



The Education of Children

Plutarch

1. Let us consider what may be said of the education of free-born children, and what advantages they should enjoy to give them a sound character when they grow up.

2. It is perhaps better to begin with their parentage first; and I should advise those desirous of becoming fathers of notable offspring to abstain from random cohabitation with women; I mean with such women as courtesans and concubines. For those who are not well-born, whether on the father's or the mothers side, have an indelible disgrace in their low birth, which accompanies them throughout their lives, and offers to anyone desiring to use it a ready subject of reproach and insult. Wise was the poet who declares:

The home's foundation being wrongly laid,
The offspring needs must be unfortunate.

A goodly treasure, then, is honourable birth, and such a man may speak his mind freely, a thing which should be held of the highest account by those who wish to have issue lawfully begotten. In the nature of things, the spirits of those whose blood is base or counterfeit and constantly being brought down and humbled, and quite rightly does the poet declare:

A man, though bold, is made a slave when'er
He learns his mother's or his sire's disgrace

Children of distinguished parents are, of course, correspondingly full of exultation and pride. At all events, they say that Cleophantus, the son of Themistocles, often declared to many persons, that whatever he desired was always agreed to by the Athenian people; for whatever he wished his mother also wished; whatever his mother wished Themistocles also wished; and what ever Themistocles the Athenians wished. It is very proper also to bestow a word of praise on the Spartans for the noble spirit they showed in fining their king, Archidamus, because he had permitted himself to take to wife a woman short of stature, the reason they gave being that he proposed to supply them not with kings but with kinglets.

3. In this connexion we should speak of a matter which has not been overlooked by our predecessors. What is this? It is that husbands who approach their wives for the sake of issue should do so only when they have either not taken any wine at all, or at any rate, a very moderate portion. For children whose fathers have chanced to beget them in drunkenness are wont to be fond of wine, and to be given to excessive drinking. Wherefore Diogenes, observing an emotional and crack-brained youth, said, "Young man, your father must have been drunk when he begot you!" So much for my views on the subject of birth. We must now speak of education.

4. As a general statement, the same assertion may be made in regard to moral excellence

that we are in the habit of making in regard to the arts and sciences, namely, that there must be a concurrence of three things in order to produce perfectly right action, and these are: nature, reason, and habit. By reason I mean the act of learning, and by habit constant practice. The first beginnings come from nature, advancement from learning, the practical use from continued repetition, and the culmination from all combined; but so far as any one of these is wanting, the moral excellence must, to this extent, be crippled. For nature without learning is a blind thing, and learning without nature is an imperfect thing, and practice without both is an ineffective thing. Just as in farming, first of all the soil must be good, secondly, the husbandman skilful, and thirdly, the seed sound, so, after the same manner, nature is like to the soil, the teacher to the farmer, and the verbal counsels and precepts like to the seed. I should strenuously insist that all three qualities met together and formed a perfect union in the souls of those men who are celebrated among all mankind,- Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and all who have attained an ever-living fame.

Now it is a fortunate thing and a token of divine love if ever a heavenly power has bestowed all these qualities on any one man; but if anybody imagines that those not endowed with natural gifts, who yet have the chance to learn and to apply themselves in the right way to the attaining of virtue, cannot repair the want of their nature and advance so far as in them lies, let him know that he is in great, or rather total, error. For indifference ruins a good natural endowment, but instruction amends a poor one; easy things escape the careless, but difficult things are conquered by careful application. One may understand how effective and how productive a thing is application and hard work, if he only direct his attention to may effect that are daily observed. For drops of water make hollows in rocks, steel and bronze are worn away by the touch of hands, and rims of chariot-wheels once bent by dint of labour, cannot, no matter what be done, recover their original lines. The bent staves which actors use it is impossible to straighten; indeed the unnatural shape has, through labour, come to predominate over the natural. And are these the only things which clearly show the potency of diligence? No, but myriads upon myriads. A piece of land is good by nature, but without care it grows waste, and the better it is by nature, so much the more is it spoiled by neglect if it be not worked. Another piece is forbidding and rougher than land should be, but, if it be tilled, straightway it produces noble crops. What trees if they are neglected do not grow crooked and prove unfruitful? Yet if they receive right culture, they become fruitful, and bring their fruit to maturity. What bodily strength is not impaired and finally ruined by neglect and luxury and ill condition? On the other hand, what weak physique does not show a very great improvement in strength if men exercise and train themselves. What horses if they are well broken when young do not become obedient to their riders, whereas if they are left unbroken they turn out stubborn and restive? Why wonder at other instances, seeing as we do that many of the wildest animals are made tame and used to their labours?

