

and the Bill of Rights of 1689 were also important sources. It is possible that the Charter of Liberties granted by King Henry I in 1100 was also thought of. James Madison and other members of the convention of 1787 were careful students of history. We might almost say that the study of history made the Constitution of 1787. It was not a miracle, or a mere happy thought of the moment. It had centuries of experience behind it.

I am pretty certain that the Virginia Bill of Rights, drawn up by George Mason in 1776, and the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson the same year, were also familiar to the makers of the Constitution.

Do not overlook the fact that all great constitutions, fundamental laws, have not been the creation of a moment or even of a year, but have been the work of many years. They are the products of experience, sometimes of bitter failure. The failure of the old Constitution (the Articles of Confederation) had a great deal to do with the success of the new one.

Question 30. Do you know of anything that is going on now which shows that a constitution is a growth, a product of years?

Answer. Yes. In Virginia now the General Assembly, the Governor, and the people of Virginia are trying to improve the constitution of the state, the fundamental law of Virginia.

*Reported by JOHN W. WAYLAND*

## SOME FACTS REGARDING HABIT FORMATION

SEVERAL weeks ago a little woman from Czecho-Slovakia spoke at the college; by way of introduction she said that Americans always began their talks with a joke or two. Being a good American, I want to tell you of the kindergartner who one day was waiting in the station for a train and saw a mother with a little child about two years old. The mother was feed-

ing a banana to the child. The Kindergartner kept quiet as long as she could and then said to the mother, "You oughtn't to feed that child banana; it isn't good for him." Whereupon the mother answered, "You can't tell me anything about raising children. Ain't I buried six?"

It is not my purpose, then, to tell you how to raise your children, but merely to bring to your attention one of the most important factors of right living; namely, *habit formation*. No doubt some of the habits your children have formed have caused you no little concern. When I was a teacher of young children the formation of right habits was always uppermost in my mind; one of the first things a teacher of little children says about a child is that he has good habits or bad habits, as the case may be.

What I have to say classifies itself into three parts,

First, a definition and classification of habits

Second, rules or helps for making and breaking habits

Third, practical application or importance of habits

Habits are acquired or learned ways of behaving and, whether we will it or no, the child is going to form habits. He comes into this world a helpless little being with some ready-to-wear acts; he can cry, kick, coo, eat; he can withdraw his foot or hand if it touches something uncomfortable; he also has a nervous system in rather poor working order but sensitive, open to all suggestions which may come to it. This nervous system craves activity, and is therefore affected by everything that happens to it. Something is happening every minute.

Nature is a wise mother and nurse. She is a good psychologist, too. She sees to it that her children are made ready for the community in which each has to live. The fish has a very limited world; all it has to know is how to get out of the way of danger, how to get something to eat, so its



nervous system is very simple—just a backbone and not very much of that. The bird, the dog, the horse, and so on up or down the scale are all equipped with nervous systems which will help them adapt themselves to the world in which they must live. Now the world in which the child finds himself is a pretty complex place, so nature has given him this complex, poor-working—but-open-to-suggestion nervous system; in addition nature provides a longer period of infancy or helplessness in which to make the adjustments that are necessary. It is this period of infancy which interests us, for during it the child is “trying on” the world, is learning and building habits.

The first six years of the child are by far the most important. One psychologist says you can break or make a child the first four years of its life. This is the time not only when character traits are formed, but also when undesirable traits can be modified by treatment because of the plastic state of the mind. The child touches this thing, explores that, experiments with this, and questions that; he is no respecter of persons or things. The cut glass vase and the tin pan are one and the same to him. It is a hard time for the parent and teacher, but my sympathy is with the child; all the time he is doing these things he is learning, he is building habits.

Habits may be classified as useful, useless, or harmful; useful when the ways of behaving serve some worthwhile purpose (thus, habits of reading, writing, arithmetic may be termed useful); useless when the habit serves no purpose (many of our expressions like “Now really,” “Don’t you know,” “Understand,” are in this class and have no real value); harmful when the way of acting works real harm to the individual, such as taking drugs, or working too hard without enough recreation, or building up a critical attitude toward others.

