

1934

EC5512 The Little Child's Father

Florence J. Ovens

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist>

Ovens, Florence J., "EC5512 The Little Child's Father" (1934). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 2781.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/2781>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

AGRI
S
85
E7
#5512

out of Print

Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

Extension
Circular
5512

1934 U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

THE LITTLE CHILD'S FATHER

Florence J. Owens, B.S., A.M.,
Editor, National Kindergarten Association, New York City

How important is Father in your family? No, not how much does he earn and not merely to what degree do the others accede to his wishes, but, rather, to what extent is there a daily exchange of contributions each with the other? Sometimes a father's apparent interests are so remote from the experiences of his children that he is incomprehensible to them, difficult to approach and impossible to meet on their own level. And when this condition prevails the mother usually has more responsibilities than she is equal to, and there is social poverty in the home circle. Masculine qualities are a necessity in an environment for the best development of both daughters and sons.

If father's standing in the family is not what it should be, who is to blame? Well, of course, sometimes it is Father, himself, but perhaps quite as often, it is Mother. It may be that when the baby first came Mother imagined that she alone was capable of making decisions with regard to its welfare. This attitude, usually, is unjustifiable conceit. The little one is frail and helpless, but also a bundle of marvelous possibilities, needing the full cooperation of both parents.

From the time there is a baby to be thought of, both Father and Mother should find the study of child development an absorbing hobby. In every study there are different methods of approach so it is advised that the parent student, whether amateur or professional, contribute generously, but with humility, of his own deductions and welcome the findings of the other with sincere appreciation, though they may contradict his own. Even the wisest have so much left to learn about boys and girls. And oh, dear Father and Mother of little children, do remember that tact is priceless.

FATHERHOOD, A PROFESSION
By Charles F. Powlison, General Secretary
National Child Welfare Association

We hear a great deal of the sanctity of motherhood and of the sacred responsibilities of the mother; but who talks about the nobility of fatherhood and the wonderful privilege of being a father? One would almost suppose that children had but one parent, or that, beyond the obligation of support, a father owed nothing to his children.

As a matter of fact, just what does he owe them?

In the first place, he owes them the best possible inheritance of health and natural strength. If the fathers of the present generation had been taught, as schoolboys, that they owed their children a heritage of physical health, the present generation of children might be a far healthier, happier lot of youngsters.

And having given his children a healthy heritage, the father should share with the mother the oversight of the children's well-being. I know--as everyone else does--hosts of fathers who not only fail to take any responsibility about the children's habits, but who actually, though unconsciously, work against the mother and make her work more difficult, often by giving candy surreptitiously or by keeping the children up late to play with them. The result is that Father is very popular, while Mother is considered "awfully fussy".

On the mental side, a child, as he grows older, needs both Father and Mother. Wise is the father who takes an active interest in current events or allies himself on the side of local civic improvement, for through his example his children naturally acquire a love of good citizenship.

And on the moral and religious side, how often is Father a mere figure-head in his own family? Usually it is Mother who represents the moral law, or, if Father does take a hand, it is merely as the executor of her decreed punishment. "Wait till your Father comes home!" is either an empty threat, or, in rarer cases, a phrase filled with terror for the small rebel.

Too often church attendance is left entirely to the women. The children see Mother start off alone for church, while Father remains at home to read his paper. The notion that church is a woman's affair is formed so naturally that, later in life, it seems an instinct.

How much children miss, how much fathers miss, by this one-sided parenthood! Happy the boy who looks up to his father as an ideal of bodily vigor, wisdom and goodness. And this does not mean that Father must stand on a pedestal. Far from it! Anyone who has read the charming letters of Theodore Roosevelt to his children sees, as in a mirror, the picture of a father utterly devoted to his children, and utterly adored by them. Whether he is leaping from haymow to haymow in a wild game of tag, or reading aloud with his children gathered around him, he is always their chosen companion, their best friend, their greatest hero. And there are many devoted fathers! Francis E. Leupp gives us a charming picture of one in his little book, "A Day with Father".

