

PARENTHOOD.

BY THE EDITOR.

FROEBEL'S motto, "Come, let us live for our children," should be adopted as a maxim by all parents. Parents that cannot make up their mind to live for their children have no business to have children. Children are not dolls; they should not become toys for our amusement and diversion; children are pledges; the possession of children implies duties, and the fulfilment of these duties demands not only a painstaking labor and watchfulness, but also much discretion and wisdom.

The obligation of educating children exercises a most beneficial influence upon parents, and the proposition to discuss "the education of parents by their children"¹ is not as paradoxical as it seems. We may say that no one, neither man nor woman, has grown to mental and moral maturity until he or she has been confronted with this noblest of all duties, the care of bringing up children. Carus Sterne² says :

"Every child requites much of the love bestowed upon it by the parents, by making them better and more perfect beings than they were before its advent into the family. In fact, the highest polish, the finishing touches of education, are given people neither by home, school, nor church, but by their own children. Should they be so unfortunate as not to have any, they will experience difficulties in replacing this lacking factor in the education of their affections."

Frequently sexual love is spoken of as the factor that exercises a civilising influence upon man; but Carus Sterne, "at the peril of exposing himself to heresy in poetical matters," declares that on the contrary it engenders cruelty, produces destructiveness and

¹ This is the title of an article by Carus Sterne, which appeared in *The Open Court*, Vol. I. Nos. 22-23.

² Carus Sterne is the *nom de plume* of Dr. Ernst Krause, of Berlin, a well-known German author of scientific and popular-scientific works, his most celebrated work being *Werden und Vergehen*. He is counted among the foremost evolutionists of Germany, and did not fail from the very beginning to emphasise the moral significance of the doctrine of evolution.

brings about beneficent results only when resulting in a firm union, demanding reciprocal surrender and self-sacrifice. The religious aspirations of mankind develop from the relation between parents and children. Says the same author :

“Out of parental and filial love there develops, even in immature minds, a universal love for humanity. The infant becomes the Saviour—the earthly father becomes the prototype of the all-wise, all-bountiful Father in heaven.”

Protestants as a rule object to Mariolatry as pagan. They are aware of the pagan features of a literal belief and are therefore disgusted with their Roman Catholic brethren. But belief in the divinity of motherhood contains no less truth than the belief in the divinity of fatherhood. Protestants, as a rule, believe in the latter, and are therefore not aware of the Protestant paganism that results from a sensual and grossly literal interpretation of the belief in God the Father. The family relation is not dual, but trinitarian. It is not parent and child, but father, mother, and child.

Carus Sterne, too, touches upon this point, saying :

“The early endeavor to elevate the mother into the realm of the divine is a deeply-felt and psychologically well justified factor in the development of Christian dogma. It was thus that the mother with the infant on her lap was made the chief picture at the shrines. The “Holy Family,” so typically portrayed by Raphael, wins all hearts, even at this day, in Protestant countries, for it justly makes the nursery the sanctuary which produces and constantly feeds the pure flame of love of man and of God.”

The possession of children is a blessing, and the joy that parents may derive from them is immeasurable. It would nevertheless be a grave mistake to think that such happiness can be had simply through the procreation of progeny and by indulging, simian fashion, in a love of one's own offspring. The bliss of parenthood has to be bought with many cares, with sacrifices, and with far-seeing forethought.

It is a common observation that the character of people changes for good the moment they become parents. The average man is thoughtless and perhaps even frivolous, but as soon as the duties of parenthood approach him, he begins to reflect and becomes considerate. Now he weighs his words and takes life more seriously. Many who never before gave a thought to the problems of religion, because they are lukewarm and do not care to have a settled opinion, pause for the first time in their lives and ask themselves whether they had better teach belief in God or unbelief. The moral views of people assume a decidedly more definite form when they think of their children, and our behavior is influenced

by the idea that we set with our habits an example to our youngsters.

What a wonderful plan it is of nature to split up the evolution of mankind whose life in its entirety forms one uninterrupted line of progress, into innumerable sections of individual lives. We could very well imagine a different arrangement. The individual and the race might coincide, and we should then have the growth and evolution of one immortal personality, in the place of an immortal race broken up into a progressive succession of mortal individuals. There would be no death in the dispensation of the unlimited life of such a race-individual; nor would there be any birth, and mankind would not need starting life over again with every new baby; there would be no need of education; no need of love. But where would the interest in life remain, if this mankind-individual lived through centuries and millenniums without being obliged to continue its existence through begetting and educating children.

Life would be unpalatable if it were not broken up into limited pieces and constantly started over again. An immortal mankind-individual would feel like Goethe's Mephistopheles, who says to Faust:

"Trust me, who for millenniums, year by year,
The same tough cud must masticate and test:
No mortal from the cradle to the bier
Can ever this unsavory stuff digest.
Trust one of us to whom this life is known;
The whole can be endured by God alone."

The mutuality of life is the condition of our moral ideals which naturally have a tendency to break through the narrow range of exclusively individual interests; it points beyond the sphere of individual life without annihilating the importance of the individual. It makes the individual the representative of superindividual aspirations which, through the inherited parental affections, have become sufficiently deep-seated as to well up spontaneously whenever needed, sometimes even in criminal characters, in spite of themselves. Egotism and altruism are both useful and beneficent instincts. They balance each other, and where either is missing the other will run to seed and do great harm.

Our ethics, our religion, nay, our whole interest in life, is simply an expression of the natural constitution of mankind, viz., of the system of mutuality.

It may be wrong to say that without the mutuality of life there would be no ethics at all, because another arrangement would sim-

ply imply other rules of conduct than those which we now call moral. In other worlds of a different constitution, with other interrelations, there would be other needs, and consequently its creatures would aspire after other ideals. It is difficult to say what might be; but this much is sure, that our moral and religious conceptions are a product of the conditions which have shaped our lives. However much religious truths have been represented as a contradiction to nature, they are nature in its highest efflorescence; and wherever for a time, through gross sensualism and childish immaturity, by a literal conception of parables and an unspiritual pagan interpretation of the nature of dogmas, mankind has drifted into a hostility to nature, religion lost its true significance, but showed always, even in the darkest ages, a tendency to return to a purer, more elevating, and more natural morality.

It is mutuality that gives zest to life and makes it worth living. The interest that keeps us in the world and attaches us to existence is like the vault of a massive structure, where stones keep one another up by inclining toward and pressing upon one another. Mutuality holds up the lofty arch as firmly and as solidly as the interrelation that obtains among the various members of human society naturally produces and sustains ethics; and the most important, because fundamental, mutuality of human life is the relation between parents and children. It is apparent that mankind would never have developed true humanity, had it never witnessed a mother's love. The sublimest and noblest sentiments would be still unknown, had not generation after generation been trained in the school of parental care and self-sacrifice. Men have learned the most valuable lessons of life by living for their children.