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EC5529 The Little Child's Future

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THEIR SON'S PROFESSION

Dorothy E. Inghram

Ray was the only child of the Collins family, and all Mr. and Mrs. Collins' hopes and ambitions for the future centered around his little life. Mrs. Collins had the habit of going busily about her work, dreaming and planning.

Just now she was saying, "In three more years Ray will be ten; five years later, fifteen; and in five years more, twenty. My, how time flies!" She was overwhelmed with the thought that they would have a young man on their hands before they realized it. Then what?

"What will Ray be? Perhaps an engineer like his father," she told herself proudly. "I'd rather he'd be a doctor, though. Doctors are always needed. They accomplish such wonders for the sick. Yes," she smiled to herself, "Ray must be a doctor."

Thoughts of Ray's future vocation remained with her throughout the day. In fact, they lingered in her mind for several days. Finally, she decided that she would discuss the subject with Daddy when he came home. After supper, when all was quiet and Ray was in bed, she spoke of it.

"Jack," she said, "something quite serious has been on my mind for days."

"What is it, dear?" her husband asked, quite concerned.

"It's Ray's future."

"Ray's future?"

"Yes, when he's a man."

"Oh," laughed Jack nonchalantly. "Aren't you starting rather early with that, dear? Wait until he's sixteen or eighteen and then start your worrying."

"But there will be other problems to work out then, Jack. We ought at least to think about it, dear. It wouldn't hurt to discuss it."

Disappointment rang in her voice, and immediately her husband laid aside the evening paper.

"Perhaps you are right, Ruth," he said. "Time does pass quickly, and we do need to look ahead."

Ruth's eyes sparkled. Hadn't she already been counting up the years, saying again and again that time simply flies? Looking into her husband's eyes, she told him her dreams of the future.

"Jack, wouldn't it be marvelous for Ray to be a physician? I can see him now, in the middle of the night, with his overcoat buttoned warmly across his chest and his little medicine kit in his hand, hurrying through rain and snow to the bedside of a patient."

"Perhaps to a home where his services are needed but there's no money," added Jack.
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"Perhaps to set a little broken arm or leg," breathed Ruth.

"Or to save the life of a mother," whispered Jack.

"Oh, Jack!" cried Ruth, thrilled with the enthusiasm and pride which filled her heart, "Ray must be a doctor! I'll never want him to be anything else."

"A doctor he shall be!" said Jack emphatically as they smiled into each other's eyes having thus settled the plan in their minds.

But just then they heard a sound coming from Ray's room. Ray was talking in his sleep, as he often did. Softly they tiptoed to the bedroom door and listened.

"I'm going to be an engineer like Daddy, Miss James."

The little voice died away in a contented whisper. A smile flitted across his face. He nestled close among his covers.

The two at the door looked at each other in consternation. Then they stood for a few moments without speaking. It was Ruth who finally broke the silence.

"Jack," she whispered, "We're wrong. We can't choose for him. He must choose. We must let him be whatever he is best fitted for. He must be allowed to follow his own ambition."

They moved back to the other room. There on the floor before them was something they had failed to notice before.

"Look, Mother," cried Jack excitedly, falling on his knees before Ray's little erector set which stood in the perfect form of a little bridge.

"Daddy!" cried Ruth in response, "we've been so blind."

"Now what do you want your son to be?"

"Whatever he desires," responded Ruth earnestly.

"Yes, whatever he desires," repeated Jack reflectively.

"Perhaps an engineer, Jack?"

"Perhaps. But we must not jump at conclusions, Mother. He may like to play with things like these just because he is proud of his Daddy."

"Yes, of course that's true."

"Let us give him opportunities to look about him and to examine many lines of work. Then when the time comes for him to choose, he will be ready."

RONALD SHOULD DECIDE

Lillie M. Saunders

"Father, Tom Dean is going to Montana to work for his uncle and says if I'll go with him I can have a job, too, as his uncle told him if he knew of a steady hand to bring him along," said nineteen-year-old Ronald Fields.

Mr. Fields lowered the paper he was reading and glancing at his son replied, "And I s'pose you want to go. Well, you are not going," and he resumed his reading.

"But, Father, will you listen to me a few moments, please?"

"Well?" came impatiently from behind the paper.

