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PARENTHOOD

The Most Important Profession
in the World!
by
DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.

THE QUEEN'S WORK

3115 South Grand Boulevard

ST. LOUIS 18, MO.

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PARENTHOOD

The Most Important Profession in the World

By DANIEL A. LORD, S. J.

THIS booklet is for parents, future parents, potential parents, and those who have to deal with parents. That covers a large section of the population.

With surprising unanimity the members of the human race continue to become parents or remain the sons or daughters of parents. So the subject of parenthood should have considerable appeal.

The profession of parenthood concerns itself with two groups of people who from the dawn of recorded history have regarded each other with love and suspicion, deep affection and deep distrust, delight, amazement, and misunderstanding.

For instance . . .

An irritated gentleman of considerable importance recently asked, in genuine despair, "I wonder when the young people started to be so rude, so bad-mannered, so inconsiderate, so noisy and generally annoying." His friend, who had a way of seeing the world honestly and humorously, replied, "Since you reached the age of forty-five."

No shift in world politics or domestic affairs will ever change parenthood from being concerned with parents and their children, between whom stretches a long and impassable generation. Fathers and mothers always look on their children down the vista of twenty to forty years. Children look to their parents as to the incomprehensible Olympians—sweet, generous, kind, but oh so difficult to understand and please.

The Chasm

Somerset Maugham years ago said that anyone over forty regarded anyone under twenty as a general nuisance; and anyone under twenty regarded everyone over forty as slightly ridiculous.

Twenty years is not really a long span. Yet it remains a vast time chasm over which the members of each generation gaze at those of other generations with questioning, apprehensive, and misunderstanding eyes. We feel for the people of the American Revolution a kindred sympathy. The Civil War men in their doeskin breeches and the girls in crinoline are attractive and understandable. But a man of forty-five today is likely to regard the youngster of eighteen with awe and amazement. He cannot believe that anyone could be so noisy, boisterous, uncouth, and generally difficult. And the boy of eighteen is convinced that within a month or two his parents will be ready to become museum pieces.

Exaggerated? Think back to the day when you first became conscious of your mother and father. Remember the dear old lady who held your hand? Come to think of it, she must have been all of twenty-eight years old. Recall your astonishment that anyone as old and feeble as your father could still find the strength to play golf or take your mother dancing in the evening. He must have been at that time a **senile thirty**.

Well-Trained Mother

Our experts these days know exactly how men and women lived during the Stone Age (I frankly don't believe them). But their own children baffle them. Parents seem sometimes to live in a state of dazed bewilderment where their children are concerned.

There was for instance the lady who visited my office.

"I took my daughters, two of them, both in college, to New York recently. I turned our money over to them and told them to see that we all had a good time." (A well-trained mother, you see.) "They managed well. But one evening something mysterious started brewing. They dressed carefully but said nothing of their plans for the evening. Finally I said, 'Well where tonight?' My daughters exchanged lightning glances. Then my elder daughter—nineteen—spoke up. 'To tell the truth, we're going to the theater; but you're not going with us. You see, mother, we don't think it is exactly the sort of play you ought to see'."

Now there were two girls who took excellent care of their mother's morals. But you can't blame the mother if she was a little surprised.

Oldsters' Bewilderment

A Canadian priest told me in all bewilderment about an incident that left him utterly at sea about the younger generation. The scene was a lovely Canadian shrine. The priest in charge, though by no means an antique, was growing annoyed at the type of costume worn by visitors to the shrine. So when this morning he saw from his window the tall young lady swinging up the path, his annoyance reached heights. He called his younger assistant.

"Look at that girl!" he cried, indignantly. She was costumed in shorts and the briefest of jackets. "Please hurry out and explain to her that she can't go into the shrine in that disgraceful rig."

Obediently the younger priest went out. The girl herself was hesitating before the shrine. As he approached, she took the lead.

“Good morning, father,” she said. “I do so want to see the shrine. I was just driving past. But I hesitated about going in. You see, father, I haven’t a thing to put on my head.”

The priest was still shaking his head when he told me the incident.

Parents' Awe

There is a fair chance that our age may be known to posterity as the Age of the Well-Behaved Parents. Time was when mother threatened the unruly son in this wise: “Just wait, young man, until your dad gets home and I tell him how you’ve been acting.” The lad was promptly cowed and frightened into obedience. Nowadays a really well-regulated father is threatened with his children: “Oh for goodness’ sake, dear,” the worried wife and mother exclaims, “let them go to the movies. They’ll make life miserable for us if they don’t go.” And they go. Rather than face the indignant wrath of his children, dad gives them the money, bribes them to keep the peace.

It is my observation that the modern mother and father are pretty much in awe of their sons and daughters. They know exactly what their children expect of them, and they try to live up to those expectations. Many parents indulge in brief periods of the administering of discipline; but usually those periods end with the parents’ doing in all docility what their children want them to do.

Afraid of their own children? Yes—and I’ll go farther than that: I find that many modern parents are afraid of the whole job of parenthood. It has them scared to death.

Respect for Life

Parenthood is the most important profession in the world and the noblest natural vocation given to men and women.

The Catholic attitude (and this attitude is the historic Christian attitude) toward parenthood is one of deep respect. That rises of course out of the deep respect which the Christian has for human life. Christians believe that through the exercise of parenthood God's sons and daughters enter the world as He intended they should. Christians believe that parents are the first and natural teachers of children. Christian parents regard their jobs as fundamental to the happiness of the race and the stability of the state.

Indeed as a Catholic I find it easy to bracket the priesthood, parenthood, and medicine as the three great careers. All three are concerned with human life—its production, its maintenance, its elevation.

Parenthood and Priesthood

Once upon a time parenthood and priesthood were closely interrelated. The first priests were the fathers. The home was the first church. The first liturgy of worship was centered in the family. The Pass-over feast of the orthodox Jews retains memories of this interrelation: the sacrificial lamb as part of a family banquet, with the father seated at the head of the table to act as priest.

