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Hannah Whitall Smith

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Miss E. 1879-1909)**

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The exaltation of the child is one of the pet ideas of the day. While there is no question that in years gone by childhood was too entirely ignored as a factor in the problem of humanity, the other extreme is quite as dangerous, and the poor souls who have "put away childish things" are now in process of extinction as factors. Mrs. H. W. Smith has written a taking little book upon *The Science of Motherhood*, which contains many good and no novel ideas. She puts the matter before us in a vivid, lively style, and we cannot but agree with her that the science of motherhood should be seriously studied for the benefit of the little children about us. Not a day passes that does not bring before us an example of the sins committed by ignorant mothers against innocent children. But we protest against the assumption by all writers upon this subject, that grown people cannot remember their own childhood and benefit by that remembrance. We are told continually that children cannot put themselves in our places and understand our motives and dispositions; but no one ever intimates that all mothers have once been children, and know what childhood is from experience. Mothers are told to devote themselves to the study of their children as though they were an entirely unique creation, confined to their own family. There is too much attenuated sentiment and too little persistent, gentle teaching of children that there is such a thing as *government* in the world, and the sooner they accept the idea the happier will be their entire lives. It is doubtless heresy, but when we read that no mother must *ever* say "Don't" to her child, we remember the robust grandmother in "Old Town Folks," who said her idea of training was to tell a child to do a thing, and if he refused, "hit him a clip and do it myself." (H. F. Revell Co., New York. 12mo. 35 cents.)

Under the modest initials H. W. S., Mrs. Hannah Whitall Smith puts forth a charmingly bound brochure of less than fifty pages, a true *multum in parvo* of winnowed wisdom on *The Science of Motherhood*. (Fleming H. Revell Co., New York. 35 cents). In reply to those who would imagine that all the knowledge needed is "just to be a mother," she says: "Some may shrink from this word 'science,' but what is a science?" and gives Webster's definition: "Knowledge duly arranged, and referred to the general facts and principles upon which it is founded"; and adds: "If there is no science of motherhood in this sense it is high time there was." She pungently outlines the work the mother is to do thus:

"To her is intrusted, in large measure, the working out of God's ideal for each child given to her care, and upon her will it largely depends whether characters shall be rounded out into the fullness of a noble manhood or womanhood, or dwarfed by neglect or deformed by sin,

. . . the mother . . . must surely be eager to bring to her work the best wisdom and the clearest knowledge. . . . The mother is to 'learn how' to be the mother she ought. . . . When I say mothers I do not mean only those women who have actually had children; but I mean all women who have in any way the care of the young, whether nurses, governesses, teachers, forewomen in shops, or any other woman in places of responsibility."

She continues:

"I could show you women who have given birth to five, or six, or even ten children without possessing, apparently, a single spark of real motherhood; on the other hand, there are hundreds of spiritual mothers who have never been physical mothers at all. Look at the gentle face of that teacher in the mission school, and see how it lights up with the true mother love, as she takes the little grimy hand of the ragged street Arab, and with loving tenderness washes the dirty face and draws the child into the happy circle of other little ragamuffins cared for and taught by her."

And she enforces the value of enlightened effort thus:

"If it is worth the effort of a lifetime to lift a fellow-creature out of a pit of degradation, how much more worth while it must be to prevent him from falling into the pit, and the work of prevention is in the highest sense the mother's privilege."

Mrs. Smith acknowledges her debt to Miss

Harrison, of Chicago, who has written "A Study of Child-nature from the Kindergarten Standpoint," a real contribution to knowledge on child-training, and Miss Harrison also conducts classes for the training of mothers—which are eagerly sought by women of all ranks. A similar work is being done in London; and Mrs. Smith says that many of her most valuable ideas have been taken from Miss Harrison's book, and that she only expects and desires to call attention to a work that is daily growing into deserved prominence among the truly regenerative agencies of the world. To show how she enforces her argument would be to transcribe her book. She is widely known as an original expounder of the Bible, and her way of going directly to the heart of things is shown thus:

"'Take this child and nurse it for Me' is the divine word of command to every mother; and surely it is every mother's duty to *learn* the best way of fulfilling this divine behest. Let us study, then, *the science of motherhood*. . . . Already, even in her ignorance, mother-love works magic for humanity; but taught and guided into the highest intelligence, who can doubt that it will work miracles?"

There certainly is a spirit moving upon the face of the waters, in this our time, to show us that nearly everything is better done for having learned how; hence the multiplicity of "schools" that are springing up on every hand, and there is just as certainly coming to us the knowledge, that in the neglect of childhood, as seen in the street gamins, born with human souls, but on whom no light of the true motherhood ever shines, is the great source of the future material that will fill our prisons and reformatories. Could one quarter of the money now spent on capturing, trying, sentencing, transporting to prison, and maintaining these waifs when there, be spent in taking them under the shelter of motherhood—as above defined—before three years old, and bending the twig till the foundations of character are laid, we might sincerely congratulate ourselves that we had encountered one segment of the millennium. Get the book and read it, and then pass it on to some other woman who has a child's soul intrusted to her care. P.S.—It will not hurt any man to read it! and it has not a dull page from cover to cover.