

# **Relations Between Parents and Children**

Clara Dixon Davidson

# Table of Contents

<u>Relations Between Parents and Children</u> .....	1
<u>Clara Dixon Davidson</u> .....	1
<u>SUPPLEMENTAL</u> .....	6
<u>HOW TO MAKE LIARS OF CHILDREN;</u> .....	6

# Relations Between Parents and Children

Clara Dixon Davidson

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- SUPPLEMENTAL
  - HOW TO MAKE LIARS OF CHILDREN:

The wisdom of acts is measured by their consequences.

The individual's measure of consequences is proportionate to the circle of his outlook. His horizons may lie so near that he can only measure at short range. But, whether they be near or far, he can only judge of consequences as proximately or remotely touching himself. His judgment may err; his motive remains always the same, whether he be conscious of it or not.

That motive is necessarily egoistic, since no one deliberately chooses misery when happiness is open to him. Acts always result either indifferently or in furtherance of happiness or increase of misery; one who has power to decide and intelligence to determine probable consequences will certainly give preference to the course which will ultimately advance his own happiness.

The law of equal freedom, "Every one is free to do whatsoever he wills", appears to me to be the primary condition to happiness. If I fail to add the remainder of Herbert Spencer's celebrated law of equal freedom, I shall only risk being misinterpreted by persons who cannot understand that the opening affirmation includes what follows, since, if any one did infringe upon the freedom of another, all would not be equally free.

Liberty without intelligence rushes toward its own extinction continually, and continually rescues itself by the knowledge born of its pain.

Intelligence without liberty is a mere potentiality, a nest-full of unhatched eggs.

Progress, therefore, presupposes the union of intelligence and liberty: Freedom to act, wisdom to guide the action.

Equal freedom is the primary condition to happiness.

Intelligence is the primary condition to equality in freedom.

Liberty and intelligence acting and reacting upon each other produce growth.

Thus growth and happiness are seen to be, if not actually synonymous, almost inseparable companions.

Where equal freedom is rendered impossible by disproportion in degrees of development, the hope of the higher units lies in the education of the lower.

## Relations Between Parents and Children

Children, because of their ignorance, are elements of inharmony, hindrances to equal freedom. To quicken the progress of their growth is toward the equilibrization of social forces.

Then, liberty being essential to growth, they must be left as free as is compatible with their own safety and the freedom of others.

Just here arises my difficulty, which I freely admit. For the enunciation of this principle is the opening of a Pandora's box, from which all things fly out excepting adult judgment.

Who shall decide upon the permissible degree of freedom? Who shall adjust the child's freedom its safety so that the two shall be delicately, flawlessly balanced?

The fecundity of these questions is without limit. Of them are born controversies that plague all the unregenerate alike, whether they be philosophers or the humblest truth-seekers. Christians escape this toilsome investigation. Their faith in rulership simplifies all the relationships of life. Their conduct need not be consistent with equal freedom, since obedience, not liberty, is the basis of their ideal society.

Reluctantly I admit that during infancy and to some extent in childhood others must decide what is for a child's welfare.

The human babe is a pitifully helpless and lamentably ignorant animal. It does not even know when it is hungry, but seeks the maternal breast as a cure—all for every variety of physical uneasiness; therefore the mother or nurse must inevitably decide for it even the quantity of nourishment it may safely receive and the length of time that may intervene between tenders of supplies. That these judgments are far from infallible is well known. One mother of five living children confessed to me that she had lost one child, starved it in the process of learning that her lactation furnished a substance little more nutritious than water.

Grown older, the babe does not know the danger of touching a red-hot stove. How should it know? It is without experience. The mother's impulse is to rescue the tender, white baby hand. Is she wise in interposing this restraint? I think she is not. If the child is to have bayoneted sentries always on guard between it and experience, it can only grow surreptitiously. I say "bayoneted" advisedly, since the hand interposed between the baby and the stove not infrequently emphasizes its power with a blow which gives more pain than the burn would have given, while its value as experience may be represented by the minus sign.