I mention this fact because priesthood has lost honor among large sectors of modern men. A sacrificing priesthood is today almost exclusively the possession of the Catholic Church. Protestantism lost its interest in priesthood. The pagan priests corrupted their profession to its death. So with the glory of priesthood vanished from the world, one can well worry that the glory of parenthood, long linked with priesthood, may disappear in the same way.

The importance of both these professions lies, as any sensible person knows, in their close connection with human life.

Each morning the Catholic priest goes up to the altar and brings down to intimate association with men and women the blessed Son of God. Because of the priest's profession the streams of grace pass through his hands. This simply means that the priest deals with grace, which is the life of God born into the souls of men.

Medicine and Life

Sometimes we are surprised to find out that pagans have a low opinion of the medical profession. Recently I learned that in the days of Augustus not one physician was allowed in Rome. Part of this contempt was due to the chicanery and quackery of ancient medicine; part of it was due to the low value set on human life. Despising human life, the pagan had little respect for the physician who served it.

Christians have a very different attitude toward doctors. From the days of Luke the physician, medical men have been honored. Because they deal intimately with human life, their work has an almost sacramental character. They help life enter the world. They strive to prolong human life. They are constantly locked in struggle with death, which terminates human life. They beat back the diseases which cut short or make weak and ineffective human life.

Intensive Training

Because of the importance of their professions priests and physicians spend long years in preparation for their lifework. The doctor's education is expensive, exacting, and exhausting. In these days when he finishes his final training as an intern, he usually progresses—in peacetime—to further, specialized education. Until his education is complete, we hesitate to let him—even if he is the brightest young medical student—trim a hangnail or prescribe for

a head cold. His training finally completed, even then he finds the general public reluctant to trust "that young upstart of a doctor" with any but minor ailments.

The goal of the priest is to bring down the Son of God upon the altar and the life of God into human souls. To this end his education is long and exacting. He trains for his career through a careful course in philosophy and science and four years of theology. He hears confessions, bringing life back to slain souls, only after long years of study in how to treat and cure the diseases of the soul. And even after those long and arduous years, after his ordination he is usually sent to a parish in which he becomes a very subordinate curate. The old pastor is very likely to look down his nose at this young, inexperienced, immature priestling and announce, like "Father Fitzgibbons," that the young fellow is not "going my way."

School for Parents?

Long and careful training gives the young man courage to enter upon the difficult profession of medicine or the priesthood.

When we come to parenthood however, the story is very different. What training is there for that career? Yet parenthood is the profession that brings life into the world and then trains that life through all the important years from infancy to completed adolescence. For this tremendously important profession there is almost no preparation at all. Indeed I am tempted to say flatly that the modern young mother and father are devoid of any education that matters when they enter upon this vital career.

Young people are swept into marriage and subsequent parenthood on the tidal

wave of young love and immature romance. They run the course of a typical boy-meets-girl plot, presently are married, later are parents. They find themselves holding in their arms a child they brought into the world, looking at it, and wondering what in thunder to do with or about it.

Something is certainly wrong somewhere if the most vital profession is left to untrained hands and the luck of good will and honorable intentions.

The Child's Utter Dependence

During the war years I came to regard with deep and almost helpless pity the dozens of young mothers who traveled in the wake of their servicemen husbands. They walked through the coaches, carrying babies in their arms, enveloped in a general mist of wistful love and abashed futility. You didn't know whether to worry more about the mother or the child.

Who can question the importance of successful parenthood? In God's plan mothers and fathers collaborate in the one way God devised for the bringing of human life into existence. Then during the long years that follow birth, years vital for the formation or deformation of the human being, the parents' influence is the one that really matters. The child depends utterly upon his parents. He takes his language, his ideals, his morality, his whole outlook on life from them. He goes to the school they choose. He returns from brief hours there to spend the rest of his impressionable life in the sort of home they provide for him. Today compulsory education prolongs the childhood of the race; so today children are for longer periods under the influence of their parents.

The Important Years

During these youthful years the child is gradually moving toward adulthood. Psychologists grow more and more insistent on the fact that everything valuable that an adult knows he learned during those days of dependency. It is doubtful whether after we are twenty-one we can learn any new art or technique. We merely improve on what we learned before we were twenty-one. Some experts push the end of the learning age back to twelve, claiming that we learn nothing after that time. Others say that we are completely formed in all essentials by the time we are five years old. More recently the attitude has been that the human being is shaped for life by the time he is two years old. Before the age of two he has learned to walk, sit, stand, eat, talk; he has made a beginning of culture, self-control, good manners, social intercourse, morality, religious ideals. From the age of two on he merely develops the essentials he has already acquired. The age of two seems very young. But the more you study the matter, the more convinced you are that everything up to that age is incredibly important.

Complete Definition

If you are ever asked—on a Catholic quiz program or elsewhere—to state the purpose of marriage, be sure you give the complete answer: Its primary purpose is the propagation *and* education of the human race. The job of parents is to bring children into the world and by the proper education and training to fit them to lead complete and happy and useful lives. The end product of the sacrament of matrimony is, not babies, but complete human beings. It is through the work of parents that the helpless and unshaped babies born into the world are developed and trained to satisfactory adulthood.

Obviously parenthood is the world's most important profession.

What education is given to these vital professionals?

The Matter of Sex

Among a number of educationists there is much talk of sex education. A properly equipped father and mother could in an hour's competent talk teach any normal adolescent all he needs to know about sex. Nature is quick to learn. The sex impulse is readily responsive to decent direction, and direction is poor unless it is brief, objective, and simple.

Sex education has nothing in the world to do with the business of learning to be an adequate father or mother. And I doubt that the skilled profession of parenthood could be taught in a week or a year, much less in an hour.

