

# GODEY'S

## Lady's Book and Magazine.

PHILADELPHIA, NOVEMBER, 1865.

### A CHRISTMAS TALK WITH MOTHERS.

BY MARION HARLAND.

[Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1864, by LOUIS A. GODEY, in the clerk's office of the District Court of the United States, in and for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.]

"I do not approve of lady lecturers, as a general thing," I remarked, meditatively, a while since, to a gentleman, in whose presence I am somewhat prone to think aloud.

"You allude to *public lectures*?" said he, interrogatively, with unnecessary emphasis.

"Of course!"

"Oh!" and he resumed the study of a very dry-looking volume.

Affecting not to observe the mischievous gleam of his eye, I resumed:—

"But I am sometimes tempted to ask the use of your lecture-room for one evening, to call together an audience from which all persons of the masculine gender shall be excluded, and, then and there, harangue my own sex upon a subject that has engrossed much of my time and thoughts for eight years past."

"What is it—cookery or dry goods? Either topic would be popular."

"Something more important than both put together!" I retorted. "My theme would be '*The Rights of Babies and the Responsibilities of Mothers!*'"

My auditor raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips very slightly—just enough to give one the impression that he would have whistled, had not politeness restrained him. Seeing that I was in nowise abashed by these discouraging manifestations, he offered an amendment to my resolution.

"Better write your discourse, instead, and have it printed."

"But," I objected, "what I would say would be addressed to women alone. We don't care to let men know how unmercifully we can handle one another. Moreover, I should use great plainness of speech"—

"I think I can set your mind at rest on that point," interrupted my companion, drily. "I don't believe many men would read your treatise."

Whereupon he picked up his treatise and withdrew to his sanctum, leaving me to arrange the heads of my "discourse," or to ponder the meaning of his last equivocal observation.

And thus it came to pass, that, sitting lonely here, and arranging plans for the coming festival—the jubilee that, throughout Christendom, commemorates the birth of a little child in the grotto of far-off Bethlehem; musing of that child and his mother, while from the wall, the *Mater Dolorosa*, wondrous in beauty and in sorrow, looked down upon me—thought followed thought, and memories, sweet, tender, and full of joy; others sad, yet precious, and mingled with wistful yearning, flowed in upon me, and I have taken up my pen, not to indite a lecture or an essay, but a simple, homely, heartfelt Christmas letter to my fellow-workers in the great mission to which God has called us.

And first, let me remark, by way of "beginning at the beginning," as old-time teachers were wont to exhort their scholars to do—that *babies have a right to be.*

This is not the page whereon to record a frank and full opinion upon such a subject, nor is mine the will or ability to treat of the mysteries of iniquity, the violence done to conscience, humanity, and natural affection, that have come to be talked of in the so-called higher circles as familiar things, convenient and expedient measures for leaving fashionable mothers—does not the holy word look like a bitter sarcasm, written in this connection?—for leaving frivolous, heartless mothers, I say, at liberty to follow the devices of their own foolish brains, and delivering sordid fathers from what I have heard professing Christians style—“the curse of a large family.” I know that such abominations do exist, and so does the fair reader, who is ready to ostracize me for daring to hint thus publicly at what she privately approves and advocates. I can see that our pleasure-loving neighbors over the water are in a fair way to be rivalled, if not eclipsed, in certain respects by their American cousins. Further than this I will not go. I only refer to this, to me revolting subject, to substantiate a conclusion at which I have arrived in the course of my serious and often sadly troubled lucubrations with regard to this matter. It is my conviction that the real root of the evil lies back of this, its most reprehensible offshoot. I have no means of settling the date at which the opinion or prejudice was implanted on this continent, but certain it is, that a vast proportion—I fear, a large majority—of American mothers would secretly, if not openly, controvert my first proposition. There is among us, if not a woeful deficiency of genuine maternal instinct, a style—a fashion, if you choose to call it, and a very vile fashion it is—of deprecating as a grievous affliction the repeated visits of what a higher authority than “the noted Dr. — from Paris,” or the autocrat of neighborhood gossips has declared to be among Heaven’s best gifts to human kind.

“Poor Mrs. A., with her eight children, like a flight of stairs—just two years between them”—is, by her friends’ very pity, made to feel that she is, in some sense, the inferior of Mrs. B., who “manages so beautifully! She has but three, and they are seven years apart.”

It matters not that Mrs. A.’s household resembles a snug nest of chirping birdlings, who lie all the warmer for being obliged to stow a little closely; who learn patience and loving-kindness and generosity by hourly practice of

these graces upon one another, without being aware that any lessons are set for them—they come so naturally; who never lack company or sympathy by reason of the abundance of home companions and home love; who bid fair to keep their parents’ name long alive upon the earth, and, in their own maturity, to transmit to an extended circle—to a large community—it may be to a whole nation, the principles taught them at their mother’s knees and from their father’s lips. It signifies little to the feminine cabal that each one of the little B.’s has been, for seven long weary years, that most forlorn and pitiable of juvenile specimens—an only baby; has become dwarfed in affections; narrowed as to ability to love and to enter into the feelings of other children; thoroughly, and often incorrigibly selfish; and when, at last, the lustrum being accomplished, the newer infant is ushered into the world, the older regards it with dire distrust and lurking jealousy, if not avowed dislike, as the usurper of his or her hitherto undisputed rights.

“My children will never be companions for one another, they are so far apart,” sighs Mrs. B., as the pert Miss of fourteen pronounces the tiny sister, who has not numbered as many hours of existence, “a regular bore!” and “wonders why she came. Nobody wants her; and it is too provoking to have a baby in the house just as one is beginning to go into society and wants a good deal of gay company.”

