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Who is Responsible for the Child?
A Teacher Closes the Series

By LOUISE CRAWFORD

It was with a reluctant feeling that I finally consented to offer a modest contribution for this issue of the Iowa Homemaker, that splendid growing publication, which is so replete with worthwhile topics, written in the most original style by the various students of its editorial staff, as well as by those of the faculty who are recognized as authorities in their special work, or by those who have gone into larger fields of service from Iowa State College.

The topic assigned is weighty, indeed and I feel at the start that I have overestimated my ability to write anything of interest, especially after reviewing the preceding well-written articles.

I may state that I have had the blessed privilege and experience of motherhood, and added to that, have as a teacher shared with parents the responsibility for a time, of their little ones during the most impressionable years of their lives.

Parents first of all are responsible for their children; in fact, the supreme responsibility, the greatest obligation, the highest duty that comes to men and women, comes to them as fathers and mothers, and it is said this responsibility does not seem to diminish until the quarter century mark of the offspring. The mother has a much larger portion during the earlier years, the father's influence coming on gradually as the child matures.

Each generation finds new problems, new responsibilities—so that it is far better for the parents to assume the control of their children than to shift much of it upon the grandmother's shoulders or any other relative who may be a member of the household. Some of these dear old grand women are quite insistent upon using their theories of rearing a family, but the chances are that the mother's generation will have fewer changes from the present than that of two generations back. Even mothers with well-meaning grandparents, as a general rule, are quite too lenient for the child's good, and consequently the parents have a constant struggle to keep near their ideals of proper training.

Some parents spend too much time and thought on the physical and material side of the child's make-up, but lose sight of the things which enter into the making for an appreciation of the more beautiful things in life. They also have a fear of some bodily ailment or torturing him when sometimes the moral are being undermined by bad associates.

Teachers come in for their big share of responsibility, especially where most children regard the teacher as a fair model for them to imitate. And yet when we calculate that the teacher has the child but one-fifth of his waking hours, and the other four-fifths is spent in much larger proportion of his recreation hours, that the teacher finds it difficult to see the effect of her moral efforts.

The more the parent is a teacher, the better the child's education—the more the teacher is like a parent the better the results at school. Parents' opportunities for affecting character are much greater than those of a teacher because theirs is a continuous influence and a more intimate one. Parent-teachers associations are doing a vast amount of good. When the splendid opportunity is given to two many of the troublesome problems are now solved with ease, and a strong mutual feeling of interest and sympathy now exists between them.

Some of the effects of the irresponsibility of parents may be gleaned from the statistics which tell us that 82 per cent of children are born with a chance to be vigorous men or women, but only 17 per cent grow up without some handicap—so that 65 per cent are cheated by someone's lack of responsibility.

Too long automobile rides, and the taking of children to inappropriate places because they have no one to leave them with is a sign of great selfishness on the parents' part. Keeping the children up till father comes home at night so that he may have a romp with them before bedtime, makes hours for slow variable—fine for the father, but children then have too excited to go to sleep readily, and sooner or later develop one of those extremely nervous dispositions. They rattle the child's desires when they know it is not for the best, because the child's crying makes them nervous, or they allow them to run about when they have fever, as it is such a task to keep them in bed.

Another father wants it quiet in the evening so that he can make out his daily paper, mother wants peace, too, with her bit of fancy work for a pastime, the movie seems like temporary relief at least, from the children, and the parents go on quite unmindful of the neglect of their responsibility to make the God-given gifts a comfort to them in their declining years.

Herbert Hoover, in one address at St. Louis, said, "Parents should realize that the joys and privileges of parenthood must be paid for in a good deal of sacrifice on their part, this not only applying to the mother, but to the father as well."

I like the thought of score cards for parents by which they can measure themselves and find out in what respect they are wanting in the cares connected with the proper rearing of a family.

Children are quick to discern weaknesses in parents as can be illustrated by this conversation between a mother and child. The mother said to her little son that she did not altogether like one of the habits of a little companion of his, whom she had heard speak quite rudely to his mother, and was afraid her child might fall into the same habit if he continued to play with him. She was surprised when the child replied, "Oh, never to you, mother." "But if you could hear how saucy his mother is to him sometimes you'd not blame him so much." He quickly recognized the contradiction in thought, and realized that his mother was aiming to be a model parent to him, and assuming all the responsibilities she could for his welfare.

So may I close by quoting: "Train up a child in the way he should go. And when he is old he will not depart from it."