Reversing a well-known quotation, we may say, "Happy is the father who knows his own child." Happy because there is no more delightful study than that of the development of a child, as he progresses from infancy, through childhood to youth. Happy because of the inspiration that comes from the companionship of children. Happiest of all because, in the trying times of their youth and early maturity, he will be able to understand his children. He can guide and counsel them, instead of standing helplessly by--an outsider. If only American fathers would know their children, they would find them more interesting than any business in the world, and as for the children, who can measure their gain?

FIFTY-FIFTY

By Betty's Father

"Betty has been very naughty today, Daddy, and I want you to take her upstairs and punish her," was the pathetic greeting I received from Betty's mother one evening just after returning home.

13532m

Then followed a list of our small daughter's shortcomings, and I reluctantly took Betty in my arms and started to mount the stairs. When about half way up, she pointed to her kiddie kar turned upside-down on the landing. I had given her this kiddie kar fully three weeks before. In fact, it was already showing signs of wear.

"Thank you, Daddy Dear, for that nice kiddie kar you gave me," said Betty winningly, her tearful cheek pressed close against mine.

I put the little tad down, and strode back to the kitchen where my wife was busily engaged in preparing the meal.

The spirit of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence was in my heart. "If you want Betty punished, Little Mother," I told her, "I guess you'll have to do it yourself this time!"

And right then we decided upon our future course of action concerning Little Daughter's discipline. Whatever misdemeanors she should be guilty of when I happened to be present, regarding which I would have definite, personal knowledge, should be punishable by me. I agreed to take all responsibility for them and deal with them to the best of my ability and conscience. However, if Betty cut up any capers in my absence, her mother should attend to the matter.

Surely Father should take a part in family discipline. It is unjust to expect Mother to do it all! But on the other hand, is it not unjust to ask him to punish for offences committed in his absence? Can he possibly deal as fairly with the little offender as the mother, in whose presence the child was naughty? Should Father be obliged to impersonate an old ogre whose home-coming is awaited with dread of impending punishment? I believe the reader will stand by me in answering all three questions, "No."

Let's try to go fifty-fifty in this discipline business, Fathers and Mothers. It will work out better for the youngsters, and be easier for us.

A MAN'S IDEAS ON DISCIPLINE

By Russell Coryell

A smart spanking with the flat of the hand doesn't hurt a child very much. I mean to say that it isn't very painful from a physical standpoint--and it is so simple to administer, and such a relief to a nervous parent to be able to expend his overwrought feelings on the naughty child.

But what a pity it is that often the spanking does the child no good! If only one could have the satisfaction of relieving his feelings and at the same time benefiting the child. But alas, it seldom helps the child from a moral standpoint, but instead usually does him harm. It is an object lesson in violence and vindictiveness. A child soon learns to beat his companions when he is angry.

But if we were to abandon this good old custom of whipping, what then could we do with naughty children?

The answer is rather difficult. In the first place, what constitutes naughtiness? Is it doing something that is bad for the child? Or is it doing something contrary to custom? Or is it simply doing something that annoys the parent?

Let's be honest for once and admit that we want to punish children almost always because they have annoyed us, pestered us, made us nervous.

Take the first case: Suppose the child is doing something dangerous or likely to harm him. If it really is dangerous it ought not to be very hard to demonstrate this fact to the child. In case the child cannot be shown the danger then the only thing to do is to remove the danger, remove the child, or keep a watchful eye on him. If you are honest with yourself you must admit the inadequacy of whipping. It simply doesn't register.

Take the second case: Suppose the child is doing something contrary to custom, etiquette or some other of our civilized taboos. Suppose, for example, that he likes to play in the coal bin and get dirty, or that he prefers to eat his food with his hands instead of his fork or his spoon. Well, these things in themselves are not wicked or wrong. The first makes extra work for Mother and the second is shocking to finicky old maids, but there is nothing wicked about them, is there? Nothing wicked until Mother has commanded the child never to do it again and the child promptly does it. The child has then committed the sin of sins; he has been disobedient. I won't attempt to justify a child in being disobedient in such a case. I could never convince you. Let us rather assume that disobedience is to be avoided. I suggest, then, that if a mother doesn't want her child to disobey she would be wise not to issue any arbitrary commands. Don't tell Johnny never again to go into the coal bin on pain of punishment. That's the easiest way out of it. You might explain that you hope he won't go in again, and then suggest something more interesting to do.

