Hints

On

Child-training

By

Henry H. Clay Trumbull

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By

H. CLAY TRUMBULL
XXVII.

THE POWER OF A MOTHER'S LOVE.

In estimating the agencies which combine for child-shaping through child-training, the power of a mother's love cannot be overestimated. There is no human love like a mother's love. There is no human tenderness like a mother's tenderness. And there is no such time for a mother's impressive display of her love and tenderness toward her child as in the child's earliest years of his life. That time neglected, and no future can make good the loss to either mother or child. That time improved, and all the years that follow it shall give added proof of its improvement.

Even when a man seems to be dead to every other influence for good, the recollection of a mother's prayers and a mother's tears often has a hold upon him which he neither can nor would
break away from. And a mother is so much to a man when he is a man, just because she was all in all to him when he was a child.

Although God calls himself our Father, he compares his love with the love of a mother, when he would disclose to us the depth of its tenderness, and its matchless fidelity. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you," he says, as if in invitation to the sinner to come like a grieved and tired child, and lay down his weary head on his mother's shoulder, where he is sure of rest and sympathy, and of words of comfort and cheer. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" asks God, as if to turn attention to that which is truest and firmest of anything we can know of human affection and fidelity. And then to show that he is a yet surer support than even mothers prove to their loved children, he adds, "Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee."

David, the man after God's own heart, could find
no words which could express his abiding confidence in God, like those wherein he declares, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Nor could he find any figure of the profoundest depth of human sorrow more forcible than that in which he says of himself, "I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother." When David's greater Son was hanging on the cross in agony, with the weight of a lost world upon him, he could forget all his personal suffering, and could turn, as it were, for a moment, from the work of eternal redemption, to recognize the tenderness and fidelity of his agonized mother at his feet, and to commend her with his dying breath to the faithful ministry of the disciple whom he loved.

The Bible abounds with pictures of loving mothers and of a mother's love,—Hagar, weeping in the desert over her famishing boy; Rachel mourning for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were not; Jochebed playing the servant to secure the privilege of nursing her babe
for the daughter of Pharaoh; Hannah joying before God over her treasure of a longed-for son; the true mother in the presence of Solomon, ready to lose her child that it might be saved; Rizpah, watching on the hill-top the hanging bodies of her murdered sons, month after month, from the beginning of harvest until the autumn rains, suffering "neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night;" the wife of Jeroboam, longing to be at the bedside of her dying son, and torn at heart with the thought that as soon as she should reach him there he must die; the widow of Zarephath, and the Shunammite woman, securing the intercession of the prophet for the restoration to life of their dead darlings; the mother of James and John pleading with Jesus for favors to her sons; the Syro-Phoenician woman venturing everything, and refusing to be put aside, that she might win a blessing from Him who alone was able to restore to health and freedom her grievously vexed daughter; the mother of Timothy, teaching her son lessons by which the world
is still profiting; and so on through a long list of those who were representative mothers, chosen of God for a place in the sacred record, and whose like are about us still on every side.

And the Bible injunctions concerning mothers are as positive as the examples of their loving ministry are numerous. "Honor thy father and thy mother" is a commandment which has pre-eminence in the reward attached to it. "Forsake not the law of thy mother," said Solomon; "and despise not thy mother when she is old." It is indeed a "foolish man," as well as an unnatural one, who "despiseth his mother," or who fails to give her gratitude and love so long as she is spared to him. In all ages and everywhere, the true children of a true mother "rise up and call her blessed;" for they realize, sooner or later, that God gives no richer blessing to man than is found in a mother's love. Even in the days when a queen-wife was a slave, a queen-mother was looked up to with reverence, not because she had been a queen, but because she was still the king's mother. "A
mother dead!" wrote gruff and tender-hearted Carlyle. "It is an epoch for us all; and to each one of us it comes with a pungency as if peculiar, a look as of originality and singularity." And it was of the mother whose death called out this ejaculation, of whom, while she was still living, Carlyle had written, "I thought, if I had all the mothers I ever saw to choose from, I would have chosen my own."

A mother can never be replaced. She will be missed and mourned when she has passed away, however she may be undervalued by the "foolish son" to whom she still gives the wealth of her unappreciated affection. Indeed, the true man never, while his mother is alive, outgrows a certain sense of dependence on a loving mother's sympathy and care. His hair may be whitened with age; he may have children, and even grandchildren, looking up to him in respect and affection; but while his mother lives she is his mother, and he is her boy. And when she dies he for the first time realizes the desolation of a mother-
less son. There is then no one on earth to whom he can look up with the never-doubting confidence and the never-lacking restfulness of a tired child to a loving mother. There is a shelter taken away from above his head, and he seems to stand unprotected, as never before, from the smiting sun and the driving storms of life's pilgrimage. He can no more be called "My dear son" in those tones which no music of earth can equal. To him always:

"A mother is a mother still,  
The holiest thing alive."

Biography is rich with illustrations of this truth, although the man whose mother is still spared to him need not go beyond his own experience to recognize its force. Here, for example, is testy old Dr. Johnson, bearish and boorish in many things. When he is fifty years old, and his mother is ninety, he writes to her in tenderness: "You have been the best mother, and, I believe, the best woman, in the world. I thank you for your indulgence to me, and beg forgiveness of all that I have
done ill, and of all that I have omitted to do well.” How many men there are whom the world little thinks of; as child-like, who could make these words their own, and set their hands to them with Johnson’s closing assurance, “I am, dear, dear mother, your dutiful son.” And the lion-hearted Luther, who seems better suited to thunder defiance at spiritual oppressors than to speak words of trustful affection to a kind-hearted woman, turns from his religious warfare to write to his aged and dying mother: “I am deeply sorrowful that I cannot be with you in the flesh, as I fain would be.” “All your children pray for you.”