So we may rightly pity modern young people. They hurry into marriage on the drive of sex. Too many of them have been told little about the relation between sex impulses and the production of human life. More than likely they have been taught nothing about how to train that human life once it arrives. They are set up in the difficult profession that deals with the production and training of life, and they know nothing about either. They stumble, hesitate, and grope. I think we have fullest reason to regard too many young mothers with gentle pity. I can understand why young fathers have become, along with comic mothers-in-law, figures of fun for the cartoonists.

If We Do It Well . . .

We are not normal human beings if we fail to dislike doing something that we do badly.

We soon drop golf if we continue to dub along in a miserable hundred and fifty. Women who constantly turn out burned and indigestible dinners admit that they hate to cook. A person who knows he has no ear for music will not be quick to jump to volunteer to sing for a gathering.

We dread having to do something that we know we do badly. We are miserably afraid to attempt something that is likely to show us up as incompetent fools.

I have a recurrent nightmare from which I emerge bathed in frightened sweat. In some form I suffer it about three times a year. The scene of the nightmare is always backstage in a large theater. A play is in progress, and through the wings I can see an enormous audience wrapped in that intense darkness beyond the footlights. Suddenly I am tapped on the shoulder, and to my horror I realize that my cue has been spoken and I must walk out onto the stage to play the leading part. The cue is repeated, and I know that there is nothing for me but to walk out and be the target for the concentration of those thousands of eyes.

Ignorance and Fear

I make my entrance, knowing, as I walk from the darkness into the blaze of light, that I do not know a single line of the part I am supposed to play. Indeed I don't even know the name of the play. I stand paralyzed, the lights and the eyes of the audience focused upon me. The other actors toss me cues and hints; I grope, knowing that I have never heard the answering line. They gather about me and through painted lips whisper and hint, and the whispers and hints mean nothing. I stand agonized and sweating—until I wake from the horrible experience, panic making my heart race, a scream formed on my lips.

No doubt there are many learned explanations of that dream; to me it has remained the simple expression of the fact that when I am called on to do something that I don't know how to do I am scared stiff.

Temptation to Side-Step

Thousands and thousands of young people who every year are called upon to play the part of parents know that they are utterly unfitted for the role. They don't know even their lines. They have no idea of what the situations will demand. They may take up their role with a feeling of sick misery. Nature and instinct sometimes rush to their rescue and feed them lines. But almost as often they grow to hate their whole assignment. And when birth-control literature falls into their hands, they seize it with real relief. At last they have found a way to dodge the job that they feel they are doing so badly.

Quite willingly I grant that human selfishness keeps many young people from becoming parents. With others the reason is poverty or the love of luxuries. But after the first baby is born, many a young mother and father decline to accept the responsibility of a second simply because they are afraid of a job badly done. They have come to realize their incompetence. They are parents, and they don't know how to be parents. They gaze at their one child in perplexed embarrassment. And they run away from further exercise of a profession for which they feel completely unprepared and untrained.

Where to Turn?

I am told that when young mothers get together they talk incessantly about their children. They compare and trade feeding formulas. They compare notes on what

they do when their children act thus and so. The male of the species pretends to regard this woman talk as a little ridiculous. As a male I cannot but wonder whether these mothers may not be struggling to supplement their sketchy knowledge and information with what scraps they can pick up from their friends.

To whom shall they go for information, these young parents?

Not to other young friends, who are usually as unfitted for parenthood as they themselves are. To books? Magnificent books are offered these days to parents—and some pretty stupid and questionable books too. Many a writer in pagan fashion regards the child as a little animal, to be trained as animals are trained. Yet even the best book is a tall hurdle—without a teacher. Many a young mother has bought a shelf load of books on child training and has given them up with the first volume hardly cracked.

Parents and Lore

Shall they go to their own parents? First of all rarely do unmarried people, even when they are contemplating marriage, go to their parents with questions like these. A study made some few years ago by the Catholic priest in charge of an important high school disclosed that ninety per cent of his seniors never talked to their parents about anything along these lines. The remaining ten per cent received a little information on sex from their parents. None of the seniors had ever discussed parenthood, its rules and techniques, with their parents.

From my own experience I can say that high-school girls talk to their parents a little more than do boys of this age—but not a great deal more.

Once they are married, girls are likely to run to their mothers for help and advice; this is not so common of men in relation to their fathers.

When young people do consult their parents, too much of the information they get is shot through with folklore. Indeed much of such information with which young people are afflicted might be useful if it weren't fable and might be enlightening if it weren't strict fiction. The doctors of several generations have struggled vainly against the old-wives' tales that pass from generation to generation. For instance... If an expectant mother is frightened by a fire, the child will have a flaming birthmark on his cheek. If she is scared by a misshapen person, the child will be born deformed. If she is frightened by a wild animal, she may give birth to a monster.

Mentors for Parents

Such lore is sheerest nonsense. Doctors with a sense of humor parody this misinformation by wisecracking to expectant mothers that should they be frightened by a bear in the zoo their children will be born with bare feet. Or they joke about the mother who read "David Copperfield" during her period of waiting and her baby was born full of the Dickens.

The information passed on by parents to their children, rare as it is, has not always been very helpful. We can however be grateful for the homing instinct that sends young brides rushing home to ask their mothers for counsel. Wise mothers have funds of practical experience, and married daughters do hurry to draw upon these funds.

The fact still remains that there are no schools for parenthood. Priests are carefully trained in well-organized seminaries. Doctors get their education in medical

schools, the standards of which are painfully exacting. But future parents look in vain for a school that will help them meet and handle the essential duties of one of the most important professions. (Even single courses on parenthood are rare in most schools.)

Delinquent Parents?

