

HABIT.

Perhaps the majority of us do not realise how very much help habit is to us. In innumerable cases it saves us that effort of discussion which is so wearing and tiring even about small matters. If it is tiring to “grown-ups” who have had years of experience it must naturally be to children who have not the experience to help them—therefore it is our duty to help children to form good habits which they can make use of all through their lives.

Habit runs on the lines of nature, but it is a great deal stronger, and when it is working according to nature it is not using its full power. If a child has the habit of untidiness we must help him to form the contrary habit of tidiness, which will probably remain with him through life, but if the child is naturally tidy we can see how the habit is natural and need not be formed.

A child is never too young to begin to form habits and it [p 727] is a mother’s duty to see that from his cradle days her child forms good ones. She can help him to form them involuntarily while he is young and this will save the child having to form them later. They will have become part of his nature, part of himself, and most of them he will never lose.

We know from our own experience and from the experience of great men and women all that is owing to a mother’s care during childhood’s days. A teacher, too, has great influence as the child gets a little older and it is her duty as well as that of the parents, to think out what habits should be formed in different children and then see that when once started they are completed.

Tact, watchfulness and perseverance are greatly needed, especially during the first week or so, but when the habit is once formed there is not much fear of its being broken. The dangerous time is just before the habit is quite formed when, for instance, we think, “Molly has remembered so well up to now I will not bother to call her back to put her things away this time.” The next time Molly will remember you let it pass once, and will “forget” again and gradually the almost formed habit will slip away—every day making it harder to recall.

Habit rules in practically all one’s thoughts and actions, so it is essential that we should be well-trained and train the children well so that our thoughts, from which our actions originate may be for the betterment of ourselves and our country. And the fortunate part about it is that habits and habit-forming are a delight. If we tell a child that we will try to help him when he forgets in the forming of a new habit and put him on his honour to try, he *will* try and will enjoy trying especially if he knows he is pleasing us.

It is interesting to see how each day brings us nearer our goal,—that of having a certain habit formed, and when once it is formed that hard part is over and it is *one* time and worry saver for the rest of our days.

How many times do we look at a thing first from this point of view, then from that and turn it over in our mind again and again before making a decision, whereas if we had previously formed a habit in the direction, say, of quick and clear decision it would have saved us time and trouble. Even where the will decides, habit is powerful; for example let us take two children playing together, the one having formed the habit of tidiness, the other being untidy. The latter suggests

[p 728]

that they should go out into the garden to play with Rover who has just appeared, and she wants to rush out without putting away the present playthings. Here the tidy child's habit and will will combine and although she is very eager to get out as soon as possible she will put away her things first, whereas apart from her habit, her will might not have been strong enough to resist the temptation to run out immediately.

If habits are so powerful, in fact have the power of 'ten natures' and we form them in a child, does it not take away the child's free will? asks someone. But is not each one of us subject to habits, does not our whole life embrace scores of habits a day? If it were not so our life would be indeed a weary one. Each time we wanted to do a simple and what is to us now, mechanical action such as brushing our hair, making a bed, passing something to a person when requested to, saying "thank you" to someone, we should have to go through repeated efforts of decision and it would wear us out very soon.

Therefore, considering all these advantages, let us try to help the little ones who are inexperienced to take their place in the world as noble men and women—let us help them to form worthy and useful habits while they are young so that they can form them for themselves when they are older. Also let us save them the labour of decision in minor matters which would be wearying and wearing to them and which is really unnecessary.

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