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PARENTS' REVIEW:

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

Lear and his Daughters.

By Dorothea Beale, *Principal of the Cheltenham Ladies' College.*

Cordelia— "I love your Majesty
According to my *bond*."
King Lear—"Better thou hadst not been born,
Than not to have pleased *me* better."

How simple at first sight seems the relation of parent and child—dependence on the one side, obedience on the other—yet with increasing years, how full of complications become the problems which require solution, and these can never be worked out unless we get at underlying principles. Is it presumption for one who stands on neutral ground to offer some remarks?

The reciprocal rights and duties of parents and children have furnished the theme of the most stirring tragedies. Had Agamemnon a right to sacrifice the innocent Iphigeneia for what seemed to him the good of his country? Was the resentment of Clytemnestra justified, so that the outraged mother might repudiate the relation of the wife, and avenge her child? Was it the duty of Orestes to be the avenger of blood upon his father's murderer—upon his own mother? These and such like questions were asked by Greek tragedians. And the greatest tragedian of ancient times brings before us the question in another form, when he shows us the rebel Titan defying the Father of gods and men. Kindred spirits have

worshipped at the shrine of Prometheus, but surely the Prometheus Unbound would have shown that the Titan suffered because he erred, because he thought to bless men by breaking the laws of Heaven, because he would not wait until the Lord of the bright sky should see fit to place within man's reach the gift, which only to the law-abiding is a beneficent friend, but to the lawless a devastating fiend,—and so it was needful that Hephæstos, the beneficent fire spirit, should forge the chains, and that force should bind the Titan. The two greatest tragedies of modern times, Hamlet and King Lear, turn upon the same subject. In Lear, especially, Shakspeare has shown us lawlessness in many forms, lawlessness with all its terrible consequences. He has dealt chiefly with the parental relationship, but also with the cognate relations of king and subject, of husband and wife, of master and servant, with the ties which bind us to king and to country, the bonds of piety, loyalty, patriotism. He has brought out the underlying principles, and given no uncertain sound. Yet he does not blurt out the reply, for he is no hard dogmatist; he is such a consummate teacher, that he compels us to ask our own questions, and draws from our hearts the confession, that only one answer can be given.

It is clear that whenever this subject of parental relationship is discussed, that many are, what Milton would have called "unprincipled." They cannot give the grounds of the faith that is in them; and some are so on principle; they think that an obedience which depends upon law cannot be an obedience of love. Yet, surely the sense of duty is the support of love, when we are tried by the faults of others, or our own.

> Thou who art victory and law
> When empty terrors overawe!
> From vain temptations dost set free,
> And still'st the weary strife of frail humanity.

The want of a clear perception of the true basis of filial duty was recently brought home to many by the tragedy enacted in our midst, when two lads deliberately planned to beat out the brains of their own father in a lonely lane, and on their condemnation for murder, the Home Secretary was besieged by sympathisers, who desired that the culprits should be spared.

There are two kinds of spiritual ties—those of affinity or

relationship, and those of personal sympathy. Under the first we include the obligations which bind us together as members of one family, state, nation. We cannot renounce these relations without being "unnatural"; loyalty to the chief, the king, is not dependent *only* on the character of the ruler; the fact that he stands in a special relation to us, gives him a claim on our allegiance; we feel patriotism, though we deplore the wrongs done by our country, and we all shrink from the traitor who deserts to the enemy. All such relations impose obligations, and rest on what I may call an "eternal," relation not merely a personal, a transitory one.

There is another form of love, which is both more and less than the first, that which comes from personal sympathy, that which is kindled in us by the vision of goodness. This a parent cannot have of right—it is not obtained by inheritance—it cannot be given at will—it must be won by him who is worthy. Relations sometimes claim this, when they have not cared to deserve it, on the mere ground of relationship.

There is also something which goes by the name of love which is its absolute opposite—is mere selfishness. It is the desire not to give but to receive—the wish to be loved, the greed of love.

Let us consider what is the source of true love, of that feeling which makes us long for, passionately desire the good of another, that which Tennyson has so beautifully described in "Locksley Hall":—

> Love took up the harp of life, smote all its chords with might,
> Smote the chord of self, which trembling, passed in music out of sight,

