

## FAMILY BICKERINGS.

BY LEADER SCOTT.

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"You did, I tell you."

"I say I didn't."

"What! you didn't say I should have the book next after you?"

"No. I said I wanted it first."

"Well, then, I wanted it second, and you have given it to Effie."

"No, I have not; she took it."

"She shan't have it, then. It is my book; give it up directly, Effie."

With this, the speaker, an angry little girl whose hair is fluffy, cheeks flushing, and eyes flashing, rushes at a younger child and snatches the book from her hand. On which Effie, small, pale, and peevish, sets up a dismal howl, and after trying in vain to recover the book from Dora's sturdy clutch, whimpers,

"You are a selfish thing, and I shall go and tell mother."

As the door slams, Dora turns fiercely to her brother.

"There now, see what your unfairness has done! Mother will give me all the blame, and it was your fault."

Recrimination takes place, and then a new struggle, which ends when "mother" enters the room to see the book in one pair of hands and its cover in another. She is greeted by a chorus of angry voices asserting the culpability of everybody except the respective speakers. Having taken away the ruined volume, and threatened that if the children quarrel any more they shall have no cake for tea, she goes off to ruminate sadly on the quarrelsome nature of children, while the culprits are left glaring sulkily at each other.

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This is only one of many similar cases which take place not only in this sunny nursery, but in many others. And every childish quarrel loosens a little bit of esteem or love from the family bond, till it grows at length too slack to hold the members together. The brother who tyrannises over his sisters in the nursery will not prove a trustworthy guardian of their rights in after years, and this is the cause of the frequent lawsuits when questions of pecuniary interests arise between brothers and sisters. The sisters who never give up to each other in the question of nursery toys and sweets will most likely become jealous rivals of each other in society. When grown up they will find no sympathy in their own home circle, and one soured woman may be found living alone in a foreign land, while another suffers sickness and solitude, uncared for, at home.

"Can you not keep the children from quarrelling so?" said a perplexed father one day. And the wife retorted,

"What can I do? They are all born with tempers."

"I fancy there must be something wrong in the training," sighed the father, more perplexed than before.

He was right; but few are the parents who recognise this or know what is wrong. They

accept their parental duties, some willingly and some unwillingly; they fulfil them more or less well according to their own good sense and conscience. They feed and clothe the child, nurse it tenderly when it is ill, and sometimes punish it when it is naughty, but they let the nurse begin its moral training, and governesses continue it; that is to say, they take care of body and mind; but it is only a mother here and there who really thinks, or even knows how her own child's soul grows.

A child's character is very complex. It has in it germs of all the qualities which will influence the man. In a child's heart are emulation, generosity, pride, ambition, love, and enmity, all in embryo; and so dual is child-nature that, according to training, these qualities are either improved into virtues or demoralised into vices. Thus a child of strong will may be rendered either obstinate in the wrong or firm in the right, according to the way in which his will is directed; his generosity may become either a Christian liberality, or a selfish wastefulness; his pride either true pride in good and right, or false pride in empty show and display.

The only way to make the virtues grow is to train the child's conscience and the love of others. To breed vices, the most powerful agent is love of self, and this begins almost in the cradle. When a nurse says playfully, "Naughty sissie to want baby's cake. Go away, greedy sissie," she lays the very founda-

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tion stone of selfishness and future family bickerings. When she says, "Sister loves baby, let sister taste the nice cake too," she inaugurates the culture of love and self-sacrifice that leads to peace. So early does the soul's education begin, and so necessary is it that a nurse should have not only knowledge and judgment, but conscience and tact.

But about family bickerings. The two chief causes of them are selfishness and harsh judgment of others. No punishment is of the smallest use to combat these; punishment may awake resentment and arouse greater spite against the person on whose account it is incurred, but it will never lessen the selfishness by a jot.