Well did the Thessalian say when asked who were the most pacific of the Thessalians, "Those who are just returning from war." But why discuss the matter at length? For character is habit long continued, and if one were to call the virtues of character the virtues of habit, he would not seem to go far astray. I will cite but one more example on this point and then I shall desist from discussing it further. Lycurgus the lawgiver of the Spartans, took two puppies of the same litter, and reared them in quite different ways, so that from the one he produced a mischievous and greedy cur, and from the other a dog able to follow a scent and to hunt. And then at a time when the Spartans were gathered together, he said,

“Men of Sparta, of a truth habit and training and teaching and guidance in living are a great influence toward engendering excellence, and I will make this evident to you at once.” Thereupon producing the two dogs, he let them loose, putting down directly in front of them a dish of hare, and the other made for the dish. While the Spartans were yet unable to make out what exhibiting the dogs, he said, “These dogs are both of the same litter, but they have received a different bring-up, with the result that the one has turned out a glutton and the other a hunter.” in regard to habits and manner of life let this suffice.

5. Next in order comes the subject of feeding. Mothers ought, I should say, themselves to feed their infants and nurse them themselves. for they will feed them with a livelier affection and greater care, as loving them inwardly, and according to the proverb, to their finger-tips. But the good-will of foster-mothers and nursemaids is insincere and forced, since it is for this purpose that she has provided for every animal which gives birth to young a source of food in its milk. Wise also is her fore-thought; for she has fashioned women’s breasts double, so that, if there be twins, they may have a double source of nutrition. Yet apart from all this, mothers would come to be more kindly disposed towards their children, and more inclined to show them affection. Not unnaturally either, I swear; for this fellowship in feeding is a bond that knits kindness together. Yes, even the brute beasts, when dragged away from their companions in feeding evidently miss them. So, as I have said, mothers must endeavour, if possible, to nurse their children themselves; but if they are unable to do this, either because of bodily weakness (for such a thing can happen) or because they are in haste to bear, more children, yet foster-mothers and nurse-maids are not to be selected at random, but as good ones as possible must be chosen; and first of all, in character they must be Greek. for just as it is necessary, immediately after birth, to begin to mould the limbs of the children’s bodies in order that these may grow straight and without deformity, so, in the same fashion, it is fitting from the beginning to regulate the characters of children. For youth is impressionable and plastic, and while such minds are still tender lessons are infused deeply into them; but anything which has become hard is with difficulty softened. for just as scale leave their impression in soft wax, so are lessons impressed upon the minds of children while they are young. And, as it seems to me, Plato, that remarkable man, quite properly advised nurses, even in telling stories to children, not to choose at random, lest haply their minds be filled at the outset with foolishness and corruption. Phocylides, too, the poet, appears to give admirable advice in saying:

Should teach while still a child
The tale of noble deeds.

6. Now there is another point which should be omitted, that in choosing the younger slaves, who are to be the servants and companions of young masters, those should be sought out who are first and foremost, sound in character, who are Greeks as well, and distinct of speech, so that the children may not be contaminated by barbarians and persons of low character, and so take on some of their commonness. The proverb-makers say, and quite to the point, “If you dwell with a lame man, you will learn to limp.”

7. When now they attain to an age to be put under the charge of attendants, then especially great care must be taken in the appointment of these, so as not to entrust one’s children inadvertently to slaves taken in war or to barbarians or to those who are unstable. Nowadays, the common practice of many persons is more than ridiculous; for some of

their trustworthy slaves they appoint to manage their farms, others they make masters of their ships, others their factors, others they make house-stewards, and some even money-lenders; but any slave whom they find to be a wine-bidder and a glutton, and useless for any kind of business, to him they bring their sons and put them in his charge. But the good attendant ought to be a man of such nature as was Phoenix, the attendant of Achilles.

I come now to a point which is more important and weighty than anything I have said so far. Teachers must be sought for the children who are free from scandal in their lives, who are unimpeachable in their manners, and in experience the very best that may be found. For to receive a proper education is the source and root of all goodness. As husbandmen place stakes beside the young plants, so do competent teachers with all care set their precepts and exhortations beside the young, in order that their characters may grow to be upright. Nowadays there are some fathers who deserve utter contempt, who, before examining those who are going to teach, either because of ignorance, or sometimes because of inexperience, hand over their children to untried and untrustworthy men. And this is not so ridiculous if their action is due to inexperience, but there is another case which is absurd to the last degree. What is this? Why, sometimes even with knowledge and with information from others, who tell them of the inexperience and even of the depravity of certain teachers, they nevertheless entrust their children to them; some yield to the flatteries of those who would please them, and there are those who do it as a favour to insistent friends. Their action resembles that of a person, who, if he were afflicted with bodily disease, should reject that man who by his knowledge might be able to save his life, and as a favour to a friend, should prefer one who by his inexperience might cause his death; or again that of a person who should dismiss a most excellent shipmaster, and accept the very worst because of a friend's insistence. Heaven help us! Does a man who bears the name of father think more of gratifying those who ask favours than he thinks of the education of his children? And did not Socrates of old often say very fittingly, that if it were in any way possible one should go up to the loftiest part of the city and cry aloud, "Men whither is your course taking you, who give all possible attention to the acquiring of money but give small thought to your sons to whom ye are to leave it?" To this I should like to add that such fathers act nearly as one would act who should give thought to his shoe but pay no regard to his foot. Many fathers, however, go so far in their devotion to money as well as in animosity toward their children, that in order to avoid paying a larger fee, they select as teachers for their children men who are not worth any wage at all-looking for ignorance, which is cheap enough. Wherefore Aristippus not inelegantly, in fact very cleverly, rebuked a father who was devoid both of mind and sense. For when a man asked him what fee he should require for teaching his child, Aristippus replied, "A thousand drachmas"; but when the other exclaimed, "Great Heavens! what an excessive demand! I can buy a slave for a thousand," Aristippus retorted, "Then you will have two slaves, your son and the one you buy." And, in general, is it not absurd for people to accustom children to take their food with their right hand, and, if one puts out his left, to rebuke him, and yet to take no forethought that they shall hear right and proper words of instruction?