No wonder the human race is overrun with children who grew into the kind of adults that stumble through life. No wonder the products of many marriages turn out to be men with little self-restraint and women with scattered brains and jumpy nerves. We all suffer from the children of parents who, knowing nothing of the profession of parenthood, brought into the world babies who remained complete mysteries to their parents during the years that they should have been trained to strong adolescence and competent adulthood.

A famous St. Louis child specialist used to pound the desk in rage whenever he spoke of the society parents whose children he was belatedly called in to salvage. "If the rich of this town," he used to shout, "spent one tenth the time training their children that they give to rearing their horses for the horse show, we'd not have the papers filled with reports of wealthy young drunks and society divorcées and the broken lives and bankrupt careers of those who should be our leading citizens."

Three Important Factors

Any young person who is entering upon the profession of parenthood should know something of the three complicated factors which together are responsible for a baby's eventually becoming a satisfactory adult.

The first of these factors is free will. The second factor is heredity, a convenient name for the equipment that the child gets

directly from his ancestors. The third factor is environment, the surroundings against which the child develops.

The tendency of the Catholic is to put all the emphasis on free will. Catholics have seen free will so carelessly and stupidly denied that they rush to its defense and are quick to insist that free will together with the grace of God are what shape the inchoate human being into the complete and well-developed adult human being.

Free Will

Naturally I myself would be quick to defend free will against any attack on it. I should regard anyone who denied it not merely a thoughtless fool but a perilous enemy of human nature and of society. I might even resort to simple demonstrations of free will. There was the priest who on a ferry from New York met a blatant materialist. The materialist rejected free will—with emphasis.

“Everything is decided for us,” he maintained. “We may feel free, but we are experiencing what is no more than a great illusion. If I am making a ferry trip, it is because I am obliged to do so by a long series of impulses over which I have no control. Freedom is just a hoax. We are no more free than is electricity racing along a telegraph line.”

“Then,” the priest countered, “I’ll give you a simple chance to win a bet.” He took five dollars from his pocket. “Here is a fifty-fifty proposition. My coat has two lapels. In a moment I intend to touch one of them. I myself don’t know which I shall touch. But according to you that action is predetermined. I will have the illusion of being free, but it was long ago decided which lapel I shall touch. Suppose you decide on either the right or the left lapel

and bet me that I shall touch that lapel. If I am obliged to do what I shall do, then naturally it's too late to change. If you bet that I'll touch the right lapel, I'll have to touch the right lapel because that action was decided for me and I am not free. Since I have only two lapels, I must touch one or the other. How about betting me, and I'll let you name the lapel?"

Abstract Versus Concrete

"Oh," said the skeptic, nervously, "in a case like that my theory might not seem to work."

He didn't believe in free will, but he seemed rather sure that no matter which lapel he selected the priest would be perfectly free to touch the other. All the theories against free will explode in the face of our constant use of free will.

Yes men are free—and women have freedom of choice. That is perfectly true and easily proved. But the tendency among Catholics sometimes is to overstress this freedom. Men and women are not nearly so free in some cases as they may seem to be.

For while in the abstract free will is a simple thing, we do not live in the abstract. In the concrete things may be quite complicated.

Slight Details Alter . . .

We can find an illustration in another field of science.

Let's take the force of gravity. A long time ago Galileo went up into the leaning tower of Pisa and worked a simple but most important experiment. He proved to the satisfaction of the scientific world that a ball of lead and a maple leaf dropped to earth both hit the ground at the same rate of speed. If—theoretically—we were to toss a block buster and a cigaret paper

out of a bomber, the theory is that both would fall to the ground at the same second.

The first time one hears this, it sounds ridiculous. Indeed a nervous little kinglet who was told about the theory threw himself to the floor and chewed the carpet in frenzied protest at such nonsense.

"Ah," Galileo hastened to explain, "I am talking about objects falling in a vacuum."

Nature a Consideration

The experiment must be performed in a vacuum, and that makes the difference. Quite clearly if you toss a silk handkerchief and an armchair out of an upper window, they are not falling in a vacuum. And if they are not falling in a vacuum, the currents of wind and the resistance of the air make each object fall to earth at a different tempo. The size of the object and the surface that the object presents to the atmosphere make all the odds. Two pieces of lead will fall at a quite different rate of speed if one is a small bullet and the other a thin sheet of lead that was beaten out under heavy pressure.

When you perform the experiment in a vacuum, the theory holds perfectly. But nature abhors vacuums. So the falling leaf is wafted to and fro and whirls to earth in a leisurely skirt dance, while a baseball falls straight down and hits the ground with a loud and emphatic smack.

If in nature there is no vacuum, so there is in nature no such thing as the abstract. You never find man in the abstract. You never locate a free will operating in a vacuum.

You the Concrete

Let's take a quite simple case. You go to church on Sunday morning and hear an eloquent missionary priest preach. He gives

a most inspiring talk on his mission, sketching the poverty and ignorance of the people, whose characters are nevertheless splendid and who are eager to receive the faith. The little effort that has been made thus far in behalf of these people has turned thousands of erstwhile savages into fine Catholics and extraordinarily worth-while citizens. The missionary concludes with an appeal to you for help in his work. In a burst of generosity you say to yourself, "Henceforth I shall give a tenth of all I earn to his mission."

Certainly that is an excellent act—an act moreover which you were free to make or not make, as you pleased. Nothing forced you. Your own spontaneous virtue motivated your free will.

Yet as you leave the church, you realize that you do not live in a vacuum. A thousand forces begin to play upon you. You walk down the business street and note displayed in a shopwindow exceptional bargains in your favorite wine. You turn in and place an order. The window full of fur coats reminds you that your wife and daughter have both been nagging you for fur coats and that you know you'll have to give in, perhaps to the tune of a thousand dollars.