Habits may also be classified in another way:

First, Motor, or movement, habits

Second, Intellectual habits

Third, Feeling, or emotional, habits

Child specialists have found that habits relating to muscular skill and development are best formed during the first nine years of the child’s life; therefore those physical habits pertaining to eating, sleeping at regular periods, walking, talking, cleanliness, dressing, etc. should be formed early. One value of the kindergarten is that it co-operates with the home in building up these habits so that the child will have a good background of automatic behavior and be free to build new ways of behaving when the situations present themselves.

The intellectual processes are governed by habit. Paying attention is a habit, which should be begun early in the child’s life. It is true he cannot pay attention to one thing for a very long period of time, and the thing to which he is giving his attention must be linked up with his interests. In the home you build up this habit when you have the child listen to Mother Goose rhymes; you link it with motor habits when you have him put on his rubbers or lace his shoes. In the school we try to build up habits of attention through story telling, through oral composition, etc.

I want to say in passing: Don’t be surprised and think your habit training is worthless, if, when the child is telling of some interesting event, he uses poor English. He is learning, he is building up habits, and hasn’t had enough experience to use correct speech and tell it correctly at the same time. No wonder the child has so much difficulty in forming right habits of speech; there are so many ways of saying the same thing. I am reminded of the little boy who came in after a walk and said “Miss Seeger, Minnie pinched me.” I turned to Minnie and said, “Minnie, did you pinch Thomas?” Minnie was deaf, blind, and speechless; so I turned to Thomas and tactlessly said, “Thomas, where did Minnie pinch you?” to which he replied, “Bout from here ’way down to the next corner.”



Thinking is a habit, again determined by the amount of training given to it. The younger the child, the less thinking takes place, perhaps because so much time is taken up with getting control of his body, and other motor habits. Nevertheless, problems do arise in the child's mind, and he should be given practice in solving them. When the child loses or breaks his toy, allow him to help solve the problem; he helped make it. The best type of mother or teacher is not the one who shields and protects her child until all his initiative is spent, but the one who allows him to tug and pull over something which concerns him. Toys consisting of boards, nails, hammer, shovels, pails, etc., offer so many more opportunities for practice in thinking than do ready-made mechanical things.

Respecting the rights of others, knowing how to play and work with others, is a problem which confronts teachers of children. The little child is naturally an egoist, he is self-centered; but since he must live in a world with others, since his welfare is determined by his relation to others, it is necessary that he early learn to give and take. Again, the real value of the nursery school and kindergarten is that they give children opportunities for building up social habits. The fact that 25 or 30 children of the same age are congregated together means social training. It is important, therefore, that the child of five years and older should have contacts with other children outside the home.

In addition to the motor and intellectual habits, the child also learns how to behave emotionally. The importance of the development of right emotional habits is perhaps less understood and less considered by mother and teacher. We have been so interested in giving him knowledge that we fail to take into account his feeling about the thing. Many a person's life has been warped because "way back yonder" in childhood he has built up an emotional habit around something and has never been able

to get away from it. Fear of the dark is an example. Many cases of hysteria in adulthood may be traced back to the time when the person's curiosity was not satisfied satisfactorily and she got the habit of behaving wrongly.

It grieves me to see the little child too much under the care of the ignorant nurse girl, for we can't tell until too late just what kind of emotional habits she has helped to build up in the child. Is she telling him that the policeman or the dark will get him, and therefore building up a fear that will persist through life? Is she teasing him and thereby throwing him into a rage which may take years and years of training in later life to overcome?

What kind of emotional habits is the child building up around going to bed in the dark? Has he learned to offer excuses for this thing and that when bed-time comes? Has he learned to make the meal-time the time for showing off and refusing to eat his food because he knows you will make a fuss over him and coax him? Is he becoming quick-tempered, moody, sunny, cheerful? Whichever it is, the habit is being set during the period of childhood.

