

## CHAPTER II.

## HOME POWER.

"So build we up the being that we are,  
Thus deeply drinking in the soul of things,  
We shall be wise perforce."—WORDSWORTH.

"The mill-streams that turn the clappers of the world arise in solitary places."—HELPS.

"In the course of a conversation with Madame Campan Napoleon Bonaparte remarked: 'The old systems of instruction seem to be worth nothing; what is yet wanting in order that the people should be properly educated?' 'MOTHERS,' replied Madame Campan. The reply struck the emperor. 'Yes!' said he, 'here is a system of education in one word. Be it your care, then, to train up mothers who shall know how to educate their children.'"—AIME MARTIN.

"Lord! with what care hast Thou begirt us round!  
Parents first season us. Then schoolmasters  
Deliver us to laws. They send us bound  
To rules of reason."—GEORGE HERBERT.

HOME is the first and most important school of character. It is there that every human being receives his best moral training, or his worst; for it is there that he imbibes those principles of conduct which endure through manhood, and cease only with life.

It is a common saying that "Manners make the man;" and there is a second, that "Mind makes the man;" but truer than either is a third, that "Home makes the man." For the home-training includes not only manners and mind,

but character. It is mainly in the home that the heart is opened, the habits are formed, the intellect is awakened, and character moulded for good or for evil.

From that source, be it pure or impure, issue the principles and maxims that govern society. Law itself is but the reflex of homes. The tiniest bits of opinion sown in the minds of children in private life afterwards issue forth to the world, and become its public opinion; for nations are gathered out of nurseries, and they who hold the leading-strings of children may even exercise a greater power than those who wield the reins of government.\*

It is in the order of nature that domestic life should be preparatory to social, and that the mind and character should first be formed in the home. There the individuals who afterwards form society are dealt with in detail, and fashioned one by one. From the family they enter life, and advance from boyhood to citizenship. Thus the home may be regarded as the most influential school of civilization. For, after all, civilization mainly resolves itself into a question of individual training; and according as the respective members of society are well or ill trained in youth, so will the community which they constitute be more or less humanized and civilized.

The training of any man, even the wisest, cannot fail to be powerfully influenced by the moral surroundings of his early years. He comes into the world helpless, and absolutely dependent upon those about him for nurture and culture. From the very first breath that he draws, his educa-

\* "Civic virtues, unless they have their origin and consecration in private and domestic virtues, are but the virtues of the theatre. He who has not a loving heart for his child cannot pretend to have any true love for humanity."—JULES SIMON'S *Le Devoir*.

tion begins. When a mother once asked a clergyman when she should begin the education of her child, then four years old, he replied: "Madam, if you have not begun already, you have lost those four years. From the first smile that gleams upon an infant's cheek, your opportunity begins."

But even in this case the education had already begun; for the child learns by simple imitation, without effort, almost through the pores of the skin. "A fig-tree looking on a fig-tree becometh fruitful," says the Arabian proverb. And so it is with children; their first great instructor is example.

However apparently trivial the influences which contribute to form the character of the child, they endure through life. The child's character is the nucleus of the man's; all after-education is but superposition; the form of the crystal remains the same. Thus the saying of the poet holds true in a large degree, "The child is father of the man;" or, as Milton puts it, "The childhood shows the man, as morning shows the day." Those impulses to conduct which last the longest and are rooted the deepest, always have their origin near our birth. It is then that the germs of virtues or vices, of feelings or sentiments, are first implanted which determine the character for life.

The child is, as it were, laid at the gate of a new world, and opens his eyes upon things all of which are full of novelty and wonderment. At first it is enough for him to gaze; but by-and-by he begins to see, to observe, to compare, to learn, to store up impressions and ideas; and under wise guidance the progress which he makes is really wonderful. Lord Brougham has observed that between the ages of eighteen and thirty months, a child learns more of the material world, of his own powers, of the nature of other bodies, and even of his own mind and other minds, than he

acquires in all the rest of his life. The knowledge which a child accumulates, and the ideas generated in his mind, during this period are so important, that if we could imagine them to be afterwards obliterated, all the learning of a senior wrangler at Cambridge, or a first-classman at Oxford, would be as nothing to it, and would literally not enable its object to prolong his existence for a week.

It is in childhood that the mind is most open to impressions, and ready to be kindled by the first spark that falls into it. Ideas are then caught quickly and live lastingly. Thus Scott is said to have received his first bent towards ballad literature from his mother's and grandmother's recitations in his hearing long before he himself had learned to read. Childhood is like a mirror, which reflects in after-life the images first presented to it. The first thing continues forever with the child. The first joy, the first sorrow, the first success, the first failure, the first achievement, the first misadventure, paint the foreground of his life.