Now I will tell what happens to these admirable fathers when they have badly brought up and badly educated their sons. When their sons are enrolled in the ranks of men, and disdain the sane and orderly life, and throw themselves headlong into disorderly and slavish pleasures, then, when it is of no use, the fathers regret that they have been false to their duty in the education of their sons, being now distressed at their wrongdoing. For some of

them take up with flatterers and parasites, abominable men of obscure origin, corrupters and spoilers of youth, and others buy the freedom of courtesans and prostitutes, proud and sumptuous in expense; still others give themselves up to the pleasures of the table, while others come to wreck in dice and revels, and some finally take to the wilder forms of evildoing, such as adultery and bacchanalian routs, ready to pay with life itself for a single pleasure. But if these men had become conversant with the higher education, they perhaps would not have allowed themselves to be dominated by such practices, and they would at least have become acquainted with the percept of Diogenes, who with coarseness of speech, but with substantial truth, advises and says, “Go into any brothel to learn that there is no difference between what cost money and what costs nothing.”

8. Briefly, then, I say (an oracle one might properly call it, rather than advice) that, to sum up the beginning, the middle, and the end in all these matters is good education and proper training: and it is this, I say, which leads on and helps towards moral excellence and towards happiness. And, in comparison with this, all other advantages are human, and trivial, and not worth our serious concern. Good birth is a fine thing, but it is an advantage which must be credited to one’s ancestors. Wealth is held in esteem, but it is a chattel of fortune, since often time she takes it away from those who possess it, and brings and presents it to those who do not expect it. Besides, great wealth is the very mark for those who aim their shafts at the purse- rascally slaves and blackmailers; and above all, even the vilest may possess it. Repute, moreover, is imposing, but unstable. Beauty is highly prized, but short-lived. Health is a valued possession, but inconstant. Strength is much admired, but it falls, an easy prey to disease and old age. And, in general, if anybody prides himself wholly upon strength of his body, let him know that he is sadly mistaken in judgment. For how small is man’s strength compared with the power of other living creatures! I mean, for instance, elephants and bulls and lions. But learning, of all things in this world, is alone immortal and divine. Two elements in man’s nature are supreme over all- mind and reason. The mind exercises control over reason, and reason is the servant of the mind, unassailable by fortune, impregnable to calumny, uncorrupted by disease, unimpaired by old age. For the mind alone grows young with increase of years, and time, which takes away all things else, but adds wisdom to old age. War, again, like a torrent, sweeps everything away and carries everything along in its current, but learning alone it cannot take away. It seems to me that Stilpo, the philosopher of Megara, made an answer worth recording, at the time when Demetrius, having reduced the people of that city to slavery and razed its buildings, asked him whether perchance he had lost anything; but Stilpo replied: “No, indeed, for war cannot make spoil of virtue.” In full accord and harmony with this appears the reply of Socrates. For he, when someone (I think it was Gorgias) asked him what notion he had regarding the great king, and whether he thought him happy, said, “I do not know how he stands in the matter of righteousness and learning,” — his thought being that happiness depends upon these and not upon accidental advantages.

9. Just as I advise people to make nothing of more immediate importance than the education of their children, so again I say they ought to cling to the uncorrupted and sound education, and to withdraw their sons as far away as possible from the nonsense of ostentatious public discourse. For to please the multitude is to displease the wise. And Euripides bears witness to my words when he says:

I have no gift to reason wit a crowd;

I'm wiser with my friends and fewer folk.
And this is just; since those the wise hold cheap
Are better tuned to speak before a crowd.