—that feeling, which makes all thought of self vanish, and quickens us with an energy of desire that another, that all, may be blest; which makes us suffer with those that suffer, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Men have framed theories that it is a "refined selfishness," either on the part of the individual who loves, or on the part of the community, who force upon him the delusion that what is for their advantage is good for him. But even the theorists of these schools have found their speech too narrow for their thought, and have admitted the old friend under a new name. They have to acknowledge "altruism" as an original principle of human nature. But the new word is not large enough for the old

thought, since love includes self too, only not self isolated, but embraced in a larger Self in whom all live, in that larger unity in which the many are truly one; a unity shadowed forth in the order of the starry heavens, which gives to man's thought an intelligible universe. The conscience and the heart refuse to believe, that for each man his little self is the centre of the moral, the spiritual universe—that there is no central life, no quickening power, in whom all live and move. We can account for this "unreasonable," this passionate desire for the good of all, only by the faith that we are all the children of God, that it is the love of God that we feel in our heart, moving us to love even as He loves. "I said, ye are gods, and ye are all the children of the Highest." The universal life and love breathing in each, is shadowed forth in the universe, which is its sacrament,—it is the presupposition of all thought; it is the reason of the intellectual world; it is the supreme good of the moral Kosmos, and finds expression in that death to self, that new birth into the Divine the all-embracing, which reveals in man the very life of God.

Now typical parental love, whose supreme joy is the good of the child, is the express image of the Divine. It does not depend on the goodness of the child, but upon the fact of the filial relationship; it will gladly spend and be spent, desiring nothing in return but the development, the perfection of the child; it is as that of the All-Father who is kind even "to the unthankful and the evil, who sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"; who does good, not for our righteousness but for "His righteousness sake."

And the reciprocal of this divine love is piety; it is due to Him to whom we owe our being, due to His wisdom and sovereignty, due from the Finite to the Infinite, from the creature of time to the Eternal; and those are foolish and presumptuous who strive to break His laws, who, ignorant and feeble, doubt whether the Judge of all the earth does right.

Resting firmly based on this divine reverence stands the bond which unites parent and child; this the Romans rightly called piety too. They did not call it piety on the part of the parent, but they might, for gravitation is one whether we regard it from the earth's surface or from the central orb; so the duties of parent and child are reciprocal, and we might even speak of God's piety towards His own creation.

It is the thought of this all-embracing divine regard which binds us to reverence the life He has given. The All-Wise has committed children to their parents, and from this sacred trust nothing can release them—no sin, no unworthiness. The All-Father hateth nothing that He hath made, but is ever drawing the sinful soul that rejects the bonds of love, by those of discipline. So the parent has never a right to cast off the child, as Lear did Cordelia, nor the child the parent, as his unnatural daughters did their father. Lear taught his daughters impiety towards himself, when he drove out Cordelia. He wanted personal love rather than piety, and chose that which "pleased him better," instead of that which was the true, the eternal foundation. He chose that which depended upon his own deserts, which was lost to him, when his daughters could point to the many faults of his old age and weakness, the seeds of which had been planted in prosperity, and which bore such bitter fruits when the sunshine was withdrawn.

Parental love is like the divine love, but exercised under creaturely limitations of submission to the law of God, and limited by the law of man, by social relations. As the joy of the parent is to give, "hoping for nothing again," so the joy of the child is to receive. It can give in return nothing but love and gratitude and obedience; it can only seek to fulfil the good wishes of those who love, by becoming such as they would have it. This affection is more than a mere personal claim; the marriage tie is of the same kind, for in such an union the personal relationship is transfigured and made eternal; and the obligations, are of the same kind, which unite us to country, to king, to the institution we serve, the master whose bread we eat, to any whose colours we wear. The terrible consequences of the repudiation of these relations—of lawlessness in its many forms, are made apparent in Lear. The tragedy is like some marvellous fugue in which kindred themes are interwoven, all leading up to the final cadence in which they die.

We have in the first scene a few preluding notes, which give the theme, which moves on with marvellous and intricate variations to the very end.

First, Gloucester's lawlessness, then Lear's lawlessness; these are the cause of all the misery and crime; out of this

grew inevitably the whole evil harvest, because they failed to recognise the unchangeable, divinely-appointed, bonds which none may burst asunder, "chords too intrinse t'unloose." We may not measure our duty by the deserts of others. In the eternal world, the world of moral laws, ordinances are no less binding than those which rule the material heavens.

The play deals then, not with the subject upon which every novelist of to-day exhausts his ingenuity, the bond of sympathetic personal affection, but with the eternal principles established by divine decree; these form an eternal bond, forged not by the individual, but by the Supreme; and, therefore, the breach of them is *Lèse Majesté* against heaven. These instincts, which make the "whole world kin," are given to the sons of men, not merely as a binding force, but as an apocalypse of God's own love—to disregard these is to bring upon oneself moral sickness, and even death.

There is also the more personal love, which is kindled in us by the sight of wisdom and goodness. We see the light, and it sets our heart on fire, and because we love the goodness, we love the person in whom we see it enshrined. We are inclined to say it is nobler than the first, but each is perfect of its kind; to God we are bound by the ties both of piety and of love; to persons sometimes by one, sometimes by the other.