But Mrs. Grundy—an American Mrs. Grundy, you may be sure, with a dash of Parisian philosophy—has declared the one matron to be a broken-down drudge, a domestic slave—“quite behind the times, in fact!” while “Mrs. B. is a truly fortunate and”—here Mrs. Grundy whispers—“a very enlightened and judicious lady!”

What an odious savor in Mrs. G.’s delicate nostrils would be the antiquated but pious friend who should, out of the plenitude of his love and good will for Mr. Grundy, pray, in the words of the Psalmist, that his wife might be a fruitful vine, and his children olive plants round about his table!

No! we do not, as a class, appreciate the dignity—I use the word advisedly—the *dignity* and privilege of maternity! In this respect, our English sisters are far ahead of us. The Hebrew women, under the Theocracy, understood it better still, when Rachel pined

in her quiet tent for the murmur of baby-voices and the touch of baby-fingers, and Hannah knelt in the court of the temple, to supplicate, with strong crying and tears, that the holy fountains of mother-love within her heart might flow out upon offspring of her own. In those days it was the childless wife, and not she who had borne many sons and daughters, who besought that her reproach might be taken away; that she might be accounted worthy to be intrusted with the high duty of rearing children to swell the ranks of the Lord's chosen people.

"If I felt as you do," said a lady, sneeringly, to a friend of mine; "if I considered the gift of children a blessing, and the care of them a delightful task, I would not wait for the slow process by which Nature creates families, but adopt a dozen at a time from an asylum."

"They would not be mine!" was the quiet reply.

I do not envy that mother her heart, who does not enter into the meaning of this rejoinder; who has not felt the delicious thrill of ownership in an object so lovely and precious as the helpless babe she has braved death itself to win; the awed delight of contemplating the new creation—living, intelligent, immortal—given to be *hers!* It may be—I have seen it somewhere asserted—that there is, after all, a species of sublimated selfishness in the ecstatic sweetness of the thought so well expressed by Emily Judson:—

"The pulse first caught its tiny stroke,  
The blood its crimson hue from *mine!*  
The life which I have dared invoke  
Henceforth is parallel with *THINE!*"

The candid reader who has known the depth and strength of a mother's love, her patience, constancy, and self-sacrifice will, I fancy, agree with me in pronouncing the selfishness to be *very* "sublimated." Said Mr. Toots, upon the occasion of the birth of his fourth daughter—"The oftener we can repeat that extraordinary woman the better!" Everybody laughs at the proud husband's praise of his spouse, but—ask your heart, loving mother, if there is not a strange fulness of joy in watching the reproduction of your traits, physical, mental, and moral, in your child? How many times a day does she bring back some half-forgotten scene of your own childhood? How frequently, at the expression of her fancies, or opinions, or desires, do you say, with

a smile, a sigh—perchance a tear—"I felt, or thought, or longed the same at her years; it is her inheritance?" Is there not a joy yet greater, an inexpressible swelling of love and pride, as you see in the lineaments and gesture of your boy, the faithful portraiture of one dearer to you than your own soul? I am not talking now to those who have felt nothing of all this; from whom the knowledge of these sacred mysteries has been withheld, or who are incapable from the barrenness and shallowness of their own spiritual natures, of ever entering fully into them. It is useless to say to these that motherhood is a holy thing, and offspring the boon of Heaven; that, amidst the wild clamor of woman's rights and woman's sphere, she best enacts the rôle appointed her by the Wise Parent of all, does most to elevate her race, who rears strong, good men, and gentle, noble daughters to serve God and the generation to come. To the gross, all things are gross, and these truths are pearls, too clear in their purity to be trampled by such. I appeal to mothers—to brave, pious women who fear God and love their husbands—but who have yet never arisen to the perfect realization of the grandeur of the work assigned them; never thought of themselves as the architects of the nation's fortunes, the sculptors, whose fair or foul handiwork is to outlast their age, to outlive Time, to remain through all Eternity. I would awaken those whom the prejudices of education or the plausible sophistries of the modern fashionable school have blinded to the deep significance of those words—"Behold, children are an heritage from the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward!" Women! sisters! be assured there is something fearfully and radically wrong in a system that teaches us to despise or refuse our rightful share in our Father's riches! Look to it, lest haply ye be found to sin against God!

My second assertion is that it is a *right of babies to have mothers.*

"I have never desired children; have always been bitterly opposed to the coming of each new claimant upon my time and labor." I once heard a lady say, "Two of mine never breathed, and I experienced a sensation of joyful relief when I found that my cares were not then to be increased. Yet I love my children very much as they grow older, and my conscience assures me that I have dis-

charged my duty to them faithfully. I accept them as inevitable evils which religion and philosophy require me to endure as well and gracefully as possible."

Yet the speaker was not a "strong-minded woman," in the popular acceptation of the term. She believed in St. Paul, and had never read a word of Malthus in her life, if indeed she were aware of the existence of that author. She reprobated women's colleges and learned ladies; stayed at home and kept her husband's house with all diligence, and was generally regarded as a pattern wife and estimable member of society. I declare, nevertheless, that if she spoke the truth in this instance, her babies were motherless. They had a capable nurse; one who discharged the external duties of her position with conscientious fidelity, and who, in the course of time, as any tolerably warm-hearted nursery-maid could not but have done, grew into a more lively degree of interest in the winsome beings committed to her charge. But of true mother-love—the beautiful instinct, and sacred as beautiful—the blending of hope and longing and solicitude that, not content with receiving the dear trust with eager embrace at the threshold of what we call life, goes forth to meet it in that mysterious, imperfect existence which even she does not wholly comprehend, and from the moment the revelation of the coming advent is known to herself, studies the comfort and well-being of the one whose name may perhaps never be written among the living upon the earth; watching and regulating the workings of her physical nature; keeping her mind calm and free; hushing every wild heart-beat, lest the irregular throb should disturb the exquisitely susceptible organization of that which lies so near it—that always marvellous, yet ever-renewed miracle of human devotion which Deity does not shun to name in connection with His own boundless, perfect love; of this, the decent matron in question knew about as much as I do of Sanscrit, or the dialect spoken by the natives among the coffee groves of Borrioboola-Gha.