"The child has joys, hopes, ambitions, fears, sorrows, which are as real to him as ours are to us." They are aroused in much the same way and need the same careful consideration and development.

The moral and religious development is pretty much a matter of habit. The child comes into this world neither trailing clouds of glory nor possessed of forty devils. Whether or not he develops into a good, wholesome personality depends on the kind of habits he has formed. Truthfulness, obedience, etc., can be built up only through specific training in each.

"The little child needs an atmosphere of love, trust, and social harmony, full of healthful provision for physical needs, which means inclusive training in habits of regularity and cleanliness. He should find that it pays to do right, or to wait for the



greater good, or to endure pains and disappointments bravely."<sup>1</sup>

Habit formation is governed by two laws, the law of *Exercise* and the law of *Effect*. If we want to build up in the child the habit of brushing his teeth, he must exercise that habit over a long period of time. One trouble with mothers and teachers is that they are impatient. Instead of seeing to it that the child has practice in forming the habit, they talk about it. Because a thing is easy to us is no reason why the child won't have trouble with it. We often expect children to be polite or to know long division before they have had sufficient practice in either. We think that by having the child watch us sew or knit or bake a cake she ought to be able to do it. It is impossible to learn anything new without sufficient practice in doing the thing.

If you don't believe it, try to build a new habit yourself. I am trying to learn to swim; by all known laws of physics I know I can't sink, yet neither can I jump in the water and swim, and my admiration for those young women who may not know as much about education as they think I know, but who can dive like birds, is great. I may say here that it is better to extend the practice over a longer period of time than to concentrate it in a short time. That is, one practice a day for fifteen days is better than three practices a day for five days, or five practices a day for three days. Also, it is better to teach one habit at a time and establish it fairly well before attempting to teach another. For that reason the custom of stressing long division in the fourth grade and fractions in the fifth has arisen. We know from experience that the young child who is learning to walk and talk does not attempt both at the same time; while he is engaging in one activity the other stops.

Do not allow an exception to occur until the new habit is well established. Again, being an impatient people, we are apt, after

a few practices, to grow lax, and do what the man did to his New Year resolution: One New Year's Day he resolved never to smoke any more. That night he mentally patted himself on the back and said, "Good for you, Resolution!" He did the same thing the second, third, and fourth nights. On the fifth night, however, after patting himself on the back, and saying "Good for you, Resolution," he walked over to his cigar box and said, "Now treat Resolution!"

Form the habit in the way it is to be used. Since most if not all the addition one does in life is arranged in vertical columns, that is the way it is taught in school. Since most of the spelling the child does is in connection with writing, most of his spelling lessons are written rather than oral.

Do not form two or more habits when one will answer the purpose. For that reason, one form is now taught for both long and short division.

It takes less time to form habits in children than in adults, but the old belief that one cannot learn anything new after thirty is no longer in vogue. Isn't it hopeful for those who have passed that milestone and are still desirous of learning? I never did like the idea of being a back number, and since society does not set an age limit, middle and old age are becoming much more interesting and exciting. Some of my colleagues have recently taken to golf. To them life has taken on new interest, and from everything I can gather, they are still learning.

A habit to be built successfully must be accompanied with satisfaction or pleasure, and therein is the essence of the Law of Effect. Stamp in desirable habits with pleasure; stamp out undesirable habits with pain. It is not enough for the child simply to repeat a thing over and over again. The repetition must be accompanied with satisfactory results. There is grave danger of building many wrong habits when no effort is made to reward the good. Often it is the

<sup>1</sup>Thom—*Mental Health of the Child*.



worst child in the home who gets the most attention, who, in other words, is rewarded for misbehaving. Or again, staying after school and memorizing poetry or Bible verses is often the punishment imposed for misconduct. It is no wonder that some of us have so little appreciation for poetry when we came to know poetry first under such unhappy conditions.