I observe that those who practice speaking in a way to catch the favour of the vulgar herd also turn out in general to be incontinent in their lives and fond of pleasure. And this surely is to be expected; for if, in providing pleasure for others, they disregard what is honourable, they would be slow to place that which is upright and sound above the gratification of their own pleasures and luxurious tastes, and slow to pursue the temperate course instead of the agreeable. Moreover, why should children [be taught such a way of speaking]? For it is a good thing not to say or do anything at random, and according to the proverb, "Good things are hard." Speeches made offhand display a large measure of readiness and facility, being characteristic of persons who know not where should be the beginning or where the end. But, apart from all other errors, those who speak on the impulse of the moment fall into a dreadful disregard of limit and into loquacity. Reflexion on the other hand prevents a discourse from exceeding the due limits of proportion. Pericles, "as the story has been handed down for us to hear," though called upon by the people, oftentimes did not heed their summons, saying that he was unprepared. In like manner also Demosthenes, who was an ardent follower of Pericles' political policy, when the Athenians called upon him to give his counsel, resisted, saying, "I have not prepared myself." This, perhaps, is an unauthentic and fictitious tradition; but in his speech against Meidias he presents clearly the helpfulness of reflection. At any rate he says, "Men of Athens, I say I have given much thought to this matter, and I could not deny that I have also rehearsed my speech to the best of my ability; for I should be a miserable wretch, if, in view of his past and present treatment of me, I had paid no attention to what I was going to say to you about it." But I, for my part, would not assert that readiness of speech is to be utterly rejected, or again that it should not be used in its proper place, but that it is to be used like a drug, with caution. Indeed until one arrives at man's estate I do not think it right that he should speak at all offhand, but when he shall have firmly established his powers, then, if the occasion invite, it is fitting for him to exercise some freedom in his speech. For just as those who have been in fetters for a long time, even if later they be set free, yet, because of the long-continued habituation to their bonds, are not able to walk freely, and are not sure on their feet, so is it with those who for a long time have kept their speech under close restraint: if ever it becomes necessary to speak offhand, they nevertheless keep to the same type of expression as before. But to allow those who are still young to speak extempore stands responsible for the worst sort of rambling talk. They tell the story of a wretched painter, who, exhibiting to Apelles a painting, said, "This I have only this moment painted." Whereupon Apelles replied, "Even should you not say so, yet I know that it was painted hastily, and I only wonder that you have not painted more of like sort."

I advise then (for I return now to my original theme) that, as one should always be careful to avoid the theatrical and melodramatic style, so, on the other hand, one should exercise the same caution to avoid triviality and vulgarity in style; for a turgid diction is unfitted for a man in public life, and a barren style is too unimpressive; but as the body ought to be not merely healthy but also sturdy, so also speech should be not merely free from fault but vigorous too. For cautious is merely commended, but the audacious is admired as well. It so happens that I entertain the same opinion also in regard to mental disposition. For a man

should not be bold, on the one hand, or, on the other, pusillanimous and cowering, since the one resolves itself into impudence, and the other into servility. Always to pursue the middle course in everything is artistic and in good taste.

While I am still dwelling upon my own opinion in regard to education, I desire to say that in the first place a discourse composed of a series of short sentences I regard as no small proof of lack of culture; in the second place I think that in practice such discourse soon palls, and in every case it causes impatience; for monotony is in everything tiresome and repellent, but variety is agreeable, as it is in everything else, as for example, in entertainments that appeal to the eye or the ear.

10. Now the free-born child should not be allowed to go without some knowledge, both through hearing and observation, of every branch also of what is called general education; yet these he should learn only incidentally, just to get a taste of them, as it were (for perfection in everything is impossible), but philosophy he should honour above all else. I can perhaps make my opinion clear by means of a figure: for example, it is a fine thing to voyage about and view many cities, but profitable to dwell only in the best one. And it was a clever saying of Bion, the philosopher, that, just as the suitors, not being able to approach Penelope, consorted with her maid-servants, so also do those who are not able to attain to philosophy wear themselves to a shadow over the other kinds of education which have no value. Wherefore it is necessary to make philosophy as it were the head and front of all education. For as regards the care of the body men have discovered two sciences, the medical and gymnastic, of which the one implants health, the other sturdiness, in the body; but for the illnesses and affections of the mind philosophy alone is the remedy. For through philosophy and in company with philosophy it is possible to attain knowledge of what is honourable and what is shameful, what is just and what is unjust, what, in brief, is to be chosen and what to be avoided, how a man must bear himself in his relations with the gods, with his parents, with his elders, with the laws, with strangers, with children, with servants; that one ought to reverence the gods, to honour one's parents, to respect one's elders, to be obedient to the laws, to yield to those in authority, to love one's friends, to be chaste with women, to be affectionate with children, and not to be overbearing with slaves; and, most important of all, not to be overjoyful at success or overmuch distressed at misfortune, nor to be dissolute in pleasures, not impulsive and brutish in temper. These things I regard as pre-eminent among all the advantages which accrue from philosophy. For to have a generous heart in prosperity shows a man, to excite no envy withal shows a disciplined nature; to rule pleasure by reason marks the wise man, and not every man can master his passion. But I regard as perfect, so far as men can be, those who are able to combine and mingle political capacity with philosophy; and I am inclined to think that these are secure in the possession of two things which are secure in the possession of two things which are of the greatest good: a life useful to the world in their public position, and the calm and untroubled life in their pursuit of philosophy. For there are three forms of life, of which the first is the practical life, the second the contemplative life, and the third the life of enjoyment. The last, which are of the greatest position, and the calm and untroubled life in their pursuit of philosophy. For there are three forms of life, of which the first is the practical life, the second the contemplative life, and the third the life of enjoyment. The last, which is dissolute and enslaved to pleasure, is bestial and mean, but the contemplative life, which falls short in practice, is not useful while the practical life which has no portion in philosophy, is without culture or taste. One must try, then, as well as one can, both to