I am happy to believe that the maternal care which antedates the birth of its object is becoming daily a subject of deeper thought and more enlightened comprehension, with those whose duty it is to be instructed in this regard. It is only among the ignorant or the reckless that we find total disbelief and utter

neglect of the laws which treat of the intimate and subtle relation existing between mother and child. It is no longer customary to scout as old wives' fables the tales of horrible wrong done by passionate or imprudent women to the bodies and intellects of their unborn babes. But we have still much to learn, and more to heed upon this vital point.

Passing thus briefly over the earliest phase of motherly duty, we come to the education of the living, breathing, "necessary evil," or cherished blessing, as the parent's taste or principles may determine the little stranger to be. The pink, plump, piping bantling has been exhibited to the usual round of ceremonious visitors, and passed muster with all—in the mother's hearing—having been praised by one as the image of his papa, and by another, no less discerning, as his mother's miniature, and content with having acted well its part, in voting him to be a "remarkably fine child," the "finest of the season," Society dismisses the subject and remands baby to his curtained crib in the darkest corner of the nursery. For all that Society cares or thinks, he may, in that convenient retreat, slumber away the seasons of infancy and adolescence in a sort of Rip Van Winkle torpor, until his long clothes drop from his growing frame like the husk from a ripe nut. Society does not regard a "human boy"—as Mr. Chadband has it—as having arrived at the "interesting age until he attains the age of discretion." Young lady cousins, enthusiastic school-girls, or matrons, incited to the examination by thoughts of their own little ones, occasionally lift the lace curtain and turn down the coverlet; call him an "angel," and remark in rapturous whispers upon his increasing size and comeliness, and forget all about him by the time they reach the foot of the stairs. Or, an old friend of the family, who "dotes upon babies," begs that the "cherub" may be brought down to the parlor, saying, in pathetic reproach, "To think, my love, how seldom I see the darling!" Really deceived into a belief of the sincerity of her visitor's desire, mamma sends off an order to nurse; baby is caught up from his crib of ease, thrust into a clean slip, his tender scalp brushed to the right and left of the line—more or less imaginary—where the down—alias hair—ought to part, until the soft, throbbing spot on the top of his head pulsates faster and harder with pain and fright. Daily

prepared for inspection, he performs the journey to the lower floor, where he undergoes a vigorous kissing from the baby-lover, who "must hold him" herself. The blinds are opened that his budding beauties may be clearly seen, and while the connoisseur goes into a transport of admiration, master baby, alarmed, fluttered, and uncomfortable, first looks long and piteously into the strange visage above him, and proceeds to express his sentiments by wrinkling up his cherubic nose and opening his cherry mouth for a squall.

"There! take him, nurse!" says the visitor, hastily. "He does not fancy new acquaintances. In a year or two, he will be just at the interesting age, and we shall be capital friends. Not a word, my dear!"—to mamma, who stammers an apology. "All young children behave worst when we want them to show off their prettiest ways."

This may be true, but for my part I don't blame the babies. Most papas are shy or negligent of their heirs or heiresses at this epoch. It is quite common to hear ladies relate, as a proof, I suppose, of their spouses' superiority to small matters, that they are utterly careless of their babes while they are in arms.

"Mr. C. never notices one of his until it is two years of age," remarks Mrs. C. "Then, when he sees that it is a pretty plaything, he becomes quite fond of it, enjoys frolicking with it."

As he would with a puppy, which, frisking about his feet, should attract his lordship's attention to its graceful shape and winning ways!

"Mr. D. thinks young babies disgusting little animals!" laughs Mrs. D. in reply. "He says that he would not kiss one under eighteen months old, for five hundred dollars!"

My private opinion, which, of course, I do not divulge to Mrs. D., is that her husband is a Yahoo, and ought to be banished to Gulliver's famous island, in order that he might consort with his fellows.

Even good, right-minded, affectionate papas—like your stronger half and mine, dear reader!—do not overwhelm his very littleness with demonstrations of esteem.

"Say good by to baby!" you plead, as his paternal progenitor enters the nursery to take leave of you until dinner time.

If he does not smoke, and is very amiable, he stoops and touches the little forehead with

his lips—a very different salute from that bestowed upon yourself. If he has lighted a cigar, he replies: "I won't kiss him. The tobacco might sicken him. Good-by, monkey!" tapping the velvet cheek with one finger.

Baby blinks and throws his fat arms about in a blind, senseless fashion, which you think very cunning.

"Did you ever see a child grow and improve as he does?" you ask delightedly.

"Oh, very!" is the good-natured, but not very pertinent response. "The fact is, wife, I am not much of a judge of the article in its present state. Wait until he reaches the interesting age, and you will have no cause to complain of my lukewarm praise."

Bridget, also, "is very fond of children, when they get to be knowing and wise, and full of pretty tricks, but she finds the care of a young baby very confining," and but for the tip-top wages she gets, would probably look out for another place.