St. Augustine has been called the most important convert to the truth from St. Paul to Luther. Near the close of his eventful life, St. Augustine said: “It is to my mother that I owe everything. If I am thy child, O my God! it is because thou gavest me such a mother. If I prefer the truth to all things, it is the fruit of my mother’s teachings. If I did not long ago perish in sin and misery, it is because of the long and faithful years which she
pleaded for me." And of his mother's remem-
bered devotedness to him, he said at the time of
her death: "O my God! what comparison is there
between the honor that I paid to her, and her
slavery for me?"

John Quincy Adams's mother lived to be seventy-
four; but he had not outgrown his sense of per-
sonal dependence upon her, when she was taken
away. "My mother was an angel upon earth," he
wrote. "She was the real personification of female
virtue, of piety, of charity, of ever-active and never-
intermitting benevolence. O God! could she have
been spared yet a little longer!" "I have enjoyed
but for short seasons, and at long, distant intervals,
the happiness of her society, yet she has been to
me more than a mother. She has been a spirit
from above watching over me for good, and con-
tributing, by my mere consciousness of her exist-
ence, to the comfort of my life. That conscious-
ness has gone, and without her the world feels to
me like a solitude." When President Nott, of
Union College, was more than ninety years old,
and had been for half a century—a college president, as strength and sense failed him in his dying hours, the memory of his mother's love was fresh and potent, and he could be hushed to needed sleep by patting him gently on the shoulder, and singing to him the familiar lullabies of long ago, after the fashion of that mother, who he fancied was still at hand to care for him.

Lord Macaulay has been called a cold-hearted man, but he was never unmindful of the unique preciousness of a mother's love. He it was who said: "In after life you may have friends, fond, dear, kind friends, but never will you have again the inexpressible love and gentleness lavished upon you which a mother bestows. Often do I sigh, in my struggles with the hard, uncaring world, for the sweet deep security I felt when, of an evening, nestling in her bosom, I listened to some quiet tale, suitable to my age, read in her untiring voice. Never can I forget her sweet glances cast upon me when I appeared asleep; never, her kiss of peace at night. Years have
passed since we laid her beside my father in the old churchyard, yet still her voice whispers from the grave and her eye watches over me as I visit spots long since hallowed to the memory of my mother."

Napoleon Bonaparte, with all his self-reliance and personal independence of character, never ceased to look up to his mother with a reverent affection, and he was accustomed to say that he owed all that he was, and all that he had, to her character and loving ministry. "Ah, what a woman! where shall we look for her equal?" he said of her. "She watched over us with a solicitude unexampled. Every low sentiment, every ungenerous affection, was discouraged and discarded. She suffered nothing but that which was grand and elevated to take root in our youthful understandings. . . . Losses, privations, fatigue, had no effect on her. She endured all, braved all. She had the energy of a man combined with the gentleness and delicacy of a woman."

When all else seemed lost to him, as he lay a
lonely prisoner on the shores of St. Helena, Napoleon was sure of one thing. "My mother loves me," he said; and the thought of his mother's love was a comfort to him then. He who had felt able to rule a world unaided, was not above a sense of grateful dependence on a love like that. "My opinion is," he said, "that the future good or bad conduct of a child depends entirely upon its mother."

A young army officer lay dying, at the close of our American civil war. He had been much away from home even before the war; and now for four years he had been a soldier in active army service. On many a field of battle he had faced death fearlessly, and in many an hour of privation and hardship he had been dependent on his own strength and resources. What could more have tended to wean a man from reliance on a mother's presence and sustaining care? The soldier's mind was wandering now. It was in the early morning, after a wakeful, restless night. Exciting scenes were evidently before his mind's eye. The enemy was
pressing him sorely. He was anxious as to his position. He gave orders rapidly and with vehemence. His subordinates seemed to be failing him. Everything was apparently wrong. Just then the young officer's mother, who had come from the North to watch over him, entered the room where he lay. As the door opened for her coming, he turned toward it his troubled face, as if expecting a new enemy to confront him. Instantly, as he saw who was there, his countenance changed, the look of anxiety passed away, the eye softened, the struggle of doubt and fear was at an end, and with a deep-drawn sigh of relief he said in a tone of restful confidence, "Ah, mother's come! It's all right now!" And the troubled veteran soldier was a soothed child again.

Soldier, statesman, scholar, divine; every man is a child to his mother, to the last; and it is the best that is in a man that keeps him always in this child-likeness toward his loving mother. Were it not for the power of a mother's love, that best and truest side of a man's nature would never be de-
veloped, for the man's good and for the mother's reward. It costs something to be a good mother; but there is no reward which earth can give to be compared with that love which a faithful mother wins and holds from the son of her love. Oh! if good mothers could only know how much they are doing for their children by their patient, long-suffering, gentle ways with them, and how sure these children are to see and feel this by and by, the saddest of them would be less sad and more hopeful, while toiling and enduring so faithfully, with perhaps apparently so slight a return.