You Rationalize

Your hand, half without propulsion, touches the heavy envelope in your breast pocket. It is a notice reminding you that you owe a heavy income tax that must be paid by the fifteenth of the month. Suddenly you recall that you have never heard of one of your relatives' having given a large gift to the missions or to charity. It is something that your family regards as quixotic and slightly mad. Then there are your business associates who give to the civic charities and the various city drives

as part of their normal expenses; giving to an unknown missionary would be something they'd regard as bad business and reckless extravagance.

Anyway if you want to meet the right people, you are going to have to join a better golf club — and that will mean money. How in the world will you explain to that expensive family of yours that they are going to have to cut down their budgets to make it possible for you to contribute ten per cent to the missions? Won't your wife, suspicious creature that she is, decide that you've been up to something and that this ten per cent is conscience money?

"The World, the Flesh . . ."

And so it happens that by the time you reach home your generous ten per cent has dropped to your usual ten cents; a thousand influences, intangible but very effective, whittled your magnificent determination down to the customary sum of your mission donations.

No one will deny that you were free to give whatever you wanted to give. Nobody will deny that you have a good many reasons not to give the ten per cent. Your surroundings, the traditions and customs of your family, your own personal desires and inclinations cut and cut and cut your original splendid determination, until there was little or nothing left.

For you don't live in a vacuum, you see. You live in a world that is always pulling and pushing and rubbing and pumicing your free will until the difference between what you will and what you accomplish is the difference between a symphony playing Beethoven and a penny whistle squeaking a pitiful wisp of a tune.

Free Will and the Age of Reason

Returning now to this baby in the arms of his parents, we know that in theory he is endowed with a free will.

At the ripe age of six years the normal child reaches a point at which he uses his free will to choose the right and reject the wrong. He is now free to pick the good and spurn the evil. He is a free agent, and God's grace uniting with that free will makes it possible for him to choose to be a grand man—or she a splendid woman.

That is the theory. In practice things work out very differently.

I am not taking time to explain the influence of original sin upon the workings of free will. That goes back to our first parents—and only incidentally to our individual father and mother. Parents cannot control that—except in so far as they see to it that by baptism the original sin is washed from the soul of the child.

Heredity

But the other two elements, heredity and environment, depend upon the parents in an almost frightening degree. And since these two factors are the ones which are going to pull and tug and push and drive against the child's free will, we'd be smart to pause and give these elements more than a passing glance.

The most amazing studies have in recent years been made of the whole question of heredity. Here again the field is so vast and the investigations are so scientifically accurate that I can make only the most general references to the subject. But even these generalities should be enough to convince parents and future parents of their importance to their children.

Mother looks down at the baby and says, "Look! he crooks his little finger just as

you do." The father grins sheepishly. Actually the baby's gesture is like his father's. The father says, almost lyrically, to the mother, "The baby has your eyes and hair"— and that is much more than a mere figure of speech. We know that in the chromosomes, those tiny life carriers that are passed on by the mother and the father to their children, are ancestral qualities in a startling degree. The famous Hapsburg lip, the unfortunate tendency of the Bourbons to be bleeders, quite as much as the shape of a family nose or the length of a paternal lip may be passed on to the children. The whole complicated Mendelian law in all its modifications is based on the qualities which parents contribute to their children before even those children are born.

But the part of the parents is simpler than that.

Health Inheritance

Today we are constantly being told of the danger of social diseases that are passed on to innocent children by sinful parents. We are distressed that from weak bodies of mothers and corrupt bodies of fathers should be born children physically predestined to sickness and lifelong infirmity. There is a whole series of diseases that we call "congenital," diseases that arise from germs and tendencies that come from the father or the mother or both father and mother. We know that the health of the child for years and years will be influenced by the health of his parents at the time he was conceived and during the months of his development in his mother's womb.

One of the most interesting studies should be that of heredity. Musician geniuses are usually the children of musical mothers and fathers. Often a strain of drunkenness is seen to run through a fam-

ily. "That is the family weakness," we say, in easy explanation of criminal conduct.

You Can Bequeath

Some time ago a young woman who wrote to me told me that she was soon to become a mother. "What shall I do during the months of waiting for my baby?" she asked. It was a question that one could answer simply. "Become as charming and as gracious a person as you can," I wrote her. "Think beautiful things. Read beautiful literature. Listen to lovely music. Pray well and often. Steep yourself in the wonderfully beautiful things with which God has filled the world. Make your body strong and vigorous and healthy. Then when your baby is born, you will be able to know that you have given him out of your body and mind, your strong emotional life, and your beautiful soul the finest endowment that a mother can make to her newly-born infant."

Mary the Model

That advice was oversimplification, I confess. But it was written with a thought to the beautiful years that prepared Mary to be the Mother of God. I was thinking of Mary's youth spent in high virtue, the service of the Temple, the reading of the world's greatest Book, the nurturing of that strong and beautiful body and that magnificent soul that were to be worthy to mother the Son of God. Mothers cannot do better than think of Mary and walk the way she walked during the years she was waiting, without knowing it, for the hour of Christ's coming into her womb.

The Father's Role

We of this age are inclined to forget the importance of fathers. The tendency in America is to subordinate the father to the

mother, to place all the emphasis on the mother. We still believe, we Americans, in the importance of pure mothers. But there does not seem to be much importance attached — at least in practice — to pure fathers. As I write, I am thinking of those villainous misleaders of young men who in some of our armed services encourage the future fathers of the race to risk the vitiation of bodies and the corruption of emotions by the use of the powers of paternity in gross and vicious associations. These misleaders may have high rank in the service; they are terrible enemies of the future of our country, which depends fully as much on good, wholesome, clean, strong fathers as on virtuous mothers.

George Bernard Shaw was giving equal importance to the mother and to the father in his famous retort to the brash lady who said to him, "We really should have a child. What a wonderful child it would be if it had my looks and your brains." Shaw answered: "My dear lady, think what a child it would be if it turned out to have my looks and your brains."