Ronald summoned courage to continue. "You know there is no work to be had here that pays, and I'm tired of having no money of my own. If I could finish college, it would be different, but you can't afford to send me, so I want to work and earn enough to finish my education."

"You say this uncle of Dean's lives in Montana? What does he do?" asked Mr. Fields.

"He is a rancher," replied Ronald. "Mr. Orton is Tom's mother's brother. I do want to go."

There was a pause. Then Father answered, "You are not old enough to go so far away. As for finishing college, I think you have had all of that you need. When you are twenty-one, I intend to get a store in some little town close by for you to run."

"But, Dad, I don't want to be a country storekeeper, I want to finish my college course in civil engineering. I've always planned that as my life's work. It will take plenty of hard work to qualify, but it will be worth it."

"Ron, I intend you to be a storekeeper and that settles it, so say no more about it," and Mr. Fields resumed his reading.

"Well, Father, I had hoped you could see my side of the question for once, but it seems not. I am no longer a child, I have my own life to live and I don't want to stand behind some counter all my life as I am doing now in your little store. I am sorry to go against your wishes, but if I can't have your consent, I must get along without it for I have decided to go with Tom." Ronald left the room as he finished speaking.

During the conversation between the father and son, the mother had remained quiet. After the door had closed behind Ronald, she said, "John, do you think you are doing right in opposing Ronald? After all, it is his own life he has to live, just as he says, and I think he should choose for himself. Even if he had not always been so steady and trustworthy he should still have his rights. You did not let your father choose for you, why should you decide for your boy? He knows what will suit him best and if he is willing to work for it, why not consent to his doing so? And as far as his age is concerned, remember you were two years younger than Ron is when you left home."

"But Mary, Montana is so far away and ranching is pretty hard; don't you know that?"

"Of course I do, John. Don't think it will be easy for me to see Ron go, but it is his right. Hard work in the open won't harm him."

After a lengthy pause, Mr. Fields replied, "I guess you are right, Mary."

WHAT IS A CHILD'S TIME WORTH?

Laura B. Gray

"Mother, what can I do?" wailed a little fellow of five.

"Run away and play, and don't bother me just now; I'm busy," was the answer.

Half an hour later I saw Tommy leaning against a tree, sucking his thumb and looking the picture of misery. Poor little fellow! It is hard for a grownup to be idle but much worse for a small boy. Sometime later the child ventured into the house again, looking appealingly at his mother.

"Here, Son, take this nickel, and go and buy a chocolate bar," she said.

The boy brightened, and went out. But was candy really a suitable answer to his appeal? The child had come begging to be shown what to do, how to use his ability, and he was told to go and eat!

"Tommy is so purposeless," his mother remarked to me. "He never seems to have anything to do. I'm thankful his Aunt Flo is coming to look after him this summer. She is a kindergarten teacher and knows all about children."

When I visited him some weeks later, Tommy was a very different little boy.

"Come and see my boats," he said to me, and he proudly led the way to his own special corner. "I made them all myself. See this house and these little men! I moulded them out of plasticine. And look at those paper lanterns!"

"Come, Tommy," called his aunt. "Please take this letter to the post office at the corner; here is the money. Buy a three-cent stamp, and put it on the letter before dropping it into the box. Do you think that you can do all that?"

"Yes, Aunt, and then will it be tea time?"

"I think it will."

"What a change there is in Tommy," I remarked, when the child had gone. "He seems sturdier and brighter and much happier. What have you done to him?"

"I have just taught him to do a few things. I try to see that he keeps busy all day, always looking forward happily. He is beginning to think up things to do, himself, now. I wish you could have seen his joy when he found he could make those paper boats without any help."

The small boy reappeared. "I posted the letter, Aunt; is tea ready?"

"Yes, you can help me bring it in."

Tommy vanished, but soon returned carrying a plate of little cakes nicely arranged on a paper doily. "Aunt and I made them," he said, his eager step and beaming face expressing his joy at being allowed to help.

"Now, Tommy, what are you going to do while we have tea?" asked Aunt Flo.

"I am going to play that game you showed me, in the garden."

"Don't you find that it takes a great deal of time to entertain Tommy?" I inquired.