Virtues, like flowers, grow in the sunshine; you can cultivate them or draw them out with love and reason, but you can neither force nor whip them into existence. Try to do so, and the virtue you want will come forth in the guise of its corresponding vice. Instead of truth-speaking courage, a lying cowardice; instead of obedience, obstinacy.

Of course the best way to prevent bickering is never to admit it from infancy; to train the child to find its happiness in giving others pleasure; to show him always how good and kind others are to him; in fact, to let the names of mother, father, sister, and brother stand for love and loving-kindness to him.

If unhappily this has not been begun from the cradle, then an entire change of treatment will be required. Never be angry when the children are cross, and never add harsh words of reproof when a child is sore under what it feels to be an injustice. Gently draw the belligerents' minds to the fact that they are feeling very unhappy, that this is merely the natural result of saying unkind things; and that, as it would not be fair to make everyone else unhappy too, they must for other people's sakes go away from the room, or leave the game till they can make it pleasant.

If you have seen the beginning of the quarrel, try and get the children to talk it over with you when they are cooler, and suggest to Bessie that if she had answered softly when Tom was

first angry, all the tears and misery would have been avoided; and put it to Tom that if he would only remember in time that it is the man's privilege to protect the woman, and be generous and gentle to Bessie, she would always look up to him and try to please him.

"The children's hour" is a fine time for cultivating the nursery virtues and settling down bickering. When the boys and girls sit round the fire with mother, much might be done indirectly.

As rarely as possible make wrong actions the theme of a  
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story, unless they are actions the children have already committed, and you want to show the natural consequence of them. It is a certain fact that the suggestion of good things is much more likely to lead young minds upwards than the suggestion of evil, even in the form of a warning, is likely to keep them from sinking to it.

Then one might proceed to put these newly awakened ideas into action. One day, for instance, say to Dora, "I am going for a drive and have room for only one of you. As you are the eldest it is your right, but Effie is not well; would you not like to give her the pleasure? It would be such a chance for you to be kind to her." No doubt Dora will give up, and will stand at the door watching Effie's happy face with great satisfaction; only make sure that Effie shall thank Dora for it on her return, for children are exacting in the way of justice, and recognise gratitude when they see it. Never compel a sacrifice as a right, but merely suggest to a child that here is the way to give up self, and do a kind and lovely action. Very often it will be refused, for virtues are difficult flowers to train; then all one can do is to draw the child's attention to any suffering or discomfort which may be occasioned by its selfishness, and make a mental picture of the pleasure he has missed giving. When an unselfish action has been performed, give the child the full benefit of the happiness it brings, remark on the other's enjoyment, and show the light of mother's smile and approval.

If the family have outgrown the nursery, and the causes of bickering are of longer growth, then one must fight it off with religion and reason.

I should in this case lead the talks with the young people to our power to render others either good and happy, or wicked and miserable, and the great responsibility this power brings us. I should by a Socratic method of argument make the children themselves prove how far their right to be happy is limited by the same right in others; that as they claim to be left free in action, so they must leave others equal freedom; as they resent having their actions criticised, and false feelings imputed to them, so they must refrain from criticising the behaviour of others. Indeed, all family criticism should be strongly discouraged. Let it be an axiom in the family that anybody may look for virtues, but nobody is to seek a fault except parents and instructors. If you thus cut off the family barbs of criticism, you stop more than half the bickerings. It is when brothers jeer at girls' stupidity and cowardice; when children make fun of each other's little personal failings, that anger and resentment are aroused. When one girl sneers at her less talented sister's

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efforts to play or sing, or ridicules her striving to be good, then are the seeds of non-sympathy sown.

The writer is acquainted with a large family in which bickering is unknown, though at one time there were signs of great character-friction among the members. The means the

mother took to uproot family jars was by working on that vein of imagination which every child has, and setting them to fight giants. Of course the lessons began with a parable, for there is no moral teacher better than the parable, or else our Saviour would not have chosen that form of spiritual teaching. The mother, *apropos* of Jack the Giant-killer, gave a sketch of the giants which beset young folks, and morally devour them, such as Self-love, Vanity, Obstinacy, Falsehood, &c., and excited their interest by telling them that these giants were so curiously leagued together that if one were conquered the others would probably flee.