All this while, too, the training of the character is in progress—of the temper, the will, and the habits—on which so much of the happiness of human beings in after-life depends. Although man is endowed with a certain self-acting, self-helping power of contributing to his own development, independent of surrounding circumstances, and of reacting upon the life around him, the bias given to his moral character in early life is of immense importance. Place even the highest-minded philosopher in the midst of daily discomfort, immorality, and vileness, and he will insensibly gravitate towards brutality. How much more susceptible is the impressionable and helpless child amidst such surroundings! It is not possible to rear a kindly nature, sensitive to evil, pure in mind and heart, amidst coarseness, discomfort, and impurity.

Thus homes, which are the nurseries of children who grow up into men and women, will be good or bad according to the power that governs them. Where the spirit of love and duty pervades the home—where head and heart bear rule wisely there—where the daily life is honest and virtuous—where the government is sensible, kind, and loving, then may we expect from such a home an issue of healthy, useful, and happy beings, capable, as they gain the requisite strength, of following the footsteps of their parents, of walking uprightly, governing themselves wisely, and contributing to the welfare of those about them.

On the other hand, if surrounded by ignorance, coarseness, and selfishness, they will unconsciously assume the same character, and grow up to adult years rude, uncultivated, and all the more dangerous to society if placed amidst the manifold temptations of what is called civilized life. "Give your child to be educated by a slave," said an ancient Greek, "and, instead of one slave, you will then have two."

The child can not help imitating what he sees. Every thing is to him a model—of manner, of gesture, of speech, of habit, of character. "For the child," says Richter, "the most important era of life is that of childhood, when he begins to color and mould himself by companionship with others. Every new educator effects less than his predecessor; until at last, if we regard all life as an educational institution, a circumnavigator of the world is less influenced by all the nations he has seen than by his nurse."\* Models are, therefore, of every importance in moulding the nature of the child; and if we would have fine characters, we must

\* "Levana; or, The Doctrine of Education."

necessarily present before them models. Now, the model most constantly before every child's eye is the mother.

One good mother, said George Herbert, is worth a hundred school-masters. In the home she is "loadstone to all hearts, and loadstar to all eyes." Imitation of her is constant, imitation, which Bacon likens to a "globe of precepts." But example is far more than precept. It is instruction in action. It is teaching without words, often exemplifying more than tongue can teach. In the face of bad example, the best of precepts are of but little avail. The example is followed, not the precepts. Indeed, precept at variance with practise is worse than useless, inasmuch as it only serves to teach the most cowardly of vices—hypocrisy. Even children are judges of consistency, and the lessons of the parent who says one thing and does the opposite are quickly seen through. The teaching of the friar was not worth much who preached the virtue of honesty with a stolen goose in his sleeve.

By imitation of acts the character becomes slowly and imperceptibly, but at length decidedly formed. The several acts may seem in themselves trivial; but so are the continuous acts of daily life. Like snow-flakes, they fall unperceived; each flake added to the pile produces no sensible change, and yet the accumulation of the snow-flakes makes the avalanche. So do repeated acts, one following another, at length become consolidated in habit, determine the action of the human being for good or for evil, and, in a word, form the character.

It is because the mother, far more than the father, influences the action and conduct of the child, that her good example is of so much greater importance in the home. It is easier to understand how this should be so. The home is

the woman's domain—her kingdom where she exercises entire control. Her power over the little subjects she rules there is absolute. They look up to her for everything. She is the example and model constantly before their eyes, whom they unconsciously observe and imitate.

Cowley, speaking of the influence of early example, and ideas early implanted in the mind, compares them to letters cut in the bark of a young tree, which grow and widen with age. The impressions then made, howsoever slight they may seem, are never effaced. The ideas then implanted in the mind are like seeds dropped into the ground, which lie there and germinate for a time, afterwards springing up in acts and thoughts and habits. Thus the mother lives again in her children. They unconsciously mould themselves after her manner, her speech, her conduct, and her method of life. Her habits become theirs; and her character is visibly repeated in them.

This maternal love is the visible providence of our race. Its influence is constant and universal. It begins with the education of the human being at the outstart of life, and is prolonged by virtue of the powerful influence which every good mother exercises over her children through life. When launched into the world, each to take part in its labors, anxieties, and trials, they still turn to their mother for consolation, if not for counsel, in their time of trouble and difficulty. The pure and good thoughts she has implanted in their minds when children continue to grow up into good acts long after she is dead; and when there is nothing but a memory of her left, her children rise up and call her blessed.

It is not saying too much to aver that the happiness or misery, the enlightenment or ignorance, the civilization or barbarism of the world, depends in a very high degree upon

the exercise of woman's power within her special kingdom of home. Indeed, Emerson says, broadly and truly, that "a sufficient measure of civilization is the influence of good women." Posterity may be said to lie before us in the person of the child in the mother's lap. What that child will eventually become, mainly depends upon the training and example which he has received from his first and most influential educator.