No, fond mother—and proud as fond! your blessed baby is, during the first months of helpless, dumb infancy, "interesting" to nobody except yourself. But there are weighty reasons besides the indifference of others that should make him, now, the object of your especial care, and this period one of continual watchfulness and affectionate solicitude. In trust to no nurse, however experienced, the task of bathing and feeding, dressing and undressing the tender little body. It will never need your gentle handling, your quick eye, more than at present. A pin misplaced, a sudden wrench of a joint; the twist of the upholding hand, bringing the head or a limb into contact with table or chair, may lay the foundation of years of pain and disease, if not of incurable deformity.

We hear much talk about good and bad babies; how Mrs. Such-an-one always has model children, that give her no trouble at all; but sleep and eat at regular seasons, and never cry when awake, unless they are in pain, while Mrs. So-and-So's existence is a woeful burden with her restless, fretful progeny, who turn day into night, and night into day, and sometimes decline having any night at all in the course of the twenty-four hours; who are continually crying to be fed at all manner of inconvenient times; who are, in short, as wrong-headed and peevish brats as one can find in a day's ride. Yet, Mrs. So-

and-So says that they are healthy and hearty, and suffer no pain. "It is just her luck to have cross children. All hers are born crabbed."

In behalf of the infant tribe I enter a protest against this calumny. Well-bred, healthy, comfortable babies are never cross until they are rendered so, in spite of themselves, by mismanagement. If Mrs. So-and-So puts her Bobby to sleep where he is liable to be awakened by the ordinary noises of the household machinery, and, furthermore, when these, or some untoward accident has startled him from the slumber that should have lasted two hours, before one-half of this time has elapsed if she make matters worse by taking him up, instead of quieting all external disturbance and lulling him again to rest before he knows where he is, or what has happened; if he is fed just when it suits Mrs. S.'s or Bridget's convenience or Bobby's whim, at intervals of varying lengths; the probability, I may say the certainty is, that Bobby will become an unreasonable, discontented tyrant, a nuisance to himself and to all around him. And if Susy, and Jenny, and Dicky are all trained after the like manner, there is an equal certainty that Mrs. So-and-So will have, among her acquaintances, the deserved reputation of being the worn-out, irritable mother of a brood of cross, spoiled, "hateful" children. But, again I say, I don't blame the babies! First of all, make the darlings welcome; that is half the battle! Then, make them comfortable. A celebrated medical man gives three capital rules for securing this desirable end; "plenty of milk, plenty of sleep, and plenty of flannel." I would add a cardinal principle, governing every other—begin from the outset—from the day of birth, if possible, a gentle, firm system of punctuality in feeding, dressing, and putting to sleep the wee things that lie, like breathing automatons, upon the hands that foster them. Like their fellows of a larger growth, they are creatures of habit.

I wish—how fervently and how frequently, I dare not pretend to say—that *method*, a wise and just system of duty and recreation, could be made the chief earthly law of every household. Let there not only be "a place for everything and everything in its place," but a time for everything, and let everything be done in its season. When I see the mistress of a family toiling and worried from morning until night, pulled a dozen different ways at

once, by as many duties, all of apparently equal importance, driving herself and servants, wearying her husband by incessant complaints, and dragging, rather than bringing up her children, I wonder not that American women break down so early, but at the tenacity of life that enables them to endure their load for a single year. The clever writer of an article, entitled "A Spasm of Sense," published not long since, in one of our most clever monthlies, finds the cause of the lamentable condition of so many a domestic establishment in the superabundance of olive-plants that crowd American nurseries. From my different stand-point, I am inclined to believe the trouble to be, not that there are too many babies, but that there are not more wise and capable mothers.

I know a lady, who was, when she married, a delicate, beautiful girl, the petted favorite of a large circle of admiring friends. The seventh anniversary of her wedding-day saw her the mother of five children. Acquaintances, who only heard of this rapid increase of cares, shook mournful heads and drew pitying sighs, between contemptuous smiles. "What a change!" It was a change, than which my eyes have rarely beheld a fairer. Her babies were not pattern, spiritless dolls, but hearty, roguish youngsters, who frolicked and shouted, and disputed, as all sound, sprightly children will do, and as they should not be hindered from doing. But mamma was at once the motive-power and centre of attraction of the system, wherein these lively planets revolved. She was more lovely, with a chastened, matronly beauty, than in her girlhood, and discontent had ploughed no furrows in her smooth brow. To each of the fast-coming troop she gave a motherly greeting, and, as by magic, brought it, with its wishes and needs, under the influence of the judicious law of order that extended over the rest of her band. She nourished them from her bosom; bathed, dressed, and undressed them, and herself laid them down for the nightly and midday slumber; made most of their clothing with her own hands; as they grew older, directed their studies—she "could not bear to send them from her to school!" Yet she was the ever-patient, ever-cheerful referee in their sports and quarrels; looked well to the other ways of her household; was a faithful mistress, a good house-keeper, and a kind neighbor, and, withal,

managed to keep up with the best literature of the day, and when her husband's business hours were over, became his companion, at home and abroad, with more ease and frequency than any other wife I ever saw.

This is no fancy sketch, nor have I done the original justice. It is not surprising that the offspring of such a woman should rise up and call her blessed; the marvel and disgrace are, that there are not hundreds and thousands like her, throughout the country. I do not ask that our daughters should be brought up in the belief that matrimony is the chief end of woman's existence. I do hold, in consideration of the fact that an immense majority of our sex *do* marry and have the cares of a family laid upon them, that girls ought to receive a training which shall fit them, in some degree, for a position involving responsibilities so solemn and onerous.