It is when the two loves are one, when the parent is beloved for his own sake, when the sovereign is the shepherd of his people, when he is worthy of love, to whom we are bound by the ties of piety, of loyalty, that these two currents meet. And it was the double feeling which prompted the joyful cry of the psalmist: "God is the King of all the earth, God sitteth upon His holy seat."

In the opening words of the play, we are startled by the coarse jest of the libertine, Gloucester: What right has such an one to the sacred name of Father? Can such expect or claim filial love? One who has mocked at the most sacred relations? The miserable father, suffering at the hands of his cruel son, weeps at last for his sin tears of blood; and is at length redeemed only by the filial piety of Edgar, and brought to confess

> The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make whips to scourge us.

We think at first that Lear is loving, as we see him stripping himself of all and asking only in return tendance, and to be loved; we cannot but feel at first that Cordelia might have been less stiff and hard in speech:—

> I love your Majesty
> According to my bond; nor more nor less.
>
> Good, my lord,
> You have begot me, bred me, loved me; I
> Return those duties back, as are right fit:
> Obey you, love you, and most, honour you.
> . . . .
> Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
> To love my father all.

But Lear's was not true parental love; he did good to them not for their sake, but for his own, and when he got no return he thought he could break the bond, and he taught his two daughters the fatal lesson, that the bond between father and child was not one of eternal obligation, but can be broken at will. But Cordelia felt that as no gifts could purchase, so no offences could destroy it—she alone distinguishes truly between that filial love which was his as her father, and that sympathetic love which she could bestow only on the noble France, the elect of her soul.

And as the play goes on, Shakspeare contrasts this love—loyalty or piety—with personal affection, and shows us that Lear did wrong in craving for that which we may forfeit by our faults, instead of accepting that which will endure whether we are "better or worse; in sickness or in health, till death do us part."

Lear did not truly love, though he was fond of his daughters, and while all was well, they may have been fond of him, but if he was no more to them than another, they might for his faults cast him out. In Cordelia and Edgar we see the enduring nature of this true filial love. As Cordelia is the guardian angel of Lear, so is Edgar of Gloucester, when poor, blind and miserable, he finds his way to the king.

Then Edgar's soul is turned to the blessed work of healing the wounded spirit; no injustice that he had suffered could, he felt, release him from the duty to his father; he made it his study "how to prevent the fiend"; and when the wretched Gloucester would have cast himself from the perilous cliff, he is

indeed an angel to bear him up. Other variations of the theme are woven into the scheme of this wonderful drama. There is the faithful loyalty of Kent, persistent to his king through all trials and injustice, serving him faithfully in spite of his faults, because he was his king—

> Royal Lear,
> Whom I have ever honoured as my king,
> Loved as my father, as my master followed,
> As my great patron thought of in my prayer.

We have the caricature of this in the evil loyalty, the "honour among thieves," which binds Oswald, the villain, to her whose servant he was. The tie which binds Albany to his guilty wife forbids him to be the avenger; and patriotism restrains him from joining the foreign army, though the cause of France was just.

Lastly, we see the evil consequences even in the faithful, the loving Cordelia, of her wrong education; she found evil rampant in her country, and piety moved her to disregard patriotism. Alone, she would have drawn to her side the noble Albany, the valiant Kent, the true-hearted Edgar, but her error drove the faithful Albany to act with Edmund, and was the cause of her own destruction.

Thus in this great tragedy is a lesson taught which dynamiters, and the lawless of all sorts, may take to heart, that our duties are not measured by the deserts of those to whom we are bound. If Lear was afterwards more "sinned against than sinning," it was his teaching, his example, which bore one kind of fruit in Goneril's imperious nature, stiffening her will; another in the weak character of Regan, rendering her passive to evil—we see active cruelty in the one, in the other the still more cruel suggestions of weakness. Who would not rather receive the fierce blows of Goneril, than the stiletto wounds of Regan? She does not originate schemes of wickedness as her sister and Edmund, but she yields to their suggestions, and the evil seed springs up in rank luxuriance.

The parent is to the child in its early years in the place of God; if he do not present to the child the vision of justice and love, then is introduced into his soul moral disorder and confusion—he must lift the eyes of the child, to the perfection which he himself worships, even as the poet has taught us—

> I looked on Beatrice, and she on heaven.

We all who have the care of children need to beware of that Lear-like love which demands, instead of seeking to deserve, personal affection. Let us all be thankful that there is a holy bond independent of our faults, which is the salvation of the family and the State; let us desire to win and to add to that hereditary crown which we inherit as teachers, rulers, parents; that crown of personal love by which we are able to bless; which we desire not for self, but for the children's sake: even as the All-Father bids us love Him—not only because it is our duty to love God, but because He is good, and only in loving Him can we be blest—only in full sympathy with Him can we know the love of God, can we be filled with the fulness of God.