Unwanted Children

Marriage as far as the children are concerned is a fifty-fifty partnership. Both mother and father pass on to their children an equal share of inheritance. Neither can dodge that responsibility.

Beautiful and ennobling to the child then is conception out of pure love as against conception out of sheer brute, animal passion. Many children who are these days born into the world are blighted before birth by the fact that neither father nor mother wanted them. The father did not wish them to be conceived; the mother resented their coming. I have met boys and girls who somehow knew this about their birth. "I was never wanted" is a remark

that I have heard too frequently. And I could not fail to realize the lasting twist that this knowledge had given their natures.

Born out of Love

One need not go into the possible consequences to a child born of drunken parents, even conceived during a time of drunken stupor. One cannot fail to see the vitiation of character that is almost inevitable when the mother and the father are both weak, vicious, corrupt, evil.

Lucky the children whose parents pass on to them pure blood and fine qualities. Lucky the children born of pure mothers and fathers and blessed from the instant of their conception with a heritage of virtuous living and noble ancestry.

Unfortunately children cannot pick their parents. With a smile we recall the often-quoted mother who approached the great baby specialist. "How can I make sure," she demanded, "that all my children will be geniuses?" "That," he replied, "is simple. Your children will all be geniuses if they have the great good sense to pick out the right father and mother."

The mention of genius makes us pause. For undoubtedly even the swift reader is going to think of great musicians born of drunken gypsy fathers and women of the streets, of poets whose conception took place in garret or gutter, of magnificent painters who never knew who their fathers were.

Questionable Advantages

But if the young woman who was just quoted made one basic mistake, it was her desire to see her children geniuses. The old saying is that the line between genius and insanity is a thin one too, too often crossed. Geniuses have never been a particularly happy brood—or a normal one. As a rule

they are transcendently wonderful in a single line of activity, and often they are fools in all else. They find it hard to adjust themselves to normal living. They make notoriously unhappy marriages. They write poetry that scales the heights—and they themselves live in the depths. They are often sick in body... a Chatterton or a Keats; they are notoriously unhappy... a Beethoven or a Tschaikowsky; their productions may be immortal, but they remain impractical children, like Johann Strauss or Anton Dvorak.

Real geniuses often make me think of race horses or dogs trained for dog-show exhibitions. The race horse is trained to incredible speed. But he is nervous, jumpy, cannot sleep at night, must be treated like a baby. If you turned him loose to compete with a plow horse, the plow horse would outpull him, outwork him, and in the end outlive him. And were the correctly bred show dog turned out in an alley, he would lose every time to the cur and the mongrel in the rough-and-tumble business of keeping alive and fighting off the enemies in and of the canine world.

Basic Physical Equipment

Sometimes genius has meant merely elevated and ennobled humanity. Sometimes it has meant a kind of incandescence, a quick burning of nerves and emotions and physical strength and mental powers that is as beautiful as the quick, sizzling flame created by a butterfly moth's plunging into a lighted candle—and as destructive. Parents are wise if into their private litany they write, "From children who are geniuses, dear Lord, deliver me."

It is certainly beating the obvious to state the conclusion, yet I must pause. For the young man and woman about to enter the profession of parenthood are simply

failing in common sense if they fail to realize that they and they alone pass on to their children their basic physical equipment.

The young man and woman who today are doing the greatest service for the country are doing nothing spectacular, but what they are doing is vitally important. They are building strong, vigorous, pure bodies. They are filling their minds with noble dreams and aspirations that they can pass on to their children. They are developing firm wills that turn instinctively toward virtue. They are achieving the full physical, mental, and emotional development that marks mature human beings. Thus they enter marriage ready to assume its obligations and certain that they are transmitting to their children as fine equipment as lies within their powers to give.

Heredity . . . Environment?

Yet if there could be a choice between good heredity and good environment, the modern tendency would be to prefer the good environment. I recall from my early youth my father's good friend who used to say, with a boastfulness we never resented, "We are going to pass on to our children, my wife and I, so fine a heredity that they will be able to go anywhere and mingle in any type of society, brush against vice and walk in the gutters without being deflected from fine living."

It was a noble boast. After his only son was born, we watched and smiled. Never had we seen any other parents so safeguard a child against any of the environmental factors that might hurt his character. That father watched over his young son's food, reading, clothes, friends; he picked with the utmost care his schools, his vacationing places, the sports in which he was to take part. He thought highly of

his own blood, but he did not wish to see it risked in an environment that might poison or corrupt it.

Environment Against Free Will

The plain fact is that environment can destroy most and perhaps all of free will before a child has reached the age of reason. If a boy and a girl are born into the city's slums, if they are brought up in filth and squalor and see nothing but vice and drunkenness around them, if impurity has become a commonplace of their lives before they are five years of age, if theft is their routine entertainment before they are four years old, if they know only the evil and the ways of the evil and live with the sinful in the stench of their sins, it is very difficult to see how they can have any freedom left to become noble and pure and virtuous—when theoretically freedom of will should be exercised from the age of six on.

Slums . . . and Wealth

The wise humanitarian asks that the slums be destroyed not only for the sake of the slum dwellers, even though he pities them and knows the doom that hangs over their children. The wise humanitarian asks that the slums be destroyed for the sake of those who do not live in the slums. For out of those slums come the murderers, the thieves, the racketeers, the villains of our cities. From them walk the vicious women who corrupt the bodies and souls of youth. If the well to do did not make war on the slums out of pity for the slum dwellers, they should lay siege to them and wipe them out to protect themselves against the criminal hordes that rise generation after generation out of these incubators of vice and evil.