I know the popular outcry against the slavishness of maternal duties. "As well bury me alive after the first year of married life!" cries Mrs. A-la-mode. "I, with my education and accomplishments, may surely aspire to a higher position than that of nursery-maid! I consider that I serve my children more effectually by reserving my strength and cultivating my talents against such time as their maturer minds shall require my companionship."

In other words, Mrs. A-la-mode leaves it to hired menials to work, irrigate, and plant the virgin soil, and expects, in the ripening of the harvest, to put in her patent sickle—latest style—and gather such grain as she shall then decree. I am acquainted with but one way in which a woman can conscientiously and surely evade the fulfilment of a mother's obligations. In this day and country, there are no forced marriages. If Miss Faintheart and Miss Easy abhor the prospect of directing and fostering a young family, they can remain single; and, to be frank, I think the next generation will be the gainers by their celibacy.

Again, and strictly apropos to this division of my subject—*Babies have a right to be heard.*

"My dear children," said a Sabbath-school lecturer; "when I say 'boys' I mean girls, and when I say 'girls' I mean boys."

He designed to be entirely comprehensive in his address, and engage the attention of both sexes; but his juvenile auditors were evidently in a state of terrible confusion after this lucid preamble, most of them imagining

that he meditated some game of cross-purposes; as when "rise No. 2" means that No. 2 must do quite the opposite thing and not budge, upon penalty of a forfeit. But when I say "babies," I mean children of tender years—legal infants—and do not confine myself altogether to those in arms.

Especially, has a baby a right to a hearing from mamma. Unless you have been so foolish as to let him form a habit of crying—and this should be carefully avoided—his wail or scream always means that something is amiss, and it is your business to find out what it is. If you choose to send Bridget to see "what ails that child, now?" at least let him be brought to you for inquiry and for judgment. Take the convulsed, struggling little fellow in your arms; draw his head to your bosom; pat the wet cheeks and kiss the mouth quivering in distress, that is more than he can bear, slight and ridiculous as it may be to you. Soothe and quiet, before you chide, should there seem to be need for reproof. Remember—and it is a sadly solemn thought—that your arms form the only refuge outside the bosom of Infinite Compassion, to which he can, as man and boy, flee alike in sin and woe, in innocence and joy. Don't hush his sobbed confession or complaint, however strangled and unintelligible. It does him good to utter it, whether you understand it or not. Don't call him "a silly boy" for crying because he has broken the whip papa gave him only this morning, or because the pretty kitty auntie sent him has proved ungrateful and deserted her doting master. It is doubtful if you ever had what was to you a greater loss than either of these is to him. If his are tears of bereavement, kiss them away and hold up some promise of future delight that shall cast a rainbow athwart the cloud of grief. If he weeps in childish anger, be loving, while you rebuke. He loses much—how much, Eternity only can tell—who has not learned, from experience, the fullness and sweetness of that simple line—"*As one whom his mother comforteth.*"

Never let your child have his cry out alone. If he is old enough to observe that yours is studied neglect, he has also sense sufficient to enable him to put his own construction upon what is, to him, your cruel indifference to his suffering, and just in proportion as he recognizes and resents this, your influence over him is weakened; his faith in your love shaken. If he is too young to guess why you disregard

his outcry, terror and pain lay hold of his spirit, as is evinced by the changed tone of his lamentation. Shall I tell you a little story, just here, one which is unfortunately drawn from life?

A mother—a good woman, but a trifle too strong of will, and wedded to a pet theory of family government, according to which, children were but machines, to be subject in every particular to the authority of the chief engineer—one evening laid her babe, about ten months old, in his crib, for the night. The child manifested great unwillingness to lie still, and presently began to cry. The mother seated herself quietly to work upon the other side of the room, and took no outward notice of his screams. An elderly gentleman, a relative, was present, and remonstrated with her upon her silence.

“He will certainly injure himself, if you do not stop his crying!”

“That is the old-fashioned doctrine,” replied the parent, with a smile of conscious superiority. “I always expect one grand struggle for supremacy with each of my children. He is in revolt now, and must be treated as a rebel. If I yield, and take him up, the lesson is lost.”

“I don't ask you to take him up! Only speak to him. He is well-nigh heart-broken. He will rupture a bloodvessel.”

“No danger! It strengthens his lungs to cry in that uproarious manner. I have known babies to scream for two and three hours, without sustaining the least injury.”

“You will excuse me, at any rate, from staying here to see the battle out!” and the uncle left the room.

Returning, at the end of an hour, he found the child still screaming—now, in an anguished shriek that rent the man's heart. The woman and mother still sat still and sewed steadily—it seemed calmly.

“I cannot and will not bear this!” ejaculated the old gentleman. “If you don't take pity on that poor little thing, I will!”

“Uncle!” the niece lifted her stern eyes. “I permit no one—not even my husband—to interfere in my management of my child. His passion is at its height. It will soon subside.”

The cries were, indeed, growing less vehement. Too anxious to retire again until the scene was over, the uncle walked the room, hearkening, with tortured nerves, to the fee-

bler and still feebler wail; sinking, by and by, into fitful sobbings; then, into pants like those of a tired, hunted-down animal. These came at longer and longer intervals—and all was still. The uncle approached the crib, and bent over it.

“An hour and three-quarters!” said the mother, triumphantly, looking at the clock. “You will find, uncle, that, having gained this victory, I shall never have another contest with him.”

“You never will, madam!” was the awful rejoinder. “Your child is dead!”