Woman, above all other educators, educates humanly. Man is the brain, but woman is the heart of humanity; he its judgment, she its feeling; he its strength, she its grace, ornament, and solace. Even the understanding of the best woman seems to work mainly through her affections. And thus, though man may direct the intellect, woman cultivates the feelings, which mainly determine the character. While he fills the memory, she occupies the heart. She makes us love what he can only make us believe, and it is chiefly through her that we are enabled to arrive at virtue.

The respective influences of the father and the mother on the training and development of character are remarkably illustrated in the life of St. Augustine. While Augustine's father, a poor freeman of Thagaste, proud of his son's abilities, endeavored to furnish his mind with the highest learning of the schools, and was extolled by his neighbors for the sacrifices he made with that object "beyond the ability of his means"—his mother, Monica, on the other hand, sought to lead her son's mind in the direction of the highest good, and with pious care counselled him, entreated him, advised him to chastity, and, amidst much anguish and tribulation, because of his wicked life, never ceased to pray for him until her prayers were heard and answered. Thus her love at last triumphed, and the patience and goodness of the

mother were rewarded, not only by the conversion of her gifted son, but also of her husband. Later in life, and after her husband's death, Monica, drawn by her affection, followed her son to Milan, to watch over him; and there she died, when he was in his thirty-third year. But it was in the earlier period of his life that her example and instruction made the deepest impression upon his mind, and determined his future character.

There are many similar instances of early impressions made upon a child's mind, springing up into good acts late in life, after an intervening period of selfishness and vice. Parents may do all that they can to develop an upright and virtuous character in their children, and apparently in vain. It seems like bread cast upon the waters and lost. And yet sometimes it happens that long after the parents have gone to their rest—it may be twenty years or more—the good precept, the good example set before their sons and daughters in childhood, at length springs up and bears fruit.

One of the most remarkable of such instances was that of the Reverend John Newton, of Olney, the friend of Cowper, the poet. It was long subsequent to the death of both his parents, and after leading a vicious life as a youth and as a seaman, that he became suddenly awakened to a sense of his depravity; and then it was that the lessons which his mother had given him when a child sprang up vividly in his memory. Her voice came to him as it were from the dead, and led him gently back to virtue and goodness.

Another instance is that of John Randolph, the American statesman, who once said: "I should have been an atheist if it had not been for one recollection—and that was the memory of the time when my departed mother used to

take my little hand in hers, and cause me on my knees to say, 'Our Father who art in heaven!'"

But such instances must, on the whole, be regarded as exceptional. As the character is biased in early life, so it generally remains, gradually assuming its permanent form as manhood is reached. "Live as long as you may," said Southey, "the first twenty years are the longest half of your life," and they are by far the most pregnant in consequences. When the worn-out slanderer and voluptuary, Dr. Wolcot, lay on his death-bed, one of his friends asked if he could do anything to gratify him. "Yes," said the dying man, eagerly, "give me back my youth." Give him but that, and he would repent—he would reform. But it was all too late! His life had become bound and intralled by the chains of habit.\*

Gretry, the musical composer, thought so highly of the importance of woman as an educator of character, that he described a good mother as "Nature's *chefd'œuvre*." And he was right: for good mothers, far more than fathers, tend to the perpetual renovation of mankind, creating as they do the moral atmosphere of the home, which is the nutriment of man's moral being, as the physical atmosphere is of his corporeal frame. By good temper, suavity, and kindness, directed by intelligence, woman surrounds the in-dwellers with a pervading atmosphere of cheerfulness, contentment,

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\* Speaking of the force of habit, St. Augustine says, in his "Confessions:" "My will the enemy held, and thence had made a chain for me, and bound me. For of a froward will was a lust made; and a lust served became custom; and custom not resisted became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (whence I called it a chain) a hard bondage held me intralled."

and peace, suitable for the growth of the purest as of the manliest natures.

The poorest dwelling, presided over by a virtuous, thrifty, cheerful, and cleanly woman, may thus be the abode of comfort, virtue, and happiness; it may be the scene of every ennobling relation in family life; it may be endeared to man by many delightful associations; furnishing a sanctuary for the heart, a refuge from the storms of life, a sweet resting-place after labor, a consolation in misfortune, a pride in prosperity, and a joy at all times.

The good home is thus the best of schools, not only in youth but in age. There young and old best learn cheerfulness, patience, self-control, and the spirit of service and of duty. Izaak Walton, speaking of George Herbert's mother, says she governed her family with judicious care, not rigidly nor sourly, "but with such a sweetness and compliance with the recreations and pleasures of youth, as did incline them to spend much of their time in her company, which was to her great content."