Now we come to the third case: Suppose the child is making a nuisance of himself, "driving Mother distracted". This is, indeed, a difficult case to handle for the reason that we must now make Mother be reasonable--and of course a grown-up is much more difficult to reason with than a child.

Mother has a right to her peace and comfort. But so has Johnny. Then they must both learn to compromise and be reasonable.

Let us suppose that Mother is working in the kitchen. If Johnny is very fond of her and has been taught never to stray far away, it is altogether probable that Johnny will gravitate to the kitchen also. He will begin to play cars there. More than that, he will want to play cars just where it is most inconvenient for Mother; right under her feet. Mother will probably tell him with more emphasis that reasonableness to get out from under her feet. She may give his cars an inconsiderate kick to one side. Johnny will patiently get them again and return to his post under her feet. Mother will then pick him up more or less violently and carry him into another room, scold him with raised voice and return to the kitchen. Johnny will shortly return under her feet again.

If the little chaps didn't have this courageous persistence, they would soon have all personality squeezed out of them.

However, Mother must get dinner. Suppose she puts Johnny in the other room and shuts the door. She has a right to protect herself, and then she can work. Johnny, however, will probably shriek. He has found that to be the most effective way of getting what he wants. Until he was able to talk, crying was his only means of expression.

At this point there enters into the equation Mother's frazzled nerves. She simply can't stand his yelling, so she opens the door again and slaps him.

"What else can I do?" she asks desperately. The fact that she knows nothing better to do is hardly a reason for doing something wrong.

Suppose, instead, that Mother stops work just long enough to explain to Johnny that her work must be accomplished, and that it cannot be accomplished with him under her feet, and that therefore he must choose between playing in a corner of the kitchen where he won't disturb Mother, or she will have to put him in the other room and shut the door.

Some children will recognize the logic of such a situation at once; most children will if they have been reared from the very beginning with reason and logic. Johnny, however, has not been so reared, and ten to one will not be reasonable. Mother will have to put him in the other room. She will have to be firm with herself. She will have to steel herself against his wails--angry, furious wails, pleading, heartbroken wails, and wails in all keys. She may have to repeat the experience more than once. It may cost her considerable effort and courage, but in the end Johnny will see the logic of it, and then Mother's life will be a hundredfold easier--and so will Johnny's.

(Note by the Editor: Yes, that would be an improvement, wouldn't it? But is there not a still better way? Why not let Father make or provide a fence for the corner of the room? If he has not yet done this Mother could fasten some unusually interesting plaything in the corner--an old pocketbook, perhaps, containing a small purse, a pencil, a writing pad and some other little trinket; all should be fastened by strings. Whatever the plaything, it should of course be put out of sight when the occasion has passed. It is inadvisable to "pick a quarrel" with a four-year-old, and one shouldn't expect adult reasoning on his part. Be firm as a rock with him and as dispassionate but more intelligent and more kind.)

A FATHER'S DISCRETION

Pauline Herr Thomas

Mother had gone on a two weeks' visit to the home of an uncle--a rare occasion for Mother, as well as for all at home, in those days when mothers were not expected to be anywhere but at duty's post. Everyone at home was keyed up to a sincere desire to "be good", as a result of Mother's last injunction upon leaving.

Sister and I, aged ten and eight years, respectively, had done nobly at work and play. But this day the very atmosphere conspired to defeat our purpose. We fell to quarrelling, finally coming to blows with mop and broom. Rather disgraceful--but we were too much absorbed in our differences to reflect, until Father suddenly opened the door. We fell back, startled at first, then horribly ashamed.

"So this is the way you behave when Mother is gone. What was the last thing she said to you, and what did you promise?" demanded Father.

By this time the family was pretty well assembled to learn the cause of the disturbance. There were some knowing looks and restrained smiles from our brother and sister in the way children have of exulting in another's discomfiture, all of which made our situation increasingly miserable.