The theory that it is the duty of parents to provide for the needs of their young children, and of children to obey their parents and, in their age, to support them, is so generally accepted that I shall rouse a storm of indignation by asserting that there are no duties.

While a cursory glance at the subject may seem to show a denial of equal freedom in the refusal of a parent to support his child, a more careful study will reveal the truth that, so long as he does not hinder the activities of any one nor compel any other person or persons to undertake the task which he has relinquished, he cannot be said to violate the law of equal freedom. Therefore his associates may not compel him to provide for his child, though they may forcibly prevent him from aggressing upon it. They may prevent acts; they may not compel the performance of actions.

It will, perhaps, be well to anticipate at this point a question sure to be asked during the discussion.

Is it not aggression on the part of the parents to usher into existence a child for which they are either unable or unwilling to provide?

Much may be said in reply.

## Relations Between Parents and Children

First: In any association differences of opinion would arise as to whether it was aggression or not; these differences would imply doubt, and the doubt would make forcible prevention, even if practicable, unjustifiable.

Second: This doubt would be strengthened by consideration of the fact that no one could be able to predict with certainty nine months previous to the birth of a child that at the time of its birth its parent would be unable to provide sustenance for it.

Third: It would be further strengthened by the knowledge that death is always open to those who find life intolerable, and, so long as persons seek to prolong existence, they cannot properly complain of those who thrust it upon them. A young babe does not question whether the milk it feeds upon flows from its mother's breast or from the udder of a cow, and should it, with dawning intelligence, feel disturbed in mind or distressed in body by reason of its relationships toward its environments, it will, by then, have learned the art of dying.

And now, having opened a gulf which swallows up duty, shall I be able to allay the consternation of those who have substituted the worship of this for their repudiated worship of another unsubstantial God?

It has seemed to me, that generally speaking, people's love for their children is in inverse proportion to their love of God and duty. However this may be and I will admit that, although parallel and pertinent, it is not directly in the line of inquiry I am pursuing there is left to us the certainty that increasing intelligence will more and more incline individuals to face the consequences of their own acts; not for duty's sake, but in order to help establish and preserve that social harmony which will be necessary to their happiness.

Even in the present semi-barbarous condition of parental relations it is exceptional, unusual, for parents to abandon their children, and the two distinct incentives to such abandonment will be removed by social evolution, leaving the discussion of the obligation of parents to care for their children purely abstract and rather unprofitable, since no one will refuse to do so.

The two motives to which I refer are poverty and fear of social obloquy. Married parents sometimes desert their children because they lack abundant means of sustenance; unmarried parents occasionally not only desert their offspring, but deny them, in order to escape the malice of the unintelligent who believe that vice is susceptible of transmutation into virtue by the blessing of a priest, and virtue into vice by the absence of the miracle-working words.

Recognition of the law of equal freedom would nearly remove the first, render the second more endurable, and finally obliterate both, leaving parents without motive for the abandonment of offspring.

That parents usually find happiness in provision for the welfare of their young is well known. Even the habits of the lower animals afford evidence sufficient to establish this position, and, for convenience, postulating it as a principle, I shall proceed to examine how far parents defeat their own aims by unintelligent pursuit of it.

Food is the first, because the indispensable, requisite to welfare, but unintelligent and indiscriminate feeding results in thousands of deaths annually and sows seeds of chronic invalidism in millions of young stomachs.

Clothing is also considered indispensable, and is so in rigorous climates, but the primary object of covering the body, which is surely to make it comfortable, is usually almost wholly forgotten in the effort to conform to accepted ideals of beauty ideals often involving peculiar departures from natural forms.

Shelter is a necessity which is often accompanied by such overzealous inhospitality to fresh air as places choice between in-door and out-door life in uncertain balance.

But the sturdiest pursuits and the dreariest defeats and failures are found in educational endeavors.