I wish I could say that this incident were of doubtful authenticity, but it is true, from beginning to end. I grant you that it is an extreme case, but the like might occur with any young child. Ask yourself how you could endure a fit of violent hysterical weeping, for the space of an hour, or an hour and three-quarters! Days would elapse ere you recovered from the effects of the shock to nerves and heart; but “it never hurts an infant to cry.” That which would exhaust and irritate your lungs, “strengthens” his!

If your older child has anything to divulge which he deems important, contrive to give him a patient hearing; encourage him to full confidence. Many a life has been embittered by fears or fancies, that could have been removed as soon as they were formed, by five minutes' free conversation with a kind, sensible parent. To this day, I own to feeling an unpleasant sensation at the sight of any singularly-shaped or colored cloud in the heavens. This I attribute directly to a terrible fright I had when but four and a half years old.

My nurse, a young colored girl—a genuine Topsey, by the way—had early instructed me in the popular belief concerning the personal appearance of His Satanic Majesty, and I had swallowed every word, until his horns, cloven hoof, forked tail, fiery breath, and worst of all, a certain three-pronged fork he was in the habit of carrying about with him, that he might impale unwary sinners, as Indians spear salmon—were articles of as firm faith with me as was the fact of my own existence. He had an inconvenient practice of careening through mid-air—Topsey had added—with this trident already poised, on the lookout for bad little girls, who were supposed to be dainty tidbits in his estimation. One day, I was walking in the garden, unconscious of coming ill,



when chancing to look up, I saw, right above me, a small, dark cloud, irregular in outline, and moving swiftly before a strong wind. My first glance caught only this; my second traced, with the rapidity of lightning, the head, the tail, the lower limbs, and—brandished widely in air, the right arm, holding the fatal flesh-fork!

St. Dunstan or Luther would have stood his ground, as did Christian against Apollyon, but I had not the pluck of these worthies, and had I been endowed with the spirit of all three, there was neither tongs, inkstand, nor two-edged sword handy. So I chose the wiser part of valor, and ran, in frenzied haste, for the house, never stopping until I was safely ensconced under my mother's bed. Here I lay for a long time, quaking with fear, queer shivers running down my spine at thought of the sharp points I had so narrowly escaped. Then the supper-bell rang, and I crept out, unperceived. I had no appetite, and must have worn a strange, scared look, for my mother asked if I were sick. I answered, "No," very shame-facedly, and she did not press her inquiries. Children are not apt to be very communicative as to any great fright, except in the excitement of the first alarm. They fear to live it over in the recital. That night, for the first time in my life, I cried to have the lamp left burning in the chamber where I slept. My mother reasoned with me, for a while, telling me that the angels watched over good children, etc. This I did not doubt, but I was by no means sure that I was a good child. The apparition of the afternoon was frightful circumstantial evidence to the contrary. At last she scolded me for my cowardice and went away, taking the precious light with her. I wonder that my hair did not turn white during the ensuing hours of thick darkness. I pity myself now, as I remember the poor, frightened baby, lying trembling on her little bed, and staring into the gloom, peopled by her imagination with horrors. Driven to desperation, I once awoke my older sister, who shared my couch, and, in an awe-stricken whisper, imparted my fears and their origin. She was not credulous or imaginative, and, perhaps, did not quite understand what I said, for her only answer was—"pshaw!" and she was sound asleep again in a second. How and when slumber came to me I know not, but my mother reproved me, next morning, for wrapping the

coverlet so tightly about my head, saying that I would be smothered some night, if I continued the practice.

Three sentences from either of my parents would have laid the hobgoblin to rest forever, and I recollect that I did, several times, essay to broach the subject to my mother, very unskillfully, I dare say, for she did not encourage my preliminary remarks, and resolution failed me before I reached the point. I was a tall girl of fourteen when I confessed to her that, for five or six years, I believed that I had really seen the devil!

Lastly—for my rambling "talk" has already transcended the limits I at first assigned to it—*Babies have a right to be babies.*

That precocious and unnatural growth of prudence, propriety, and learning in young children, which is variously described as "old-fashioned," "smart," and "wearing a gray head upon green shoulders," is sometimes an offensive, always a pitiable sight. A life without childhood is like an arid summer day, to which the dew of morning has been denied. There are blossoms which the heat of incipient decay has forced into premature expansion. We all understand this law of Divine husbandry. Happy is she who has never had reason to tremble at sight of this early and brilliant bloom; who has not wept unavailing tears over the pale blossom, as it lay, crushed and faded, at the grave's mouth! Well is it then for the bereaved mother's peace of mind if she can, in the review of the brief years during which the gifted one was lent to her, comfort herself with the thought that she strove, in patient, far-seeing love, to repress, rather than stimulate, the unhealthy growth of intellectual powers that were in danger of outstripping physical vigor; that she rose superior to the vulgar ambition to have her child excel all others of his age in scholarship and showy accomplishments. Ah! it is not until the golden locks are hidden by the green sod, and the busy brain forever still, that, recalling the deep sayings and vivid thought-flashes that made us look upon our noble boy with such triumphant affection, we measure the short mound with tear-blinded eyes, and say: "We should have known, from the first, that all our bright dreams for him were to suffer rude, terrible awakening *here!* When we should have looked for the blade only, the bud appeared and the flowers. The fruit could only ripen in Heaven!"