"You sit right down, each of you, and write Mother a letter. Tell her everything that has happened. Let me see the letters when you have finished," said Father.

I shall never forget the awful struggle to write those letters. We wept and repented a thousand times. If only by some miracle we should be spared the humiliation of sending them. We had wretched pangs as we visioned Mother reading how disgracefully we had behaved. We had repented so completely that it never occurred to us to omit any detail. Moreover, Father had said, "Tell everything," and he wanted to read the letters when we had finished.

At last we had them ready, and we took them to him. He read one, slowly, and then the other.--He must have been taxed to keep his composure, for I am sure they were realistically funny.--Then he looked at us solemnly.

"Well, they are nicely written. I shall not require you to send them." Without another word he left us.

We stood there a moment feeling like reprieved prisoners. Then with one accord we vowed never again to be so disgraceful, and we sincerely meant it. That was one bit of discipline we never forgot.

You will say, perhaps, "But Father failed to carry out his threat. Surely he weakened his disciplinary force when he retracted the sentence." Did he threaten? Did he retract the sentence? Not a bit of it. Note that in his first command to write the letters he said no word about sending them. Wise father! He knew that the lapse of time for a reply as well as the reply itself would be weakening factors in discipline. He put us through all the suffering and humiliation required to bring us to our senses, and then, because he knew our sensitive ages and souls required no more, he closed the incident. He never intended that we should send them.

We may pride ourselves upon our modern knowledge of child psychology and discipline, but we may yet profitably recall the wisdom of a less tutored age.

FATHERS, MAKE COMPANIONS OF YOUR BOYS

Martin G. Brunbaugh, Former Governor of Pennsylvania

One of the best men I ever knew gave to this country three splendid sons, loyal, capable and conscientious. I once asked him how he managed to do it. He said: "I have always made my boys my companions." In the intimate comradeship of father and son there arose the occasion to teach the boys what it is to be a really fine American and a Christian gentleman. The father's wise procedure made three eminent citizens of his sons.

The strength of a nation lies in its spiritual forces, not in its material gains, and the great agencies that conserve spiritual ideals are the home, church and the school. Unfortunately the home, where most of this should be done, really does the least. All parents holding love for children and country will endeavor to perform their most important duty of maintaining and imparting high ideals, for in the coming days as never before we must give intelligent guidance to our children.

My own father, after church, on Sunday afternoons, often accompanied his three boys to the mountains or forests. There in the cool and silence he gave us many suggestions that have ripened into inestimable good in the years that have come and gone since. He can no longer walk with us, and we do not see him, but we do feel his presence and gratefully follow his fine teachings.

I urge all fathers to have personal and intimate converse with their sons, and this can be done from the time they are tiny fellows. Impress lofty ideals of duty to God and country. Teach the value of the great cardinal virtues of courtesy, reliability and humility, without which life is a mockery.

TRY CAMPING

Cora M. Silvius

"Wha---t?" gasped Alfred Washburn with wide open eyes. "What did you say? Go camping? Just you and I? Real camping? Not just ride there in the car, but go out in the woods where the cars don't run?"

"Yes, Alfred." The father had a twinkle in his eye. He had greatly enjoyed the boy's surprise.

"When do we go, Dad? When do we go?"

"Just as soon as we can get the tent and other things ready. But remember, we'll have to carry our things for miles. We can't back down. We can't get a car to carry us when we are tired."

"Oh, Dad, I won't back down. Didn't I get a prize in the camp?"

"That prize, Son, is the reason we are going to camp now." The man spoke slowly and impressively. "Late August is a good time to go camping. We'll come home brown and ready for school."

A happy boy raced from the house. He and his father were going camping. It was something he had never imagined, even in his wildest dreams. He had gone to a boy's camp every summer, until this one, with boys of his own age. But to go alone with his father, the man he thought the greatest on earth, why, it was -- beyond words.

To this ten-year-old boy his father was a demigod. He was a good man and a perfect gentleman. The son had never seen him rude or silly. He had always treated the boy as an equal, even when he was a small chap. He had talked with him explaining intelligently, gravely, the things he should know. But he had never been a pal.

