

BABIES' HABITS.

BY A GRANNIE.

NOT to every woman is given the joy of three grand-children in eleven weeks. The writer, having had this happy experience, is impelled to record some of the thoughts that have come to her through observations of the babies—now aged 18, 17, and 16 months. It has been said by a wise person: "No one knows what it is to be a mother until she is a grandmother." The perspective is so near, that it limits the range of the mother's vision; anxiety is nearly always present, and judgment may be perhaps somewhat biased; but the grandmother, while feeling all the affection for the little one that she felt for her own child, lives in a calmer atmosphere, and so, often has a clearer judgement, and can enjoy without the weight of great responsibility.

Probably you, who are mothers, protest that you can read the character of your baby better than any other woman, even if she be your own mother, and that grannies proverbially spoil their grand-children and do not help to train them in right habits. Wait till you hold your child's babe in your arms, and you will then understand the meaning of the above quotation. So a grannie dares to venture, with all humility, to offer some suggestions on the formation of habits in the first year, and to point to some dangers of the present-day training.

There seem to be as many ways of bringing up children as Rudyard Kipling's creeds, "And every one of them is right."

We are not sure that we agree, and think that some ways are better than others. The three babies have been fed differently, clothed differently, slept at different hours—yet all are strong, healthy, robust children, with nearly all their teeth, and can not only walk, but run. It does seem as though in physical training

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"every one of them is right." But when we observe the results of mental and character training, we find that to rear a noble man or woman, one who is all-round, with many interests, and is clean-minded, mentally awake, honourable and truthful, there must be one foundation, and that must begin in the first twelve months.

Guyau, a French writer, says: "Most parents bring up their children for their own sakes, and not for their children's sakes; some for the pleasure of the child as estimated by the child" (there is much truth in this). "True education is disinterested; it brings up the child for its sake; it also brings it up for its country's sake, and the human race as a whole." Again he writes: "All education should be directed to this end: to convince the child that he is capable of good and incapable of evil, in order to make it actually so."

If only the baby, before he walks, were considered not only a darling (which he is) but something more—a potential man or woman, who will lean to good or evil more pliantly if guided or neglected in the first months. More mothers would realize their responsibilities towards the child God has given them. The little pink bundle of humanity committed to your charge has infinite possibilities of good or bad according as you may develop them. Shall he prove a blessing to his race, or the opposite? At first he has only one instinct—the craving for food; but self-will manifests itself very early in life. At three months he may quarrel with his food, and you begin to realize that your baby is a "Person," and that there must be discipline. So, in the early months you instil the virtues of order, regularity, peace, patience, and self-

control, and fruits will spring later of trust and confidence and love. The third baby of 16 months, when supposed to be asleep after being roused at 10 o'clock, sometimes creeps out of his cot on to the bed, gives his mother a kiss, and creeps back and falls asleep at once. Every mother knows how quickly the babies respond to love.

The speechless baby tries to help us if we would but understand him. He forms his own habits, often of course replacing them for others, but proving that he will respond to guidance. For instance, he hammers a table with a spoon, shouting with all his might. This may continue a few weeks, and is then supplanted by throwing down everything that is given him to play with, and so on. He tries to let you see that he has memory and can be helped to form good habits.
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We have all met children of two or three who flit from one thing to another, play with a ball three minutes and tire, and then want a doll or a wooden horse, also to be quickly dismissed; and whose attention wanders when a story or rhyme is being told them, and who cannot *concentrate*. The mothers of the three babies determined that, if possible, they should be trained in concentration and perseverance by a simple and natural method. When their attention was fixed on anything, such as waving boughs, ivy blown by the wind, a fly on the window, or the pendulum of a clock, they were never disturbed or hurried on to another object, but were quietly left to gaze until they were satisfied.

This seems to be such a minor detail in a little life; but it will have far reaching consequences. The habit of observation and attention has been started. Was it not Leonardo da Vinci who said: "All the discoveries have been made by the eye?"

It is also true that memory is a habit that is best exercised by the development of the power of attention. A short time ago, the tale of the three bears was being told to a boy of 2 1/2, who has a "butterfly mind," and is tired of every game in a few minutes. He was sitting on the back of a couch, which was for the moment his horse. He listened to the first few sentences, and then jumped up and down as if trotting. The story-teller was rather nonplussed, when a little laugh from the end of the room made her look round. There was the baby of sixteen months, who had been allowed to look without distraction, gazing at her in rapt attention, chuckling at the three voices. So the rest of the tale was told to him, while the volatile boy came off his horse and wanted bricks.

This baby's hand was often held, and time beaten with it, when the piano was played, and although an active, lively boy, he would listen quietly to whole pieces of music. In the spring he was going to Scotland, when some soldiers began to sing in the corridor of the train, and, for the first time alone, he at once beat time with his hand and arm.