"No, not more than I can well spare, though there is much to do here. When any child is given materials and just a little encouragement and help, his imagination is set going and he carries on by himself. It is worth the trouble, for a child's time is really of more value than an adult's, you know. Attitudes and habits beginning now have much to do in determining whether the boy will be a success in life or not. The idle child is quite likely to be the idle man; the busy child, the busy man. Come and see Tommy's bedroom."

It was a cheerful room with an eastern exposure. On a chair by the little bed were several picture books.

"I change these every night," she said, "and sometimes add one he has not seen before, or a picture from a magazine to color. Tommy wakes half an hour before the rest of the family, and these books keep him quiet, and prevent him from wasting his time."

As I walked home I thought, "If every child's time were as carefully conserved as Tommy's, what a wonderful generation of adults the next might be."

B O R E D

Laura B. Gray

"Jimmy, whatever are you doing with all those boxes and bits of wood! What a litter you've made, and how untidy the room is!"

"Mummy, these aren't just boxes; this is my train, and the pieces of wood are freight cars, and this big box is the engine. See, I fastened them together with a string."

"Why do you not play with the train and the beautiful red engine I bought you? It is no use buying trains if you won't play with them."

The boy did not answer. Small children cannot tell why they do things; they require to be understood. Playing with a ready-made train was one thing, but creating a train out of boxes, bits of wood and string was quite another -- something infinitely more engrossing and delightful.

"I'll be so glad when nurse comes back from her holiday," sighed the mother to me. "Jimmy cannot grow up too quickly for my taste. I look forward to the time when he will like the things that I like."

"Mummy, are we going near the train track?" inquired Jimmy as his mother dressed him for the afternoon walk.

"Yes, we must cross the tracks on the way to town."

"Goody," and the little face lit up.

"Wait, wait, Mother, I want to see the train go past," and he clutched her skirts as she was hurrying across the track.

"Well, just one," and a bored expression settled upon her face.

Soon the great, black engine came thundering along dragging its train of cars. The man in the little house beside the tracks let down the gates, and raised them up again when the train had passed. The little fellow's whole being quivered with excitement at the passing of the black monster, and as the sound of it died away in the distance he waved to the gatekeeper; the salute was returned. All this the mother missed, so engrossed was she in her own thoughts.

"Mummy," mused Jimmy as he tripped along beside her, "when I get big I'm going to be a gatekeeper like the man in the little house."

"Indeed you aren't. I'm not going to educate you to be a gatekeeper like the man in the little house."

The child said nothing but he had an uncomfortable feeling--as though he had done something wrong.

"We'll soon be at the shops, Jimmy, and you'll have great fun looking at the things in the windows."

The first shops contained clothes, and it was Jimmy's turn to be bored. Then they came to a toy shop; Jimmy was interested, but his mother was not. She moved on to look in the window of the next shop, while the boy enjoyed the toys, but the fear of being lost, such a nightmare to young children so filled Jimmy's mind he was afraid to take his eyes off his mother, so the pleasure of the window was lost.

During the walk Jimmy's nurse had returned home.

"O, Nana!" he shouted, leaping into her lap, eager to talk, "we saw a train with four cattle cars and two oil tanks. It went this way," and he jumped down, and imitated the train.

Miss Strong clapped her hands and laughed, entering fully into the child's enjoyment.

"And Mr. Stopp knew me and waved from his house, but Mummy says that I cannot be a gatekeeper," he added wistfully.

"Never mind, perhaps you will be a president of a railway and say when and where the trains must go."

"O, yes." He brightened. "Perhaps Mummy won't mind my being a president."

In the next room his mother felt just a little bit jealous of the joyful conversation between her son and his nurse, but no, she would not bother to interest herself in these trivial things. Let the boy grow up first, and then they would be pals.

But will there ever be a time when this mother and son will be genuine pals? Does not such intimacy begin at birth, and continue all through childhood? For such relationship the mother must see life through the child's eyes. There is no trick in it; every mother who wishes to do so, can. It requires effort, and unselfish thought, but the reward in true pleasure is out of all proportion to the work and sacrifice.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Lucia Mallory

We were not very busy today at the library, and the children who came in set me to thinking. I wondered if their mothers had ever thought about the sort of memories their children would carry out of these days of financial stringency. Would they look back upon discouragement and despair, or would they recall the quiet, contented home that is every child's right?

Marilyn Corliss came rushing in, brown curls flying, her raincoat dragging over one arm.