Mr. Washburn had gone to a lecture, a short time before, given by a man who knew boys. There he had learned that a man might be an honorable citizen, a wonderful example with regard to general conduct and culture, and still not be a good father.

Several days later the two set off. They went by train as far as they could go and stayed over night in a village, laying in what supplies they needed.

They now had a small tent, fishing tackle, a few cooking things, and all the food they would need. They started off and tramped about, stopping where the fishing or camping was best.

At the end of two weeks they returned home. When they entered the Washburn gate the cat ran away in fright. Mrs. Washburn pretended she considered it unsafe to open the door. After the tired but happy boy was tucked in bed the father told his story.

"Mother," he said, "we are going camping every summer hereafter--perhaps for a month or longer. I hope you will come for part of the time if you think you will be able to rough it. It has been wonderful. I thought I knew my boy, but I did not. He has taught me many things. I was growing old, at thirty-four. Now, I believe I know as much about things as any boy does these days. We grown people know the world, but believe me, it's the youngsters who know the human side. They have well defined ideas of right and wrong. Some are quite colorful, it's true, but all the boys need is guidance."

The next day Alfred told his side.

"I always knew Dad was a wonderful man. I knew he was good. But I never could get right up to him. I was afraid to ask him things. He used to be so solemn and grave. Now, all I have to say is I wish all the boys had a pal of a father like mine."

He told the "gang" about it. They listened.

"Say," said one of them at last, "I bet another year you won't be the only one to go camping with his Dad."

DAD

by Henry Turner Bailey

Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers. Prov. 17:6.

Shake hands, Dad. How many children call you that? There are five who have called me Dad or Pa or Poppy. Excuse me for mentioning it, but I want you to know that I am no mere theorist in this matter of being the father of a family.

Now here is some straight stuff: It is father's duty to give some time every week to his boys and girls. The only time I have been able to give to mine is Sunday. My Sundays have belonged to the children.

I have been to church and Sunday School with them always, because in the light of some hundreds of years of history, there is nothing that yields better returns, in the long run, than habitual reverence for God. "Only those who believe in God do good in private," say the French.

Sunday afternoons we have always taken a walk, when the weather permitted, or if too stormy, we have read story books together, or have made various kinds of scrap-books.

In our walks we usually had a definite objective. We went to see somebody, or to get a particular view, or to visit our favorite trees, or to look for some one thing in particular. We counted birds' nests one trip; on another we searched for cocoons; on a third, dug into old stumps to see what we could discover; or looked under pieces of wood and bark; found the smallest growing things; collected leaves or seed packs of as many kinds as possible; learned the wild flowers, the birds, the butterflies and moths, the ferns, the trees, the mushrooms; made collections of colored things--flowers, leaves, insects, pebbles and so forth, and arranged them in the spectrum order; followed a brook in summer with Tennyson's Brook as a guide; followed one in winter with Lowell's Brook (in the Vision of Sir Launfal) as a guide. In a word we studied God's great wonderful outdoor book in the afternoon, just as diligently as we studied the best literature in the morning.

And what results? Five open-eyed, open-minded, intelligent young men and women, devoted to their parents and grateful for what their Heavenly Father and his children have done for them, a mother who is still young and happy (because she got a little rest on Sunday during those strenuous years), to say nothing of a father who now thanks God for the privilege of still being a boy though in his fifties.

We shall never forget those long evenings in our city home when the girls came back from seminary and high school, and the boys from Harvard and "Tech", and we sat around the dinner table together, forgetful of time. We were all more entertaining to each other than any show ever staged, because by this time each of the children had discovered his own special field of interest and delved into it beyond the limit of the others in the great realms of nature and literature that we had begun to enjoy together when they were little children. Each one could therefore make his own particular contribution to the delight of all.

Pool rooms, saloons, clubs, stag parties? When will short-sighted, self-indulgent, arrogant fathers learn that in their own wives and children are the possibilities of perennial delights and solid satisfactions compared with which other things are dust and ashes.