It being near Lenten time the mother proposed that the Lenten fast this year should be the abstaining from pet faults, and that Lent should be devoted to these spiritual enemies and the fighting of them. Each child was to keep his own secret, and whisper into mother's ear the especial giant he wanted to fight, and she would give him the right weapons for it.

One by one the whispers came to her. Fat little Dolly said she "thought she was dreadfully greedy, and she would fight that ogre." A more nervous member whispered that she "did not want to feel so often cross with Dollie [sic], whose ways jarred upon her." A third confessed that "her enemy was Vanity; she did not want anybody to do things as well as herself," and a fourth sighed that "it was very hard to keep one's temper when everybody seemed so aggravating."

On the Tuesday evening mother had private audiences of her warriors, and armed them with their weapons of war. Seven texts, one for each day of the week, to be learned and acted upon, as often as occasion served, throughout the day. "If at the end of forty days the giant is not dead, he will certainly be wounded, and have less power," promised the mother.

As a sample I will give one or two of the selections. This was for the child who could not keep her temper:—

Sunday. "Pleasant words are as an honey-comb, sweet to the soul." Prov. xvi. 24.

Monday. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Prov. xvi. 32.

Tuesday. "Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." 1 Peter iii. 8.

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Wednesday. "If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." 1 John iv. 12.

Thursday. "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." Prov. iii.27.

Friday. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient." 2 Tim. ii. 24.

Saturday. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

A PROMISE.

"Him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne."

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The little girl who "did not want to feel cross with Dollie [sic]," had the attributes of charity spread, verse by verse [sic], through the week.

The child who wanted to fight her vanity had such texts as: "Charity envieth not, vaunteth not herself, is not puffed up," "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another," "Be not wise in your own conceits," &c.

The children kept their own part of the bargain as seriously as they kept their secrets, and the result, if not quite perfect after the first Lenten fight, was a complete victory after the second. In overcoming greediness Miss Dollie [sic] lost all that self-seeking manner which jarred upon her sister, so that they ceased to rub each other up the wrong way; and in fighting down her pride, Maude began to find out all kinds of talents and good points in the others, and learned to take as much pleasure in their successes as in her own. She no longer pushed to the front, and consequently aroused no feeling of jealousy nor made quarrels.

In this sunny atmosphere the young people developed any amount of talents which that deadening family criticism had kept down, and have now so many real occupations that they never find time to waste on bickering.

I will conclude with a code of laws, which are in tacit force in this household, though no parliament has been held to pass them:—

1. Brothers and sisters, being only comrades, shall not be permitted to judge or coerce each other.
  2. Parents and tutors, being rulers, shall be judges of conduct, under a law of reason and Christian kindness.
  3. When one deems another person is in the wrong, try and find out how he feels himself in the right, before you show anger towards him.
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4. If you find the subject has two sides to it, then you shall *agree to differ*, but not attempt to make *differences agree*.
  5. To steal another person's credit or praise shall be held as culpable as stealing his money.
  6. Never let an opportunity pass of doing a kind action, or saying a kind word.
  7. Charity or love begins at home, and is the key to household peace.

But neither rules nor aphorisms are of much use without example. After all, the real makers of the household atmosphere are the parents themselves. If they are not at one the household peace falls apart. Mother's champion and father's followers will be at strife among themselves. Where parents work together in sympathy the family will be knit in the same bonds; but if the husband finds fault with his wife or shows disrespect to her before the children, the brothers will certainly treat their sisters in the same manner; and where the wife complains of "papa's unfortunate temper," or lets the children hide their actions and thoughts from him in fear of a scolding, she divides them with her own hand, and sows the distrust and defiance that make quarrels not only possible, but probable.