take part in public life, and to lay hold of philosophy so far as the opportunity is granted. Such was the life of Pericles as a public man, such was Archytas of Tarentum, such was Dion of Syracuse, such was Epaminondas of Thebes, of whom the next to the last was the associate of Plato.

In regard to education I do not know why it is necessary to take the time to say more; but in addition to the foregoing, it is useful or rather it is necessary, not to be indifferent about acquiring the works of earlier writers, but to make a collection of these, like a set of tools in farming. For the corresponding tool of education is the use of books, and by their means it has come to pass that we are able to study knowledge at its source.

11. It is not proper either, to overlook the exercise of the body, but we should send the children to the trainer's and cultivate adequately this side of education with all diligence, not merely for the sake of gracefulness of body but also with an eye to strength; for sturdiness of body in childhood is the foundation of a hale old age. Just as in fair weather, then, one ought to prepare for storm, so also in youth one should store up discipline and self-restraint as a provision for old age. But the amount of bodily exercise should be so limited as not to be a drain on the children and make them too tired to study; for, according to Plato, sleep and weariness are the enemies of learning. But why do I introduce this subject here? Just because I am anxious to say that which is of greater importance than all the rest: it is for the contests of war that boys must be practiced, by exercising themselves in throwing the javelin, shooting with the bow, and in hunting. "For the goods of the vanquished" in battle "are prizes offered to the victors." War has no place for a bodily condition produced by an indoor life, and a slenderly built soldier accustomed to military exercises forces his way through the masses of fleshy athletes.

But perchance someone may say, "What is this? You, who have promised to give directions in regard to the education of free-born children, are now evidently disregarding the education of the poor children of the common people, and you acknowledge that you are offering your suggestions for the rich only." To these it is not difficult to make reply. My dearest wish would be that my scheme of education should be generally useful; but if some, being needy in their private circumstances, shall be unable to avail themselves of my directions, let them lay the blame therefore upon fortune and not upon him who gives this counsel. Even the poor must endeavour, as they can, to provide the best education for their children, but, if that be impossible, then they must avail themselves of that which is within their means. I have burdened the discussion with this minor matter so as to connect therewith in due order the other topics which tend toward the right education of the young.

12. This also I assert, that children ought to be led to honourable practices by means of encouragement and reasoning, and most certainly not by blows or ill-treatment, for it surely is agreed that these are fitting rather for slaves than for the free-born; for so they grow numb and shudder at their tasks, partly from the pain of the blows, partly from the degradation. Praise and reproof are more helpful for the free-born than any sort of ill-usage, since the praise incites them toward what is honourable, and reproof keeps them from what is disgraceful.

But rebukes and praise should be used alternately and in a variety of ways; it is well to choose some time when the children are full of confidence to put them to shame by rebuke, and then in turn to cheer them up by praises, and to imitate the nurses, who, when they have made their babies cry, in turn offer them the breast for comfort. Moreover, in praising

them it is essential not to excite and puff them up, for they are made conceited and spoiled by excess of praise.

13. In my time I have seen fathers in whom excessive affection had become the cause of no affection. What is it that I mean to say, in order that by the example I give I may make my argument more luminous? It is this: in their eagerness that their children may the sooner rank first in everything, they lay upon them unreasonable tasks, which the children find themselves unable to perform, and so come to grief; besides, being depressed by their unfortunate experiences, they do not respond to the instruction which they receive. For, just as plants are nourished by moderate applications of water, but are drowned by many in succession, in the same fashion the mind is made to grow by properly adapted tasks, but is submerged by those which are excessive. Children must be given some breathing-space from continued tasks, for we must bear in mind that our whole life is divided between relaxation and application. For this reason there have been created not only waking hours but also sleep, not only war but also peace, not only storm but also fair weather, not only periods of vigorous activity but also holidays. In short, rest gives relish to labour. We may observe that this holds true not merely in the case of living creatures, but also in the case of inanimate things, for we unstring bows and lyres that we may be able to tighten them again. The body, generally speaking, is maintained by hunger and its satisfaction, and the mind by relaxation and labour.

It is right to rebuke some fathers who, after entrusting their sons to attendants and masters, do not themselves take cognizance at all of their instruction by means of their own eyes or their own ears. Herein they most fail in their duty; for they ought themselves every few days to test their children, and not rest their hopes upon the disposition of a hired person; for even those persons will devote more attention to the children if they know they must from time to time render an account. And in this connexion there is point as well as wit in the remark of the groom who said that nothing makes the horse so fat as the kin's eye.