Don't think for a moment however that evil environment is necessarily the monop-

oly of slums. I was walking in the most fashionable section of Havana years ago. In the public park were playing a lovely-looking group of little boys and girls, beautifully dressed and guarded by two odd-looking nurses. The nurses were uniformed in the fashion of Mayfair, but they were laughing and whispering together in a fashion that belongs to the wide-flung environs of evil.

Nullifying Factors

Finally they gathered their charges—the oldest could not have been four years old—and started to walk across the boulevard. In the center of the boulevard was a small nude statue. As they passed, first the nurses and then each of the little children paused and made an obscene gesture in the direction of the statue. These were the children of the rich and privileged. An environmental factor had entered in that had taught them the external gesture of vice before they knew the meaning of the word.

Naturally one cannot refer to the slums without thinking of those magnificent men and women who have come out of the Maxwell Street police district of Chicago or the east side of New York. But it is interesting to see in each case how some factor nullified the environment that would have been destructive: the success of a mother or a father working to keep virtue alive amid vice; the child's falling into good hands and being protected. As sometimes happens in a strange sort of experiment, while the weak and pitiful fall and die, the strong battle against the environment, resist it, struggle with the free will they undoubtedly possess, and remain fine and strong. Their very struggle with and against environment has achieved for them their greatness. It's a risky business though, and only the great of soul can meet those temptations and

fight them successfully with bare hands and the grace of God.

First Fourteen Years

The young mother and father ought to realize that upon them—and almost entirely upon them—depends the environment in which their children will be reared. During those first six crucial years of the child's life the home and other environments selected by the parents are practically the only environments he knows. For the next eight years he attends a school that his parents select, and his friends can be largely the sons and daughters of his parents' friends or friends that the parents encourage him to cultivate.

He lives surrounded by the books his parents buy and the magazines they bring home. He hears the songs they sing, the radio programs they enjoy, the music they play on their gramophone. His speech becomes a careful echo of their speech. He sees the pictures they think important enough to hang on the walls of the rooms. He listens to their conversations with their friends, and he is closely watchful when they entertain.

Creators of Environment

That is why a mother and a father have to face the tremendous responsibility of knowing that they are creating before the child is born and during all the years of the child's dependence the environment that is the most important natural element in the shaping of his life.

Often I am asked, "Is it safe to take an unknown child from an orphanage and reasonable to hope that he or she will become a fine man or woman?" It is a question which serves to indicate clearly the importance of environment.

Of course most adopted children these days do not come from entirely unknown parents. The institutions in which these children are housed before they are adopted know much about the children's ancestry and can give guarantees that the particular child is not cursed with an insane mother or a moronic or hopelessly alcoholic father. The child in a fine environment stands a wonderful chance of becoming a fine man or woman. Environment is the big element. And environment depends upon the adults who create that environment.

Poverty

Two types of environment seem to be almost by nature destructive. One is tempted to say that both types are equally destructive; extreme poverty and extreme wealth.

There is today a lot of careless praise of what is called poverty. If by poverty is meant the decent, clean, economical living that marked the holy house of Nazareth, then poverty is magnificent.

But often the poverty that is praised today means something very different. It means filth and subnormal living. It means the lack of decent food and respectable clothing. It means unsanitary housing and no playground other than the street. It means a kind of jungle living dominated by the code of sheer survival and characterized by a continued hunger of body and soul.

This kind of poverty easily nourishes schools of vice and colleges of criminals. Against its drab and ugly background the gangster looms as a victorious rebel who defied the handicaps of his environment and fought his way to the driver's seat in a Cadillac.

Wealth

Any legislation that destroys living conditions like these deserves our heartiest support. It is a waste of words to tell the readers how horrible an environment this is for children.

But we in America who cultivate reverence for money and are convinced that the wealthy are the lucky ones should be alert to the fact that extreme wealth can be almost as vicious an environment for a child as can extreme poverty. Father John Ryan once startled the economic world and the consciences of easygoing Catholics by stating that it was a crime for any parent to leave his children more than \$250,000 each. That may have sounded extreme. Today the sum would be in value about half a million.

A little extra thought about the pitiful sons and daughters of the very rich however justifies Dr. Ryan's statement. There have been in America rich families who overcame the vicious environment of great wealth by a Spartan rearing of their children. They did not let their children even know that they were rich. They safeguarded them against the softening and debilitating effects of too much money by treating them as if they were the children of the lucky middle class.

To Have Too Much . . .

Even then it was difficult to keep them from the danger of the destruction that hangs over the "silly sons of the idle rich." Christ had our times in mind quite as clearly as He had His own when He told how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven . . . or for that matter to achieve the decent enjoyment of life.

The perfect environment that can be created by any young mother and father

today is that of the wholesome Catholic middle class.

In the days when it was fashionable to sneer at America's Main Street, William Allen White reminded us all that whatever we might think of Main Street we'd be smart to fight tooth and nail to keep alive the virtues and traditions of Pine Street and Cedar Avenue. Out of those streets of plain and honorable living, out of those homes where mothers and fathers took their responsibilities seriously and loved their children enough to train them carefully came all the great men and women of America. (How true that is if you look today at the men and women who dominate American life for its good.)

Middle-Class Virtues

Because the middle-class home is the citadel of virtue and patriotism and religion and sanctity, because there are parents who earn good livings and keep comfortable homes, who love the nicer things of life but are not tricked by the gaudy things, who make parenthood a real profession, we can boast political leaders and generals and admirals and writers and scientists and doctors and great lawyers and saints and scholars and fine teachers—all that the totalitarians hate and try to destroy. Fascism and communism both war against the middle class. They hate good fathers and mothers and decent homes. For they know that these are and always will be the protectors and centers of virtue, courage, initiative, decent ambition, love of freedom, self-reliance, love of God, and service of fellow men.

Tomorrow . . .

Hence the great nation of the future will be the nation that has no extremes of wealth or poverty. It will give wide oppor-

tunity and a proportionate share of the wealth to as many as possible. It will have no proletariat and no small working class. This is not a communist dream; this is the idea of Christian democracy.