"Please help me find an exciting book, Miss Mallory," she pleaded. "Mother says we can't have any money to go to the movies, and we'll have to get our thrills at the library. Isn't it awful to be poor? My father's salary's been cut twice in the last six months!"

"It's nice that your father has a job, Marilyn." I wanted to say something to quiet the restlessness in the big brown eyes that looked up from her elfin face.

"I think so, too," the child agreed. "But mother says we might just as well be on the county. Why, we used to have money enough to drive anywhere we wanted to, and now there's hardly enough to run the car around town!"

"It's nice to remember that there are many things to make us happy that cost no money, Marilyn. Just look at all these shelves of books that you may choose from!"

As Marilyn went off happy with the story of a brave little Dutch girl, I wondered if her mother knew how deeply the child was impressed by her constant talk of hard times. I longed to tell her to speak of pleasanter things.

"Hello, Aunt Lucia!"

A soft greeting interrupted my gloomy thoughts, and I looked up to see Helen Barron, the daughter of my old school friend, who is as dear to me as if I really were the aunt that she claims me to be.

"Mother wants you to come over to dinner this evening," she told me. "We're going to have baked beans and brown bread!"

"I shall be glad to come, Helen," I answered, planning to stop for fruit at a neighborhood market on the way. Helen's father has been without regular work for weeks. "Some new magazines came in today. Would you like to read them and wait for me? Or does Mother need you?"

"Mother said I might wait for you if I wanted to." The little girl established herself contentedly at the reading table while I finished my work for the day.

Walking along beside me, Helen seemed unusually quiet. Finally she looked up with a sober question. "Aunt Lucia, do you believe that nearly all married folks quarrel and might just as well get divorced?"

"Why, of course not, child! Look at your mother and daddy, and all of their friends!"

"I know. Some of the girls at school said today that all married people quarrel, and I just told them my parents never quarrel."

Helen's attention was diverted by helping to select my treat, and she chattered on about her school work, while I was thinking how much her parents had given her that money could not buy. Never in all these trying weeks has their home given any evidence of strain or anxiety.

No apologies were made for the simple meal that was provided for me, and we talked of books and music and the children's activities. Not one word was said about hard times! After dinner John put the baby to bed and came back to read to the older children while Flo and I washed the dishes.

"John has enjoyed the children so much since he hasn't been busy," Flo confided, "that it makes up a little for the strain of being without work."

I remembered then and told her what Helen had said about her parents on the way home.

The mother's eyes were misty as she answered me. "We don't really deserve that, Lucia," she said, "but we've tried to do our best, and this will help us to keep on trying."

A D J U S T M E N T S

Emma Gary Wallace

Most of the mediocre accomplishments and the failures of late adolescence and adult life are due to improper adjustments in childhood. The wrong mental attitude develops and is never corrected. Only one of such cases can be touched upon here, but it will serve to indicate the need of watchfulness on the part of the parent, the need of understanding and kindly and firm management.

It was noticed by Tommy's father and mother that he never considered himself to blame for anything. He always had an excuse and usually something or some other person was responsible for his difficulty. Psychologists recognize this characteristic under the name of projectivity--or a projection outward of responsibility.

If Tommy stubbed his toe and fell down, he would generally turn and kick the rug or the stick or the step over which he had tumbled, perhaps screaming, "You made me fall, you did!" If Tommy quarreled with a playmate, he was always right, and the playmate wrong. Later on, in school, if he failed in an examination, it was the teacher's fault. Either she hadn't done her part in teaching him, or she had been unfair in her rating. Still later, when Tommy was older and left considerably to himself because of lack of popularity among his fellows, he thought he knew for a certainty that the rest were jealous of him, or did not want to include him in their good times because his people did not have as much money as some others.

As a result of this lack of adjustment to his environment as he went on, he became somewhat sour in disposition, suspicious in temperament, and decidedly inclined to lack initiative. Naturally his success, happiness, and achievements in life were limited.

How should Tommy have been helped as a child to prevent the development of these handicaps?

When a child exhibits evidence of perpetually finding excuses for his mistakes and of blaming others for his misfortunes, there should be a careful study made of him-- his companions, in fact, his entire environment. The following points should be determined by parents and teachers, or those in authority.