## Relations Between Parents and Children

The child comes into an unknown world. His blinking eyes cannot decide which is nearer, the lighted taper on the table or the moon seen through the window. He does not know that a Riverside orange is larger than the palm of his tiny hand until he has learned the truth by repeated efforts to grasp it. He has all things to learn: ideas of dimension, weight, heat, moisture, density, resistance, gravitation, all things in their interrelations and their relations to himself. And what bungling assistance he receives in the bewildering path through this tangle of truth!

He learns that God sends the rain, the hail, and the snow down from the sky; that his little sister was brought from heaven by an angel and deposited in a doctor's pill-bag. The tie of relationship between her and himself remains a mystery. Anthropomorphism lurks everywhere. The unseen hands moves all things. He asks many questions which his teachers cannot answer, and, unwilling to confess their ignorance, they constantly reiterate: "God did it," as if that were an answer.

Turning from unsuccessful inquiries concerning natural phenomena, perhaps the child perceives, in a dim way, his relations with the State, and, as God posed before him in the realm of philosophy and science, so do all replies to his questions now end in omnipotent government.

"Why does no one prevent the man with a star from clubbing the other man?"

"Because he is a policeman."

"Who said that a policeman might strike people?"

"The government." "What is the government?"

"The government is my son, you will learn when you are older."

"Who pays the policeman for clubbing the other man?"

"The government." "Where does the government get the money?"

"You will learn when you are older."

Usually at the age of six years old, or even earlier, a child's education is practically abandoned by its inefficient parents and entrusted to the church and the State.

The state uses money robbed from the parents to perpetuate its powers of robbery by instructing their children in its own interest.

The church, also, uses its power to perpetuate its power. And to those twin leeches, as "Ouida" has aptly designated them, to these self-interested robbers and murderers, are the tender minds of babies entrusted for education.

Herbert Spencer has shown that the status of women and children improves in proportion to the decline of militarism and the advance of industrialism.

The military spirit is encouraged in multifold way by both church and State, and little children and women, in their pitiable ignorance, assist in weaving nets that shall trip their own unwary feet and those of other women and children to follow them.

A spirit of subordination is inculcated by both church and State, which contemplate without rebuke the brutalities of authority, excepting in some cases of extraordinary cruelty, and teach the helpless victims that it is their duty to

## Relations Between Parents and Children

submit.

The most commonplace tenets of these powers would seem absurd and outrageous if expounded to an unprepared adult mind and stripped of all those devices of language by which the various promptings of shame, good nature, ignorance, or deceit impel us to soften the truth.

Say to such an [sic] one:

"Murder by the State is laudable; murder by an individual is criminal.

"Robbery by the State is permissible; robbery by an individual is a serious offence against the person robbed and also against public welfare.

"Assault of the parent upon his child is justifiable; assault of the child upon the parent is intolerable."

He would not look upon you with the simple confidence of a puzzled child, attributing the apparent incompatibilities to the feebleness of his own understanding.

But to the child these bewildering social sophistries, flowing into his mind from sources that appeal to his trust, and presenting with ambiguities of language that serve to increase its difficulties, must appear hopeless labyrinths of mystery.

Thus at every step from infancy to adult life the progress of the child is checked by the incapacity of those who desire to advance its welfare.

Inherited tendencies and the training which they themselves received incline parents to become inexorable masters and to commend most the conduct of that child which is easiest enslaved.

Parents beat their children, elder children beat younger brothers and sisters, and the wee ones avenge their wrongs vicariously by beating their dolls or their wooden horses.

Through individual revolts against the general barbarity, revolts of increasing frequency and power, humanity gradually evolves above actual application of its savage principles. But these revolts against savagery, when led by emotion, often result nearly as disastrously as savagery itself.

Reason must be the basis of all enduring social growth.

When reason shall have learned to rebel against inequalities in liberties, and when this mental rebellion shall have become quite general, then will people have passed beyond danger of relapse into savagery.