Do not seek to make of your children monstrous, uncomely, infant phenomena. If, by some special interposition of preserving mercy, their lives and health do not fall a sacrifice to your weak vanity, you will discover, when your prodigy has completed his course of book-study, that he is not one whit better fitted for the actual fight with life and labor than is the fellow-student who used to run wild, with torn hat, trousers out at the knees, rough fists, chapped by wind and weather, and pockets frightfully distended by a miscellaneous collection of unripe apples, jack-stones, peanuts, top-cord, "taffey," whistles, gingerbread, pocket-knife, hard-boiled eggs, iron nails, of assorted sizes, and, perhaps, a living specimen or two, in the shape of a spotted terrapin or a June-bug, with a string tied to its leg: the while your Pindar Augustus, in white linen pants and cheeks to match, sat in learned abstraction from all mean and common things, his spine curved, and his baby-brows knit over his Homer or Euclid. It is distressing, yet instructive, to see how the mill of every-day life grinds down college geniuses into very ordinary men; how the oft-quoted logic of events proves the "bright particular star" of the family circle and the school-room to be, after all, a luminary of, at best, the fourth or fifth magnitude. You gain nothing except mortification and disappointment, by cheating your wonderful scion out of his childhood.

I am afraid that most of us, even those who have not fallen into the gravely absurd error just referred to, are yet apt to expect too much of our bairns. They may be marvels of sweetness, and sprightliness, and filial devotion, but they are only babies after all. "Children should be seen—not heard!" is often repeated by us in thoughtlessness or ignorance of the real character of the maxim. It is illiberal and cruel, and belongs to the age when a father held almost unlimited power over the very life of his child; when the younger members of the household never dared to sit down in the presence of their parents, without their express and gracious permission. I agree that a pert, loud-tongued child is an offence, at all times, but do not let us, on this account, condemn to silence the bird-like voices that make sweetest music in our hearts and homes. Even birds sing sometimes when we would rather they should refrain; so let us be forbearing with the

clamor of the babies. Do not pretend to judge them by the rules you would apply to grown people.

"Father!" says a bright-eyed boy, as his parent enters the house at evening, "did you remember to get me the ball you promised?"

"I did not, Tom. You shall certainly have it to-morrow."

Tom goes off, in apparent content. In reality, he is sorely disappointed; but he is a good child, and does not wish to make his father unhappy. The promise for to-morrow helps him to bear the trial tolerably well. The next evening, he is more backward about asking. He hangs around his parent's chair for some time, in hopeful suspense, but as the longed-for plaything does not appear, he ventures timidly upon a diplomatic "feeler"—

"Father, maybe you've forgot your promise, again?"

The father has had a harassing day—filled with carking care—and the smouldering temper needs but a spark to influence it.

"Boy!" he says, hastily, "if you ever say 'ball' to me again, you shall not have it at all! I will not be teased out of my life about your gimcracks!"

Tom shrinks back, as if he had been struck in the face; creeps silently off to his little room, and there, in solitude, cries as if his heart would break. He *has* had a blow. It is not so much the loss of the toy, but his is a sensitive nature, and his father's words were sharp swords. He meant to be very good, very patient. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to annoy his usually kind parent. Mingling with, and embittering his grief is a burning sense of injustice. He knows that the injury was undeserved. "Father wouldn't have talked so to a grown man! It's just because I'm a poor little boy, and can't help myself!"

I fear there is too much truth in this shrewd conclusion of Tom's. We would not dare insult those of our own age, as we do our children.

"That boy is growing sulky!" growls the father. "Did you see how glum he looked because I forgot a paltry plaything? I must take him in hand!"

Then is the time for you, the mother of the wronged child, to speak up boldly in his behalf. Represent kindly, but candidly, to your irritated lord, the true value of the promised gift to the boy, and the greatness of the dis-

appointment. "And after all, papa, we cannot expect Tom to exercise much self-control or self-denial yet. Remember, he is just five years old, and babies will be babies, you know?"

If he is the husband so good a wife and mother deserves to have, he will not only acknowledge his fault to you, but seek out little Tom in his lonely chamber, and with a fond kiss tell him that "Papa spoke shortly awhile ago, because he was very tired and had had a great deal to trouble him to-day, but that he will surely remember to bring him a famous great ball to-morrow night."

There are times and circumstances in which it is very hard to remember that "babies will be babies." Bessie, and Kitty, and Freddy are playing in the nursery adjoining your bed-room, where you lie in the agonies of "one of your headaches." Every not-very-strong mother knows just what that means. You have told the little ones that you are in great pain, and having provided them with books, blocks, slates, and the like "sitting-still plays," as Bessie calls them, and begging them to try and be quiet for half an hour, have withdrawn to your darkened retreat. They are loving, well-meaning children, and, for almost ten minutes, there is a refreshing season of calm. You are just forgetting torture in a soothing slumber, when, thump! bang! down comes the castle, the erection of which has kept Freddy still thus long. He would not be a boy if he did not hurrah at the crash; the girls laugh and clap their hands, and uproar is shortly the order of the hour. Don't spring from your bed and, confronting them with your pale face and bloodshot eyes, accuse them of disobedience and want of affection for you. They love you very dearly, and they "did mean to mind," they will tell you penitently, "but they just forgot!"

It is baby-nature to be forgetful, and I am glad that it is. The injuries, and slights, and wounded feeling of maturer years are enough to make of memory a whip of scorpions. I am thankful that, with the child, a kiss, a smile, a kind word will efface the recollection of the hasty reproof, the cross look, or—I blush for human nature as illustrated in some women while I write it!—the impatient blow that has wrung blood from the tender little heart. Thank Heaven that babies have short memories! so short that the suffering of cutting one tooth is clean forgotten before the next saws its jagged edge through the swollen gum.