If these great principles were to rule our hearts, if the sacredness and the eternal character of this love were felt, it must show itself in mutual respect and forbearance. The tyrannical voice would not be heard by the little child, though respect and obedience would be required. And there would ever be shown that respect for the child's conscience, that reverence for the freedom of the will, which comes from our standing consciously side by side in the presence of Him with whom there is no respect of persons—which, may we dare to say it, causes God to permit sin, rather than "crush to earth the children of men," to break the will, to destroy that which is the glory of our humanity.

If we could always see things in the light of God's presence, we should not have parents, affectionate as Lear, driving their children from them. We should not have religious parents making religion hateful to their children, because they do not see truth under the same forms; and causing a breach where there was only a temporary misunderstanding "provoking their children to wrath", saying in act—

> Better thou hadst not been born,
> Than not to have pleased *me* better.

Earnest parents sometimes shut away children from the air and sunlight by which alone they can grow up healthy—exact from their children promises which they ought to have left to the conscience of the child. A parent who recognises his true relation will feel he has no right to put forth mere arbitrary decrees, like a Saul to Jonathan; he will feel that he must, as

far as possible, be the exponent to the child of the will of God; and very early the young child is able to *feel* (what it may be long ere he will make part of his intellectual consciousness) the difference of the obedience exacted to an external law, to an alien will which is felt as interfering with his freedom, and that obedience which frees him from the bondage to self, and draws him by the cords of love, because the will both of parent and child are embraced in the one will, which makes for righteousness.

Still God's providential government of the world does confer on the parent a special authority — the fact that the child is, unlike the lower animals, for many years of a long period of immaturity, dependent on the parent, establishes the responsibility, and, therefore, the right of control, and enforces on the child the duty of submission. Later, the years of patient forbearance, of careful education, of parental self-denial, do claim from the child, when no longer dependent, gratitude, respect, obedience, and "loyalty"; the law of filial piety is written on the "fleshly tablets of the hearts."

Obedience under normal conditions is not repugnant, but really pleasing to the child, yes, even when his wishes are thereby frustrated, and punishment inflicted. We all naturally desire in times of weakness the support of a righteous will stronger than our own, a will severe and unbending, which "will not spare for our crying."

In the case of young children especially, it is right to insist on prompt obedience to lawful authority, to demand *assent*, even without *consent*, to require an obedience like that of the soldier to his captain; but the object should be, not to substitute our will for that of the child, but to educate the child into the friend, who with advancing years understands us better. The parent's duty is not to think for the child, except in so far as the child is unable to think for itself, but to appeal to and to educate the conscience, and to enforce obedience to it, when the child, knowing what is right, needs the support of external law to discipline his feeble will. The most fatal error is to crush the will of the child, to try to hinder a mature man or woman from doing what seems right. Resentment is the offspring of tyranny; but reverence is given to the ruler, however severe, who has taught us to be severe to ourselves.

And the far-reaching consequences of a right apprehension of the parental and filial relation in early life is of incalculable importance in helping men to realise the wider relations.

> The child that scorned a Father's care,
> How shall he kneel in filial prayer?
> How an all-seeing guardian bear?

Clearly the family relation is only a special case of the universal; it is the "form" in which each of us realises the relation to the All-Father; as every planet in our Kosmos moves in obedience to the central orb, yet exercises its own attractive powers upon the sun and all its kindred stars, so in the "Kingdom of Heaven," neither does the omnipotence of the All-Father exert a power inconsistent with the will of the creature; yet all of us must render obedience to laws which we do not understand; so only shall we find the discipline of sorrow not altogether grievous, and be saved from that state of rebellion against the inexplicable, which darkens the lives of many to-day.

On the other hand too, the relation of the soul to "Him in whom we live and move and have our being," embraces all those special relations which bind men together as men; all those relations of mutual benefit and service, of rule and obedience, which come into every relation of life; it is the underlying principle of righteousness or justice; the δικαιοσυνη of the "Republic" which makes us render to all their due.

A child is bound to recognise the "divine right" of the parent, and for this reason the parent is bound to rule not arbitrarily, but as one responsible to God for the higher good of the child. It is his privilege to help the child to realise, through loving reverence to the earthly father, that kingdom of heaven in which both are embraced—that law of righteousness, which is perfect freedom. And only when we have so died to self, that we can give up our children absolutely to God's will, can we truly bless — when we can say to them—not as a mother of old, "Now, therefore, my son, obey *my* voice,"—but as the noblest of earthly mothers:— "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."