

The first school

GEORGE LEWIS

Various are the answers we would get if only we were to stop a few parents and ask them this simple question, "What ruins the World?" Most of them would try to guess the answer; a few would just appear to look wise and wait for it. Well, to spare my readers the embarrassment of many an unwise parent, I should like with the help of a practical example, to venture an answer which I submit to his/her critical judgement.

It was my painful experience, once, to witness a most disappointing scene displayed by a two-year-old boy. There was a party on and the little scamp's parents happened to be present too. While the party was warming up, a few who happened to know the parents in question started fussing over this boy in the most affectionate way. This must have pleased the parents much for the mother, proudly drawing the attention of these friends, asked to watch what she had taught her son. She immediately threw away her half smoked cigarette, took out a fresh one, and gave it to her son to hold it between his tiny lips. She then struck a match and touched the flame to the tip of the cigarette. With the ease of professional, the little brat drew in and without any sign of choking or irritation, exhaled the blue smoke through his tiny nostrils as one accustomed to an everyday experience. Then he took

in another draw but as luck would have it and much against the parents' expectation, the cigarette fell out and this time, most of the inhaled smoke escaped from the child's mouth. Some of the onlookers were rather shocked but the conceited admirers were quite thrilled and even clapped in applause.

I am glad to recall that a good number of guests including myself were shocked at this child's display. As for the proud parents, they would surely not allow disparaging comments without picking up an argument. Possibly, they would retaliate in unpleasant terms or, at least, as it is too often the case, they would sputter out in defence, their blank unreasonable utterance, "when the time comes, he will not behave like this." This, you will agree, is the shallow defence of many over indulgent parents who think of children as pets. I wonder if they ever fully realise what the word "Time" means to their spoilt charges. Among all the abstract entities which elude human grip, "Time" probably ranks first. In fact, "Time", for many, is only a fiction where the world runs according to plan and the clock is "Master of Day". In the minds of the lover of murderer and also of complacent parents, a clock is pitifully inadequate in giving a full evaluation of what it marks. What to say, now, of

the child's notion of it? And yet what precious thing "Time" is when seen as the great factor of education.

Now, the relation between parents and their children is, besides blood ties, a life-giving communion of all that is good and true. The main energizing factor, in fact the essence of this relation, is "Love". The important thing, then, is to determine the quality and degree of that "Love" and see whether it is a genuine virtue and not blind instinct or an interested indulgence. The child can take in a lot of the latter and yet, turn out a wretch unfit to face the battle of life. Besides, whether you beat him or cuddle him; whether you ignore him or worry about him, you are still teaching him something, so true it is that mother and father are the first teachers of the child by every word and deed of theirs. Thus it is that the same may rightly be called "Man's First School."

It is, therefore, ridiculous on the part of the parents to expect the school teachers to teach an over-indulgent child how to organise his personal life when the very foundation of his security is shattered by the faulty education he is given from his very infancy at home. Still, as the old saying goes, "Hope lies eternal in the human breast," there is always a remedy where there is a

will. Parents who come to realise their mistake can always rectify their methods provided they make good use of "Time" before it slips out of their grasps. Parents should always bear in mind that their children should never be permitted to act, according to their likes and dislikes. If they are made to act in harmony with sure moral laws, they will succeed in life to build their character, good habit, efficiency and self-reliance.

The question arises, then, from whom is the innocent child to get this guidance? Emphatically, from the world's best teachers namely, his beloved parents who, in turn are expected to be well grounded in the fundamentals of education. If the parent's words are backed by examples, their authority will assert itself not by sheer force, but, rather, by the sweet yoke of duty accomplished in a spirit of love and respect of the child's personality. Let the parents be sure of their principles and then, the child will be sure of his parents.

I believe that if my readers have well grasped the purport of these few lines on "Home Education", they will agree with me that the answer to the opening question of this article is properly formulated by the great educator who said that "The hand that rocks the Cradle rules the World."