Furthermore, keep them babies so long as you can without making yourself and them ridiculous, and interfering with the graver duty of preparing them for their place in the working-world. The dew-drop must exhale, by and by, but it lingers longest in the bosom of the flower that folds its petals most jealously and fondly above it. The virgin purity of the snow must change, with dust and melting, into the hue of the earth beneath; but it is a woeful sight. We would fain delay the process by every means in our power. Above all, let us make it our prayer that we may never forget that we were once children, and how we felt, reasoned, and acted then. Who of us does not treasure in her casket of remembrance certain golden days or hours that we would not lose for the wealth of a kingdom? Your daughter leans against your knee, as my little five-year old does on mine, with "Mamma, please tell me a story about when you were a little girl; how glad you were when your papa brought you home a new doll, with blue eyes and curling hair, in place of the one the dogs tore up; or about the grand holidays you used to have in the woods; or how your papa once took you to slide on the ice-pond—and O, mamma! do tell me about all the Christmases you ever had!"

All the Christmases I ever had! I wish I could remember them, every one—for those I do recall are strung upon my memory like pearls upon a silken cord, and each is a joy forever. There is but one against which I have set a black cross—the dreadful morning when the first thing I drew from my stocking was a switch! I seem to see the lithe, keen, wicked-looking rod now, and hear the shout of laughter that greeted its appearance—mirth, that quickly subsided before my torrent of grief and shame. I was soon told that the obnoxious article was placed there "in fun," by a visitor in the family. I should like to see the visitor who should dare to practise such a piece of "fun" upon one of my children!

Never deny the babies their Christmas! It is the shining seal set upon a year of happiness. If the preparations for it—the delicious mystery with which these are invested; the solemn parade of clean, whole stockings in the chimney-corner; or the tree, decked in secret, to be revealed in glad pomp upon the festal day—if these and many other features of the anniversary are tedious or contemptible in

your sight, you are an object of pity; but do not defraud your children of joys which are their right, merely because you have never tasted them. Let them believe in Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, or Kriss Kringle, or whatever name the jolly Dutch saint bears in your region. Some latter-day zealots, more puritanical than wise, have felt themselves called upon, in schools, and before other juvenile audiences, to deny the claims of the patron of merry Christmas to popular love and gratitude. Theirs is a thankless office; both parents and children feeling themselves to be aggrieved by the gratuitous disclosure, and this is as it should be. If it be wicked to encourage such a delusion in infant minds, it must be a transgression that leans very far indeed to virtue's side.

All honor and love to dear old Santa Claus! May his stay in our land be long, and his pack grow every year more plethoric! And when, throughout the broad earth, he shall find, on Christmas night, an entrance into every home, and every heart throbbing with joyful gratitude at the return of the blessed day that gave the Christ-child to a sinful world, the reign of the Prince of Peace will have begun below; everywhere there will be rendered, "Glory to God in the highest," and "good-will to men" will be the universal law—we shall all have *become as little children*.

---

### TREES.

THROUGH all the kingdoms of inanimate nature, trees are peerless in form. The shape of the waves is beautiful, but it is samely; the forms of the clouds are beautiful and of utmost variety, but their beauty is vast and grand, not coming quickly home to the human mind, and not unfrequently stretching into long straight lines, or losing itself in shapeless hugeness. They are, as poets have called them, the formless gray daughters of the sky. But the forms of forest foliage have a variety whispering of nature's infinitude; they are precisely of a size, and are precisely so placed, as to render them obvious to the eye; and in their chastened, regulated, consummate beauty, they never fail. The birch, with nodding plumes, as of forest-queen, and waving tresses as of the woodland maiden; the elm, with its imperial drapery, and majestic yet graceful port, a Queen Elizabeth among trees; the elastic, defiant, soaring beech, its boughs seeming to leap

into the sky; these, and how many others! afford the finest compositions in abstract form presented in the whole range of inanimate nature. There are no flowers now to draw the eye from the arching of the leaves and the grouping of the boughs; no local intensity, no concentration of color prevents it from resting calmly on the broad sweeps of green which robe but conceal not the majesty of the form. The fruit-tree has no fineness of form, nor is it valuable as timber; but what it wants in form and timber it makes up in flowers and fruit. Its wood is valueless compared with that of the oak; its form paltry compared with that of the elm; but no tree of the forest can boast of apple-bloom in spring, and the golden and roseate offerings of many an autumn atone for the worthlessness of the fallen trunk.

---

### MY SISTERS THREE.

BY W. S. GAFFNEY.

ALONE am I—yet not alone!—  
 This dreary vale within;  
 For, though my kindred all have down,  
 My spirit yet hath kin.  
 No brother smiles on me with love,  
 Yet sisters three have I!  
 Nor dwell they here, nor yet above,  
 Though daughters of the sky.

The eldest, when my spirit bends,  
 And Reason seems to fly,  
 A heavenly consolation lends,  
 And points my soul on high:  
 Removes all doubt, dispels all fear,  
 And bids all gloom depart:  
 Illumes the shades that hover near,  
 And brings peace to my heart!

The second—life-bestowing smile!—  
 Opens the source of bliss;  
 All care and sorrow doth beguile  
 With her auspicious kiss!  
 Points to a little trembling star,  
 And bids me catch its ray;  
 Whispers, "The guerdon there, afar,  
 Shall be an endless day!"

The youngest—sweetest of the three!  
 O bright, seraphic guest!  
 In clement goodness comes to me—  
 Is allied to my breast!  
 Unlike her eldest sister, she  
 Will live beyond the sky;  
 Unlike the second, endless be,  
 Nor born, she cannot die!

Now, though I have not mortal kin,  
 Yet I am truly blest;  
 Blest visions cross my path of sin,  
 That antedate of rest!  
 Earth may recall its mound of dust!  
 Death hath no fears for me!  
 In my three sisters will I trust—  
 Faith! Hope! and Charity!