Above all, the memory of children should be trained and exercised; for this is, as it were, a storehouse of learning; and it is for this reason that the mythologists have made Memory the mother of the Muses, thereby intimating by an allegory that there is nothing in the world like memory for creating and fostering. This then, is to be trained in either case, whether one's children be naturally gifted with a good memory, or on the contrary, forgetful. For we shall thus strengthen nature's generous endowment, and thus fill out her deficiency; and while the first class of children will excel others, the second class will excel their former selves. The saying of Hesiod is admirably put:

If even small upon the small you place

And do this oft, the whole will soon be great.

Nor should parents forget that those branches of instruction which involve memory make no small contribution, not merely to education, but also to the practical activities of life; for the memory of past activities serves as a pattern of good counsel for the future.

14. Moreover, one's sons are to be kept from foul language; for according to Democritus, "A word is a deed's shadow." Then, too, proper measures must be taken to ensure that they shall be tactful and courteous in their address; for nothing is so deservedly disliked as tactless characters. Besides, children may avoid getting themselves disliked by their associates if they do not prove totally unyielding in discussions. For it is a fine thing to understand, not only how to gain the victory, but also how to submit to defeat, in cases where victory where

victory is injurious; for there is really such a thing as a “Cadmean victory.” As a witness of this I may quote Euripides the wise who says:

When of two speakers one is growing wroth,
Wiser is he that yields in argument.

We must now lay down some rules of conduct which the young should follow no less but even more than those previously given. These are: To practice the simple life, to hold the tongue in check, to conquer anger, to control the hands. We must consider the importance of each of these; and they will be more intelligible if based on examples.

So, to begin with the last, some men by putting their hands to wrongful gains have upset the good repute of their earlier lives. Witness the case of Gylippus, the Spartan, who was forced into exile because he had secretly unsewed the bags of money.

Again, an unruffled temper is certainly the mark of a wise man. Thus Socrates once, when a bold and impudent youth had kicked him, observed that the bystanders were so indignant and so violently moved as to wish to follow up the offender; but he only said: “If an ass had kicked him in return?” That youth, however, did not by any means get off scot-free, but as everybody jeered at him, and nicknamed him “Kicker,” he ended by hanging himself.

And when Aristophanes brought out the *Clouds*, and heaped all manner of abuse upon Socrates in every possible way, one of those who had been present said to Socrates, “Are you not indignant, Socrates, that he used you as he did in the play?” “No indeed,” he replied; “when they break a jest upon me in the theatre I feel as if I were at a big party of good friends.” What Archytas of Tarentum and Plato did will be seen to be closely akin to this. For Archytas, on his return from the war (where he had been general) found his land gone to waste. He summoned his overseer and said, “You should be sorry for this, if I were not in too great a temper.” And Plato, provoked at a gluttonous and impudent slave, called his sister’s son, Speusippus, and said as he withdrew, “{Beat this fellow, for I am too much provoked.” But it may be urged that such actions are difficult and hard to imitate. I know that myself. But the effort must be made, by employing the actions of such men as standards as far as possible, to abate a great part of our unbridled and furious temper; for in other respects also we are not comparable with them either in experience or in magnanimity. Yet we, no less than they, felling ourselves to be the high priests of God’s mysteries and torch-bearers of wisdom, do attempt, so far as lies in our power, to imitate and to get a little taste of such conduct for ourselves.

The control of the tongue, then, still remains to be discussed of the topics I suggested. If anybody has the notion that this is a slight and insignificant matter, he is very far from the truth. For timely silence is a wise thing, and better than any speech. And this is the reason, as it appears to me, why the men of olden time established the rites of initiation into the mysteries, that we, by becoming accustomed to keep silence there, may transfer that fear which we learned from the divine secrets to the safe keeping of the secrets of men. For again, nobody was ever sorry because he kept silent, but hundreds because they talked. Again, the word unspoken can easily be uttered later; but the spoken word cannot possibly be recalled. I have heard of countless men who have fallen into the greatest misfortunes through intemperate speech. Of these I shall mention one or two as typical and omit the rest. When Ptolemy Philadelphus married his sister Arsinoe, Sotades said,

Tis wrong for you to try to spur that mare,

and thereafter he rotted in prison for many years; and so suffered condign punishment for his untimely talking, and to make other men laugh he sorrowed a long time himself. A story to match and couple with this, and much more dreadful, is what the sophist Theocritus said and suffered. Alexander had bidden the Greeks to make ready crimson robes so that on his return he might offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving for his victory in the war against the barbarians, and all states had a pay a polltax in money, when Theocritus remarked, "Before this I used to be in doubt, but now I know for a certainty that this is Homer's 'Crimson Death.'" And thereby he made an enemy of Alexander. And Antigonus, king of the Macedonians, who was blind of one eye, he drove to immoderate anger by reproaching him with disfigurement. For Antigonus sent his chief cook, Eutropion, who had been an officer in his army, to Theocritus, and insisted that Theocritus should come to him and engage him in discussion. When Eutropion delivered his message to Theocritus, coming several times for the purpose, the latter said, "I know very well that you want to serve me up raw to you Cyclops," twitting the one for being disfigured and the other for being now a cook. "Then you shall not keep your head on," said Eutropion, "but you shall pay the penalty for this reckless talk and madness of yours." He thereupon reported the remark to the king, who sent and had Theocritus put to death.