Modern parents have of course a terrific struggle to build the right sort of environment for their children. The creation of that environment is a life career, a vital career. They must struggle against a thousand competitors for their children: the movie theater, the radio, the roller-skating rink, the drugstore, the hamburger joint, the tavern, the dance hall, even the lavish school that wants to take the child almost entirely away from the parents.

Aids and Abets

But working on the side of the Catholic parents these days are powerful forces. No one can imagine what the world would be like today had not our children been given the opportunity for frequent communion. Catholic parents who are wise value this aid and make it part of their children's environment. The Catholic educational system has risen to a strength and power that make it the most potent ally of the parents. Home and school can work together toward the creation of an environment which can be the most powerful auxiliary of the Church.

The modern child has tremendous advantages in health, good food, facilities for exercise, healthful living conditions. It is rather terrifying to realize how far parents have failed to use these advantages. The disillusionment that the nation feels over the indifferent and bad health of the people should make parents use what science has to offer in this regard. Medical discharges from the service were a frightful indictment of those parents whose children were under-fed and undeveloped. What can we

think of the nation's parents when the occupational disease of young people is found to be unstable nerves and mental and psychic disorders?

Parenthood a Career

All I have said here sums up to one fact: The profession of parenthood is the most important profession in the world.

It is painful and ludicrous to realize that young people today regard parenthood as something that needs no more than a willing heart and an acceptance of God's cooperation.

Angelo Patri, who makes a very comfortable living by advising parents to such an extent that he has attained a national reputation on the care and education of children, recently wrote:

"Rearing a family is a lifetime task, no days off but plenty of overtime. It is not easy after a day's work to plan for a pleasant evening for four or five children, yet this is required of all good fathers and mothers. Quiet for lessons must be provided for, time for fun must be set aside, and, as they grow older, little treats of lunches and suppers provided.

"Every father and mother are busy. Every hour can be filled with something worth while, but there's nothing in the world more worth while to a father and mother than their children.

"To see them grow in health, to watch their characters develop in spiritual health, to see them become self-sustaining inside and outside the home, is enough to repay them for all the sacrifice of time and interests they cost."

Ways to Proficiency

So more power to the young people who face the profession of parenthood seriously

and with a determination to master its rules and learn its duties.

More power to the schools that put into their curriculum courses and lectures and laboratory practices that will touch on such important subjects as food and cultural reading; health and recreation; homemaking and the development of high critical judgment regarding entertainment; understanding of the growing mind and the technique of reaching the mind; the arts by which the home is made sturdy and an appealing competitor for the movies, the playground, the corner, the lavish school; a strong and enthusiastic faith that can be passed on to the children's sensitive souls; good manners; the way to teach good morals.

God's Desire

The young person who has a high regard for this most essential of professions will find ways to become proficient in it. Schools and associations which appeal to young people will help them reach professional rating in that profession.

God waits upon the parents of the world as He waits upon no one else. He depends upon them for His sons and daughters. The future of His created and redeemed world depends upon what those children receive from their parents. Christ must regard as humanity's most effective enemies those who in this generation have ridiculed faithful mothers and found devoted and unselfish fathers more than a little funny. He must regard as a triumph of the devil the war carried on against decent, constructive, happy homes.

I believe He will regard as His friends and allies those who help young people in whatever way possible to attain their full stature of success in the profession of parenthood.

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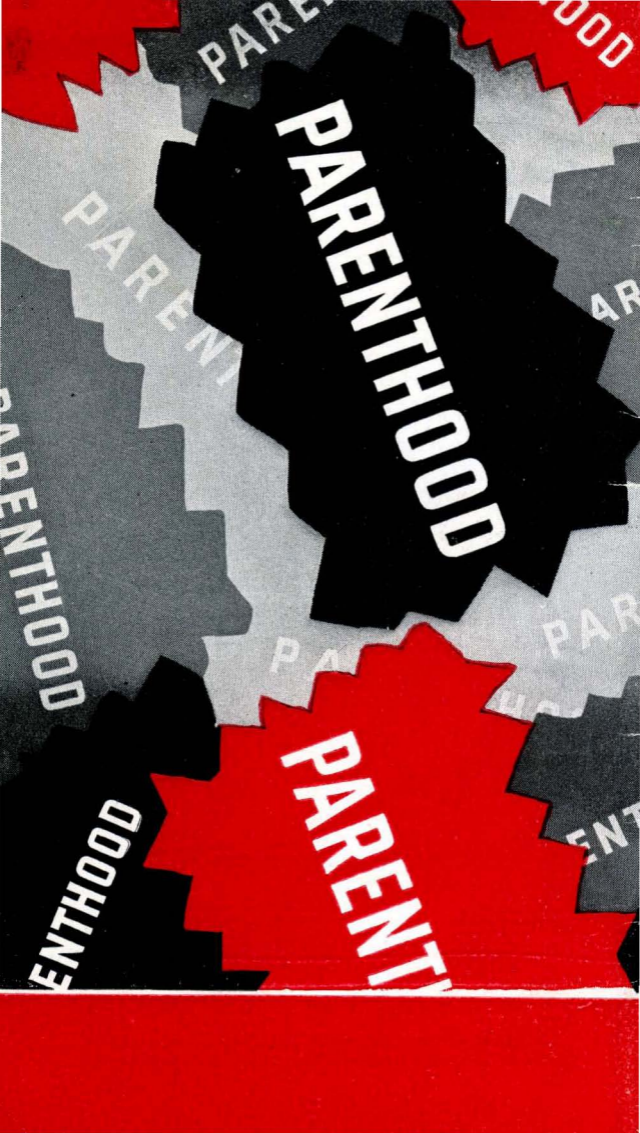
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