It is doubtful how soon a child understands that it is being discussed and praised; but is it not wise never to do this in its presence lest we foster a habit which must later make it self-conscious and a prig? This is one of the present-day dangers referred to. It certainly has grown (at least a grannie thinks it has) and she attributes it partly to the mistake of making Baby the pivot of the whole house, and perhaps to mistaken ideas of the scope of
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child-study. The observer sometimes is keener about dissection and deduction than the importance of shielding the child from the knowledge that is the dissected.

A mother, a short time ago, repeated a remark of her little girl, who, not hearing all, came to her and said, "What did I say?" and the mother told her. It was painful to see the vanity

and self-consciousness that came into the child's expression.

Even in the first year, don't show off the dear cuddly babe, and its innocent and unconscious childhood will lay the foundation of a happy and noble character.

So many forces are given to mothers that only wait to help in the training of the children. How important, for instance, is the tone of a mother's voice. It is the sound the youngest child is most quick to understand. A working mother was struck with this, when she heard a boy of four say to his sister, "Don't make a noise, mother sounds cross," and she had only told them to come to the table for breakfast.

The voice can play a great part in the first training in *obedience*—one of the most precious assets a child can possess. A babe of four months knows unconsciously if he has to take his food or cease shouting, by the tone of the voice.

Mrs. Hart Davis, an old friend of P.N.E.U., wrote many years ago in the P.R. words that helped mothers of her generation. "A mother who had a large family of boys, was at last the proud possessor of a sweet little girl. The relations and friends joined in one chorus, 'The child will be spoilt.' 'No,' said she, 'she will be loved and treasured—that must be, it would be absurd to pretend it will not—but if she is brought up to be thoroughly obedient and thoroughly unselfish she cannot be spoilt.'" [sic] While that mother pursued her quiet way, always saying to herself, 'My child shall not be ruined, she shall only be loved,' she was steering steadily towards principles which were clear enough to enable her to be calm and untroubled at the prospect before her."

How wise she was to lay special stress on "obedience," the foundation of which *can* and *must* be laid in the first year.

Let "don'ts" be very few. One child a few years old said sadly, "I wish there weren't so many don'ts in the world." And you remember the little girl who, when asked her name, replied, "Mary Don't." If, in the first year, you *seldom* threaten, but when you do so, carry it out, and then insist on being obeyed, you will have little trouble in the after years. When, at eleven months, Baby will throw his toys on the floor, and you tell him that the

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next time he does so, you will take them away, don't let tears or temper induce you to give them back. The restless boy who would not listen to a tale, would often throw down his spoon and bread, when at breakfast, and his mother would say, "You are a naughty boy, and shall not eat any more until you have picked them up." Result—a scene and much screaming, and she would quietly pick them up, and he would continue his meal, which seldom ended without a second explosion, and being carried out of the room. Poor little man! it was not his fault.

Above all things, do not pervert a child's idea of obedience. An aunt, who ought to have been a wiser woman, said, "I can make Baby do just what I want. Listen." In a stern voice, Baby was told not to touch a certain ornament on a table. This called his attention to it, and as he went towards it, she called out, "Naughty, naughty!" until the boy took it into his hands, when she kissed him, and said, "That's the way I manage him." The hearer nearly wept, and the reader will be as shocked and sad as she was. It would not have been recorded had the writer not come across three similar instances in a month.

To divert a child's mind often averts a nerve-storm and checks the idea of opposition, and is an aid in the training of obedience. But in doing so, turn the thoughts on to something that is true and real. Not like the young parents in a railway carriage, mentioned in an early

number of the “Parents’ Review,” who, in order to make their little one sit still, told him there was a mouse under the seat, forgetting that mice do not as a rule travel in railway carriages.

Don’t be discouraged and think that there are too many points to remember if your child is to come into his kingdom. They seem many; but the one principle that runs through all, and binds them together, is so simple and clear, that if accepted and adopted, you will find no difficulty in carrying them out. Miss Mason is our guide—“That every child is a Person. That disposition, intellect, genius, come pretty much by nature. That *character* is an achievement possible to us and to our children. That all real advance, in family or in individual, is along the line of character. That, therefore, to direct and assist the evolution of character is the chief office of education.”

Help your child to form brain paths by the formation of habits, and strain every nerve to start good and not bad habits. Mothers have never met with such difficulties as confront them to-day, as the fathers are away, and they have anxious hearts, and in [p 502]

addition, the sole responsibility of the first training of their children. As surely as the fathers are helping their country, so are the brave, patient mothers, who are bringing up their little ones to be good and faithful citizens.

You are also being trained by the children in self-control, who see every action, and are being influenced by your words and acts every day. Mothers *have* to be serene, unselfish, courteous, reticent, just and charitable, and this is at times a great strain; but mother-love can surmount all difficulties, and the reward will be great. Remember that the homes are the great places of *possibility*.