First. Is the child too constantly associated with those who are older than himself or of greater mental development, so that he cannot compete fairly and finds it so discouraging as practically to force him to try to justify his blunders and failures? If this is the case, he should be placed in circumstances to which he CAN adjust himself normally and happily.

Second. Is the child thoroughly persuaded in his own mind that he is inferior, and that making a real effort is useless? If so, discouragement is bound to overwhelm him at times, and during those periods there are likely to be disastrous failures for which he will blame others.

Third. Is this evident lack of proper adjustment due to fear? If so, fear of what? Parents who are oversevere or who expect too much of their children, may be responsible for driving them to make excuses at all times in order to escape punishment, scoldings, unwelcome comparisons with others, or blame. After a while, the child persuades himself to believe what he has sought to make others believe. Since this mental attitude is the result of some particular fear, the logical thing is to remove that fear.

With a young child, it will take patience to show him when he stumbles and falls over the rug or stick, that these are not to blame, while he IS to blame as he wasn't watching where he ran. When Tommy fails to win a game and blames the other players for unfairness, he should be required to explain exactly where the unfairness exists, and helped to see that he is to blame if his companions are really unfair, since he should not play at all with those who don't play honestly. When he fails in examination, he should be brought face to face with the fact that others in the same class passed, and if he hadn't understood the subject at any point, he was always at liberty to go to the teacher or to the home folks for help. So after all, he is to blame.

In each and every case, to insure a perfect adjustment, it is necessary to remove anything that constitutes a fear, and to help the boy or girl to face the facts as they are, and to assume responsibility for the outcome. Balance this program with encouragement and kindly understanding, and a very valuable character training will have been given.

"ALL KNEELING"

Janet T. Van Osdel

A child's shrill scream followed by cries of, "Mother! Mother!" attracted the crowd waiting for a train on the elevated platform of a city transfer station.

A woman of perhaps thirty, attractive, with dark hair and eyes, and wearing a black silk chiffon printed in gigantic red roses, turned around a few feet away from the child and said impatiently, "Don't be such a baby, Richard! I'm right here. Why do you have to cry about everything? If you'd just looked you could have seen me as well as not!"

A tall, graying man with an understanding, whimsical face, who was standing next to Richard and had taken his hand, said "I don't know about that. I'm rather on Richard's side."

The woman flushed. "Meaning that I'm neglectful of my child and rather hard on him?"

"Not at all! Meaning that you do not understand his difficulty. That, literally, you do not get his point of view. He was lost in a forest of legs and he grew panicky just as an adult might on finding himself lost in a forest of trees with not a familiar landmark in sight. There's not a train coming yet, so would you mind trying something? I wish you'd get down on your knees until your eyes are on a level with Richard's."

The woman looked at the man incredulously.

"No," he answered the look, "I'm not trying to make a spectacle of you. But I'd like, both for Richard's sake and for your own, to have you view the world from his angle for a moment. It may change a good many things for both of you. If you love your little boy, and you do, devotedly; please kneel on this paper I am spreading next to him."

Because, in spite of her momentary annoyance with him, she did love her little boy more dearly than she could have expressed in words, the woman knelt and then had to stoop slightly before her eyes were on a level with her boy's.

"Now, what do you see?" asked the man. "Is it legs as trees walking?"

"Why-y! That's it! This does change things. It's as you said -- from his height nothing but a forest of legs, silk-stockinged and trousered and not a face in sight! Poor baby! And to think that's what he has been experiencing every time he's been in a crowd! And I've been wondering at his gift for getting lost the minute we get in a crowd. No wonder he grips me until I've become impatient with him! And to see my head, to know that my beige stockings belong to me instead of to any one of a half dozen other women, he'd have to throw his head way back, wouldn't he?" said the woman, experimenting.

"And then if he didn't know exactly where to direct his gaze he'd miss you," replied the man. "A child isn't as adept at it as an adult. You've been seeing things a good many more years than Richard has. And remember, madam, it isn't alone here in this crowd, but at home and everywhere your boy is seeing things from a knee-high point of view."

"Thank you -- more than I can express," said the woman, holding out her hand.

"We have to get on our knees to understand them -- these little ones," said the man, and he was now speaking to an interested group that had formed to watch the experiment Richard's mother was making. "And, I think, spiritually as well as physically, if we wish to understand them. I'd advise 'all kneeling' when it comes to our relations with children."

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