But besides all this, we should, as a most sacred duty, accustom children to speak the truth. for lying is fit for slaves only, and deserves to be hated of all men, and even in decent slaves it is not to be condoned.

15. So far I have felt no doubt or even hesitation in saying what I have said about the decorous conduct and modest behaviour of the young; but in regard to the topic now to be introduced I am of two minds, and I inclined now this way, now that, as though on a balance, being unable to settle down on either side; and a feeling of great reluctance possesses me, whether to introduce or to avoid the subject. Still I must venture to speak of it. What is it then? It is the question whether boys admirers are to be permitted to associate with them and pass their time with them, or whether, on the contrary, they should be kept away and driven off from association with the youth. For when I have regard to those uncompromising fathers, harsh and surly in their manner, who think the society of admirers an intolerable outrage to their sons, I feel cautious about standing as its sponsor and advocate. But again, when I think of Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines, Cebes, and that whole band of men who sanctioned affection between men, and thus guided the youth onward to learning, leadership, virtuous conduct, I am of a different mind again, and am inclined to emulate their example. Euripides gives testimony in their favour when he says:

Among mankind another love exists,
That of an upright, chaste, and noble soul.

Nor may we omit the remark of Plato wherein jest and seriousness are combined. For he says that those who have acquitted themselves nobly ought to have the right to kiss any fair one they please. Now we ought indeed to drive away those whose desire is for mere outward beauty, but to admit without reserve those who are lovers of the soul. And while

the sort of love prevailing at Thebes and in Elis is to be avoided, as well as the so-called kidnapping in Crete, that which is found at Athens and in Lacedaemon is to be emulated.

16. In this matter each man may be allowed such opinion as accords with his own convictions. But now that I have spoken of the orderly and decorous behavior of children, I shall next pass to the period of adolescence, and say a very few words about it. I have often expressed my utter disapprobation of men who have been responsible for the introduction of depraved habits. For, while it is true that they have put attendants and teachers in charge of their children, they nevertheless have allowed the impetuosity of youth to range unrestrained, when they ought on the contrary, to have exercised greater caution and watchfulness over them when they were young men than when they were children. For who is not aware that the faults of children are trivial and altogether corrigible -heedlessness, perhaps, towards their attendants, or deceiving and refusing to mind their teachers? But the iniquities of early manhood are often monstrous and wicked-unlimited gluttony, theft of parents' money, gambling, revels, drinking-bouts, love affairs with young girls, and corruption of married women. The impulses of young men should therefore be kept fettered and restrained by careful supervision. For life's prime is prodigal in its parents who do not take hold of the reins with firm hand at this period of life, are manifestly, by their folly, giving to their sons license for wrongdoing. Wise fathers ought, therefore, especially during this time, to be vigilant and alert, and to bring the young men to reason by instruction, by threats, by entreaties, by pointing out examples of men who through love of pleasure have become involved in misfortunes, and of those who, through their steadfastness, have gained for themselves approval and good repute. For these two things-hope of reward and fear of punishment-are, as it were, the elements of virtue. For the one renders men more eager for honorable pursuits while the other makes them averse to base actions.

17. It should be the general rule to keep the young away from any association with base men; for they carry away something of their badness. This duty Pythagoras also has enjoined in the form of allegories which I shall now quote and explain. For they contribute no small influence towards the acquisition of virtue. For example:

"Do not taste of black-tails; " that is, "Do not spend your time with men of black character, because of their malevolence."

"Do not step over the beam of a balance"; that is, one should give greatest heed to justice and not transgress it.

"Do not sit on a peck measure"; as much as to say that we should avoid idleness and have forethought for providing our daily bread.

"Do not give your hand to everybody"; instead of, "Do not make friends too readily."

"Do not wear a tight ring"; means that one should live his life unhampered, and not subject it to any bond.

"Do not poke a fire with steel"; instead of, "Do not provoke an angry man." Indeed, it is wrong to do so, and we should yield to men who are in a temper.

"Do not eat your heart"; as much as to say, "Do not injure your soul by wasting it with worries."

"Abstain from beans"; means that a man should keep out of politics, for beans were used in earlier times for voting upon the removal of magistrates from office.

"Do not put food into a slop-pail"; signifies that it is not fitting to put clever speech into a base mind. For speech is the food of thought, and baseness in men makes it unclean.