Then parent and child shall not be master and slave, a relation distasteful to reasoning people, but they shall be friend and friend. There will be no restraints imposed except such as are absolutely necessary, and they will not take the form of blows and will be removed as early as possible.

Examples of such restraints as I mean are:

Detention from the brink of a precipice or an open well or the track of a coming locomotive, or of one child from striking another.

Parents who recognize the fundamental principle of happiness through freedom and intelligence will, generally speaking, achieve results proportionate to the degree of their success in harmonizing their lives with this principle. The greater their intelligence the higher perfection will they reach in the interpretation and application of the law of equal freedom, and in preparing their children to attain harmonious relations with their environment.

## SUPPLEMENTAL

### HOW TO MAKE LIARS OF CHILDREN:

I have said that infants have all things to learn. It would seem, and would be, superfluous to repeat a fact so well known, were it not true that most people credit little people with so much more knowledge than they could possibly have acquired in the given time. I have heard, not once but many times, mothers accuse young children of falsehood when I fully believed that the apparent mis-statements were due in part to the little ones' weak grasp of the language which they attempted to speak and partly to misinterpretation of facts. Even grown-up people do not look upon the simplest incident from exactly the same point of view; yet they expect from mere babes perfection of accuracy, and, being disappointed in this unreasonable expectation, accuse them of falsehood, and not infrequently worry them into admitting fault which has, in reality, no meaning to their dim understandings. But after lying has come to have meaning, the little mind becomes indifferent to truthfulness, finding that punishment falls the same, whether it inspire truth or falsehood.

Thus the child is made a liar by its parents' ignorant endeavor to teach it regard for the truth.

But worse mistakes are made by those parents who daily conversation with their children furnishes examples of untruthfulness. Who has not been frightened into obedience by tales of a bogie-man, a Chinaman, a black man, or a Santa Claus with his rattan stories which do triple injury by fostering cowardice, class-hatred, and lying?

To teach a child to steal:

Carefully lock away from him all fruits and sweets. Allow him no money for personal expenses. If you miss anything, accuse him of having taken it. If you send him out to make purchases, count the change with suspicious care when he returns. If he has lost a few pennies, accuse him of having spent them for candy. If you never buy candy for him, this will teach him a means of supplying himself, and probably your next accusation will be true.

Strike children and they will learn to strike each other; scold them and they learn to quarrel; give them drums and flags and uniforms and toy guns and they desire to become professional murderers. Open their letters, listen to their conversations with their young friends, pry into their little secrets, invade their private rooms without knocking, and you make them meddlers and disagreeable companions.

I have said that it is not the duty of children to obey their parents or to care for them in old age.

The following facts bear on this position: The life of a child is usually merely incident to the pleasure of its parents, and is often an accident deeply deplored by both. Even when conception is desired, it is still for the pleasure of the parents. If it were possible, which it is not, to conceive of a life given solely for its own happiness, its parents taking no pleasure either in the sexual relation or in the hope of offspring, the child could incur no responsibility by the opinions or the acts of its parents.

After its birth, the child does not say:

"Give me food, clothes, and shelter now in exchange for food, clothes, and shelter which I will give you in your old age," and could he make such a contract, it would be void. A man cannot be bound by promises he made during his infancy.

The question of obedience I pass, since high-evolved parents cannot be obeyed, because they will not command.

On careful thought the removal of the idea of duty will be seen to be less startling than it must at first appear to those who have accepted without question the dogmas of authority. Mr. Cowell has called my attention to the fact



## Relations Between Parents and Children

that the love which most people have for their parents or foster-parents is evidence that few wholly lack lovable attributes. During the long years of familiar companionship between parents and child ties are usually formed which cannot be broken while life lasts, not ties of duty but of affection; these render mutual helpfulness a source of pleasure. If they be lacking, a self-respecting parent would choose the shelter of an almshouse rather than the grudging charity bestowed by his child under the spur of a belief in duty.