another factor. If the sound body is unattainable, anyway, get the sound mind. Let not the nervous, anxious, worried mother think that this easy, happy relation with her children is for her. She may be the best mother in the world, but the thing that her children will get from her in these vexed moods is a touch of her nervousness—most catching of complaints. She will find them fractious, rebellious, unmanageable, and will be slow to realise that it is her fault; not the fault of her act but of her state.

Serenity of a Madonna.—It is not for nothing that the old painters, however diverse their ideas in other matters, all fixed upon one quality as proper to the pattern Mother. The Madonna, no matter out of whose canvas she looks at you, is always serene. This is a great truth, and we should do well to hang our walls with the Madonnas of all the early Masters if the lesson, taught through the eye, would reach with calming influence to the heart. Is this a hard saying for mothers in these anxious and troubled days? It may be hard, but it is not unsympathetic. If mothers could learn to do for themselves what they do for their children when these are overdone, we should have happier households. Let the mother go out to play! If she would only have courage to let everything go when life becomes too tense, and just take a day, or half a day, out in the fields, or with a favourite book, or in a picture gallery looking long and well at just two or three pictures, or in bed, *without the children*, life would go on far more happily

for both children and parents. The mother would be able to hold herself in 'wise passiveness,' and would not fret her children by continual interference, even of hand or eye—she would let them be.

Leisure.—Another element is leisure. Sometimes events hurry us, and sometimes—is it not true?—we like the little excitement of a rush. The children like it, too, at first. Father's birthday is coming, and Nellie must recite a poem for him; the little *fête* has only been thought of a week in advance, and Nellie is seized at all sorts of odd moments to have some lines of the recitation crammed into her. At first she is pleased and important, and goes joyously to the task; but by-and-by it irks her; she is cross and naughty, is reproached for want of love for father, sheds tears over her verses, and, though finally the little performance may be got through very well, Nellie has suffered physically and morally in doing what, if it had been thought of a month beforehand, would have been altogether wholesome and delightful. Still worse for the children is it when mother or teacher has a 'busy' day. Friends are coming, or the family wardrobe for the summer must be seen to, or drawers and cupboards must be turned out, or an examination is at hand. Anyway, it is one of those fussy, busy days which we women rather delight in. We do more than we can ourselves, our nerves are 'on end,' what with the fatigue and what with the little excitement, and everybody in the house or the school is uncomfortable. Again, the children take advantage, so we say; the real fact being that they have caught their mother's mood and are fretful and tiresome. Nerve storms in the nursery are the probable result of the mother's little ebullition of nervous energy.

Leisure for themselves and a sense of leisure in those about them is as necessary to children's well being, as it is to the strong and benign parental attitude of which I am speaking.

Faith.—Other ingredients go to the making of the delectable compound we call 'masterly inactivity,' but space will allow me to speak of only one more. That highest form of confidence, known to us as faith, is necessary to full repose of mind and manner. When we recognise that God does not make over the bringing up of children absolutely even to their parents, but that He works Himself, in ways which it must be our care not to hinder, in the training of every child, then we shall learn passiveness, humble and wise. We shall give children space to develop on the lines of their own characters in all right ways, and shall know how to intervene effectually to prevent those errors which, also, are proper to their individual characters.

Let us next consider a few of the various phases of children's lives in which parents and teachers would do well to preserve an attitude of 'masterly inactivity.'