The home is the true school of courtesy, of which woman is always the best practical instructor. "Without woman," says the Provencal proverb, "men were but ill-licked cubs." Philanthropy radiates from the home as from a centre. "To love the little platoon we belong to in society," said Burke, "is the germ of all public affections." The wisest and the best have not been ashamed to own it to be their greatest joy and happiness to sit "behind the heads of children" in the inviolable circle of home. A life of purity and duty there is not the least effectual preparative for a life of public work and duty; and the man who loves his home will not the less fondly love and serve his country.

But while homes, which are the nurseries of character, may be the best of schools, they may also be the worst. Between childhood and manhood how incalculable is the mischief which ignorance in the home has the power to cause! Between the drawing of the first breath and the last, how vast is the mortal suffering and disease occasioned by incompetent mothers and nurses! Commit a child to the care of a worthless, ignorant woman, and no culture in after-life will remedy the evil you have done. Let the mother be idle, vicious, and a slattern; let her home be pervaded by cavilling, petulance, and discontent, and it will become a dwelling of misery—a place to fly from, rather than to fly to; and the children whose misfortune it is to be brought up there will be morally dwarfed and deformed—the cause of misery to themselves as well as to others.

Napoleon Bonaparte was accustomed to say that "the future good or bad conduct of a child depended entirely on the mother." He himself attributed his rise in life in a great measure to the training of his will, his energy, and his self-control, by his mother at home. "Nobody had any command over him," says one of his biographers, "except his mother, who found means, by a mixture of tenderness, severity, and justice, to make him love, respect, and obey her; from her he learnt the virtue of obedience."

A curious illustration of the dependence of the character of children on that of the mother incidentally occurs in one of Mr. Tufnell's school-reports. The truth, he observes, is so well established that it has even been made subservient to mercantile calculation. "I was informed," he says, "in a large factory, where many children were employed, that the managers before they engaged a boy always inquired into the mother's character, and if that was satisfactory they

were tolerably certain that her children would conduct themselves creditably. *No attention was paid to the character of the father.*"\*

It has also been observed that in cases where the father has turned out badly—become a drunkard, and "gone to the dogs"—provided the mother is prudent and sensible, the family will be kept together, and the children probably make their way honorably in life; whereas in cases of the opposite sort, where the mother turns out badly, no matter how well-conducted the father may be, the instances of after-success in life on the part of the children are comparatively rare.

The greater part of the influence exercised by women on the formation of character necessarily remains unknown. They accomplish their best works in the quiet seclusion of the home and the family, by sustained effort and patient perseverance in the path of duty. Their greatest triumphs, because private and domestic, are rarely recorded; and it is not often, even in the biographies of distinguished men, that we hear of the share which their mothers have had in the formation of their character, and in giving them a bias towards goodness. Yet are they not on that account without their reward. The influence they have exercised though unrecorded, lives after them, and goes on propagating itself in consequences forever.

We do not often hear of great women, as we do of great men. It is of good women that we mostly hear; and it is probable that, by determining the character of men and women for good, they are doing even greater work than if they were to paint great pictures, write great books, or

\* Mr. Tufnell, in "Reports of Inspectors of Parochial School Unions in England and Wales" (1850).

compose great operas. "It is quite true," said Joseph de Maistre, "that women have produced no *chefs-d'œuvre*. They have written no 'Iliad,' nor 'Jerusalem Delivered,' nor 'Hamlet,' nor 'Phædre,' nor 'Paradise Lost,' nor 'Tartuffe;' they have designed no Church of St. Peter's, composed no 'Messiah,' carved no 'Apollo Belvedere,' painted no 'Last Judgment;' they have invented neither algebra, nor telescopes, nor steam-engines; but they have done something far greater and better than all this, for it is at their knees that upright and virtuous men and women have been trained—the most excellent productions in the world."

De Maistre, in his letters and writings, speaks of his own mother with immense love and reverence. Her noble character made all other women venerable in his eyes. He described her as his "sublime mother"—"an angel to whom God had lent a body for a brief season." To her he attributed the bent of his character, and all his bias towards good; and when he had grown to mature years, while acting as ambassador at the Court of St. Petersburg, he referred to her noble example and precepts as the ruling influence in his life.

One of the most charming features in the character of Samuel Johnson, notwithstanding his rough and shaggy exterior, was the tenderness with which he invariably spoke of his mother\*—a woman of strong understanding, who firmly implanted in his mind, as he himself acknowledges, his first impressions of religion. He was accustomed, even in the time of his greatest difficulties, to contribute largely

\* See the Letters (January 13th, 16th, 18th, 20th, and 23d, 1759) written by Johnson to his mother when she was ninety, and he himself was in his fiftieth year.—CROKER'S *Boswell*, 8vo ed., pp. 113, 114.