

How I Brought Up My Five Children

(By Mrs. ALFRED E. SMITH, Wife of the Catholic Governor of New York.)

Mrs. Alfred E. Smith, wife of the Governor of New York, has written a most interesting article on the subject indicated, which will appear in the March issue of the *Woman's Home Companion*. Among other things she says:

The first thing to be said about bringing up five children is that they are five times as easy to bring up as one child.

Much has been written about the country's need of large families and the mother's duty of bearing and rearing them; but if a task be a pleasure as well as a duty why not emphasise its pleasant aspect? The more children that came into my home, the happier home became—and the lighter my responsibilities. A woman is bound to experiment in bringing up her first child, and if he remains the only child she may have too much time for experiment. She becomes self-conscious and her self-consciousness affects and infects her boy or girl. Besides, how wasteful it is to learn the job of motherhood with one child and then never to put one's proficiency to the test with any other!

If I, if any mother of five children, were to answer truthfully the question of how we brought them up, we would say: "They themselves helped!" In little and big ways, my children brought each other up. Things that I taught Alfred jun. and Emily, my oldest son and daughter, they in turn taught Catherine and Arthur and Walter. And the little ones kept their elders from growing careless.

A Mother's Lessons.

One of the lessons which the mother of several children soon learns is that their goodness—or "badness"—is so much a matter of health and of habit. Health itself depends on habit.

There was no secluded, sound-proof nursery in that little apartment of ours. There was no nurse—there wouldn't have been a nurse even if we had had a place to put her and the money to pay her wages. I took care of my children myself; it is a pleasure which I cannot imagine leaving to others. But being the mother of one's children should not mean being their slave. When it was time for my babies to go to sleep, they were laid down in their cribs, in a darkened room, and they went to sleep. I didn't rock them; I didn't sit beside them; there was no succession of wailing calls for my presence. I started them with the right bedtime habit and they kept it up. I nursed them, of course, and thus their food habits started right.

I did all my own work when my babies were little, but it was so planned that I could take them for their outings at regular times. Their habits made them healthy, and I had to contend with little or none of that peevish fretting which, in children, is usually traceable to strained nerves or to some other physical maladjustment.

It never occurred to me, and I know it never occurred to my husband that there was anything in the world which we wanted more than our children. Simply regarded as an

entertainment, they take the place of so much that childless couples find necessary for their enjoyment of life. My children have always interested me. Spending the evening with them has given me greater returns in pleasure than a theatre or restaurant could offer. My youngest boy, Walter—my "baby," although he is twelve now—is a whole vaudeville show in himself! I do not mean that I think children should be flattered, or their precocity exploited—although praise is fully as useful as blame in dealing with them. But because their father and I have always shown that we liked them as well as loved them, that we enjoyed their society, that they added definitely to our happiness, they have, I believe, "played up" to our appreciation of them. The subconscious thought that they were a "trouble" or a "trial" has never poisoned the air they breathe.

A Dual Responsibility.

No woman however hard she tries, can keep the sun shining in her home—alone. The title of this article on "how I brought up my children" ought really to read, "how we brought up our children." The children's father has helped so much in their bringing up.

He is never so happy, I think, as when he is spending the evening with them at home, and he has had that habit ever since they were tiny babies. I cannot imagine how a mother brings up her family with an absentee father who spends not only his worktime but his playtime away from home.

My husband could bathe and dress our babies as well as I could—and he did it often. He says that one of the proudest purchases of his life was the small carriage and pair of goats, for which he laboriously saved the money when Alfred and Emily were little.

He has helped me to impress the children with the importance of their school work. I never could laugh, as some mothers do, if a boy or girl brought home a bad report. After all, doing their school work is for the time being their job in life and I have always tried to make clear to them that no one has a right to slack his job. That is exactly how their father feels about it; if possible, he feels more strongly on the subject than I do, because he couldn't have the schooling he provides for his children. One of our boys tried to argue the point with him, hinting that education wasn't "so much" because father didn't have it—and now look at father!

"I had the luck to be one out of a million," the Governor told him. "You're not running such a chance—you're to have an education." He was thinking of this interview, I know, when he wrote in his 1923 message to the New York Legislature: "Anybody desiring to have a proper understanding of the necessity for an education need only talk to the man who was denied it."

Home-life the Secret.

Sometimes it seems to me that nine-tenths of the secret of bringing up a family of children sensibly lies in bringing them up in the

home. Are not many of the developments of modern young life which worry mothers traceable to outside influence, to pleasures and friends not intimately associated with the family life? Of course, if a father and mother spend most of their time out of the home the children will follow suit. Or if the minute children enter their home they are hushed and repressed then, too, the boys and girls will stay at home at little as possible.

I decided when my children were babies that I would keep them at home not by force, but by attraction. Home, to them, has always meant "good times." It has meant a welcome to their friends; the door is ever open to the boys and girls my boys and girls like. Home has meant simplicity and laughter and good-natured teasing, impromptu children's parties, after-dinner "sings" in which my husband and myself join, putting on the phonograph records and pushing back the rugs whenever the youngsters want to dance, lengthening the luncheon or dinner table to include any child guest. One of the features of our life in Albany which we all have enjoyed is the motion-picture machine the Governor had installed in the Executive Mansion, to give us home movies every night. The friends of all the children have the habit of dropping in.

Advantages of Early Marriage.

One advantage, it seems to me, of marrying early and of not putting off one's family is that, even when they are young men and young women, father and mother are young enough to play with them. There is no desire on the part of my young people to attend questionable parties, since we all enjoy our pleasures together.

When they went out to school entertainments I went with them—not as a bored chaperon but as somebody who wanted to go to the party. And so I have always known what they are doing, who were their friends, not because I spied on them, but because I shared with them.

I played with them and they worked with me. The old adage that "many hands make light work" can come true in every big family if the mother begins right with her babies. When I asked five-year-old Emily to wipe the forks and spoons, or sent Alfred on an errand to the grocery, they didn't mind. It was like "playing house" to them. They helped take care of Catherine and Arthur when these two came along, and all of them had a hand in bringing up my youngest boy, Walter.

Even after we had more money and therefore there was less work for all of us, I always insisted that each child should have certain duties or tasks, for the performance of which he would be held responsible. The younger boys, for example, must look after their pets; we have almost a menagerie in Albany.

There is a monkey, three coons, an alligator, turtles, goldfish, canary birds, chickens, gold and silver pheasants and two baby lambs. Then both Arthur and Walter have their ponies, to which they are devoted and of which they take all the care even down to ordering the hay; the Governor has a police dog and I have my Pom.

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