“Do not turn back on reaching the boundaries”; that is, when people are about to die and see the boundary of their life close at hand, they should bear all this with serenity and not be faint-hearted.

...The young should be kept away from every sort of base men, and most of all from flatterers. Let me repeat here what I say over and over again many fathers: There is no class of persons more pernicious than flatterers, nor any that more surely and quickly gives youth a nasty tumble. They utterly ruin both fathers and sons, bringing to sorrow the old age of those and the youth of these, and dangling pleasure as a irresistible lure to get their advice taken. To sons who are to inherit wealth fathers commend sobriety, flatterers drinking to excess; fathers commend self-restraint, flatterers profligacy; fathers frugality, flatterers extravagance; fathers industry, flatterers indolence, saying, “All life is but a moment. We must live, not merely exist. Why should we give a thought to your father’s threats? He’s an old twaddler with one foot already in the grave, and before long we’ll take his coffin on our shoulders and carry him out.” Another of them posts a drab in the young man’s path, or prostitutes a married woman for him, and spoils and wastes the father’s provision for old age. Detestable is their whole tribe, pretenders of friendship, without a vestige of honest speech, flatterers of the rich but despisers of the poor, addressing themselves with instinctive art to the young, grinning broadly when their patrons laugh, spurious claimants to any spirit, and bastard members of human life, subsisting at the beck and nod of the wealthy; free-born by freak of fortune but slaves by choice. Whenever they are not treated with insult, they feel themselves insulted because then they do not fulfill the purpose for which they are kept. So if any father is concerned for the good up bringing of his children, he must drive away these detestable creatures, and quite as much must he drive away schoolmates who show depravity, for those also are capable of corrupting the most likely natures.

18. Now all these rules concern honour and good profit, but what follows concerns human nature. Take the fathers again: I do not think they should be utterly harsh and austere in their nature, but they should in many cases concede some short-comings to the younger person, and remind themselves that they once were young. As physicians, by mixing bitter drugs with sweet syrups, have found that the agreeable taste gains access for what is beneficial, so fathers should combine the abruptness of their rebukes with mildness, and at one time grant some license to the desires of their children, and slacken the reins a little, and then at another time draw them tight again. Most desirable is it that they should bear misdeeds with serenity, but if that be impossible, yet, if they be on occasion angered, they should quickly cool down. For it is better that a father should be quick-tempered than sullen, since a hostile and irreconcilable spirit is no small proof of animosity towards one’s children. It is a good thing also to pretend not to know of some shortcomings, and to turn the old man’s dull eye and dull ear to what they do, and seeing, not to see, and hearing, not to hear, sometimes, what goes on. Our friends’ shortcomings we bear with: why should it be surprising that we bear with our children’s? Though our slaves often suffer from a headache in the morning, we do not force them to confess a debauch. “You were niggardly once; well, now be liberal. “You were indignant once; well, pardon now. He tricked you once with the help of a slave; restrain your anger. He once took away a yoke of cattle from the field, he once came home with breath reeking from yesterday’s debauch; ignore it. Or

smelling of perfume; do not say a word.” In this fashion is restive youth gradually broken to harness.

19. An effort should be made to yoke in marriage those who cannot resist their desires, and who are deaf to admonitions. For marriage is the most secure bond for youth. One should, however, betroth to his sons women who are not greatly above them either in birth or wealth. The maxim “Keep to your own place” is wise since those who take to wife women far above themselves unwittingly become not the husbands of their wives, but the slaves of their wives dowries.

20. I will add but little more and then conclude my suggestions. Fathers ought above all, by not misbehaving and by doing as they ought to do, to make themselves a manifest example to their children, so that the latter, by looking at their fathers’ lives as at a mirror, may be deterred from disgraceful deeds and words. For those who are themselves involved in the same errors as those for which they rebuke their erring sons, unwittingly accuse themselves in their sons’ name. If the life they lead is wholly bad, they are not free to admonish even their slaves, let alone their sons. Besides, they are likely to become counsellors and instructors to their sons in their wrong doing. For, wherever old men are lacking in decency, young men are sure to be most shameless.

We must endeavour, therefore, to employ every proper device for the discipline of our children, emulating the example of Eurydice, who, although she was an Illyrian and an utter barbarian, yet late in life took up education in the interest of her children’s studies. The inscription which she dedicated to Muses sufficiently attests her love for her children:

Eurydice of Hierapolis
Made to the Muses this her offering
When she had gained her soul’s desire to learn.
Mother of young and lusty sons was she,
And by her diligence attained to learn
Letters, wherein lies buried all our lore.

Now to put into effect all the suggestions which I have given is the province of prayer, perhaps, or exhortation. And even to follow zealously the majority of them demands good fortune and much careful attention, but to accomplish this lies within the capability of man.

Plutarch. *Moralia*. Vol. I. Trans. Frank Cole Babbitt. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927.

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