

FATHER FORGETS

Listen Son, I am saying this as you lie asleep, one little hand crumpled under your cheek and blonde curls sticky over your wet forehead. I have broken into your room alone. Just a few minutes ago, as I sat reading my paper in the library, a stifling wave of remorse swept over me. Guilty, I came to your bedside.

There are things which I am thinking, son; I had been cross to you. I scolded you as you were dressing for school because you gave your face a mere dab with the towel. I took you to task for not cleaning your shoes. I called out angrily when you threw some of your things on the floor.

At breakfast I found fault, too. You spilled things. You gulped down your food. You put your elbows on the table. You spread butter too thick on your bread. As you started off to play and I made for my train, you turned and waved a hand and called, "Goodbye, Daddy!" I frowned, and said in reply, "Hold your shoulders back!"

Then it began all over again late this afternoon. As I came up the road I spied you, down on your knees, playing marbles. There were holes in your socks. I humiliated you before your friends by marching you ahead of me to the house. Socks were expensive, and if you had to buy them you would be more careful! Imagine that son, from a father.

Do you remember later, when I was reading in the library, how you came timidly, with sort of a hurt look in your eyes? I glanced up over my paper, impatient at the interruption; you hesitated at the door. "What is it that you want?" I snapped.

You said nothing, but ran across in one tempestuous plunge, threw your arms around my neck and kissed me, your small arms tightened with affection that God had set blooming in your heart, which even neglect could not wither. Then you were gone, pattering up the stairs.

Well, Son, it was shortly afterwards that my paper slipped from my hands and a terrible sickening fear came over me. What has habit been doing to me? The habit of finding fault, or reprimanding; this was my reward to you for being a boy. It was not that I did not love you: it was that I expected too much of you. I was measuring you by the yardstick of my own years.

There is so much that was good, fine and true in your character. The little heart of yours was as big as the dawn itself over the hills. This was shown by your spontaneous impulse to rush in and kiss me good night. Nothing else mattered tonight. Son, I have come to your beside in the darkness, I have knelt there, ashamed!

It is a feeble atonement; I know that you would not understand these things which I have told you in the waking hours. Tomorrow I will be a real daddy! I will chum with you, suffer when you suffer and laugh when you laugh. I will bite my tongue when impatient words come. I will keep saying as if it were a ritual: "He is nothing but a boy--a little boy."

I am afraid I have visualized you as a man. Yet as I see you now, Son, crumpled and weary in your bed. I see that you are still a baby. Yesterday you were in your mother's arms, your head on her shoulder. I have asked too much, too much!

Instead of condemning and criticizing others, perhaps we it would be better to try to understand them, to try to figure out why they do what they do. That's a lot more profitable and intriguing than criticism; and it breeds sympathy, tolerance and kindness, rather than contempt...!!!