The question arises: Do you believe in rewards? Yes, we all do. We all want to hear of ourselves, "Well done." It is the thing which spurs us on. But as we grow in experiences, the nature of the reward changes: the piece of candy, the ice-cream cone, the doll, the bicycle, the ring, the approval of the "gang," the good marks on the report card, the honor roll, the seat in the legislature, senate, the wee small voice within one, or the dreamless sleep which comes after the finished task. (I can't refrain from telling you of an experience I had with rewarding a group of children here in Harrisonburg. Many of the children had difficulty in skipping on both feet. They worked very hard, and one day I said, "Children, as soon as everyone learns to skip on both feet, I'll give you a party." They worked harder than ever, and at last the day when all the children could skip on both feet came. I said, "Children, what kind of party shall we have?" Whereupon, the son of one of our popular clergymen said, "Miss Seeger, give us a card party." That didn't meet the approval of the other children, so it was changed to an ice-cream cone party.)

Just as a desirable habit shall be linked up with satisfaction, so the undesirable one must be linked with pain or dissatisfaction. Here the question arises: Do you believe in punishment? Yes, we all do—but we disagree as to the nature of that punishment. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" has been debated pro and con. I have found an interesting statement, a soothing lotion to those of us who at various times have applied the stamp of disapproval and then worried for fear we had done the child a

real injustice, when in reality we suffered much more than the child.

"The stimulation of contact receptors, such as skin and muscles, cause comparatively brief, rapid discharges of nervous energy, for the contact receptors have no control over such organs as the thyroid and the adrenals. It is the distant receptors, such as eye and ear, that set off prolonged and exhausting expenditures of energy. Experimentation shows that no amount of mere physical injury to an animal causes hyper-thyroidism or an increase of adrenalin in the blood, whereas fear or rage does both."<sup>2</sup>

Breaking a habit, however, is harder than building one, for it is not simply a matter of discarding one way of behaving, but also of forming a new mode of behaving. Try to break one of your long-established habits and see how difficult it is. If we were only made to break one now and then, we would be more careful about building right ones in the child from the start.

Before taking up the last point, I want very briefly to sum up the two points already made:

First: Habits are acquired ways of behaving, based upon the ready-to-wear activities which the child is born with.

Second: They may be classed as motor habits, pertaining to muscular movements; intellectual habits, pertaining to the thinking side of us; emotional habits, pertaining to the feeling side.

Third: The forming of a habit depends upon two things:

- a. The amount and kind of exercise given to it.
- b. The amount of pleasure and satisfaction linked up with it.

Breaking a habit is a double task, because you not only have to make it terribly disagreeable, but you have to form another habit which must be unusually attractive.

We parents and teachers have a big job

<sup>2</sup>Crile—*Origin and Nature of the Emotions.*



before us—but so had those who came before us and so will those have who follow. We are a part of the great scheme of things, and I for one would not have it changed if I could.

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MARY LOUISE SEEGER

#### NORMAL SCHOOLS INCREASING REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION

Higher standards demanded of teachers in public schools of the United States are reflected in the advanced requirements in a number of States for admission to teacher-training institutions, as shown by a study of the professional training of teachers made by William McKinley Robinson, results of which have been published by the Interior Department, Bureau of Education, as Bulletin No. 36, 1927. This tendency is illustrated by the recent requirement of Pennsylvania State normal schools that students shall be graduates of four-year high schools approved by the State department of public instruction. Beginning the fall of 1928, Michigan State normal schools will accept only graduates of high schools accredited by the University of Michigan.

#### CAMP LIFE A PART OF NORMAL-SCHOOL COURSE

A nature-study and health-education camp is maintained in connection with slippery Rock State Normal School, Pennsylvania. Beginning as an experiment in 1925, it has become an established department of the school and offers health-education

courses in camp craft, scouting, and water sports, and nature-study courses in stars, trees, flowers, insects, birds, and animals. Health-education students in the normal school must take six weeks' work in camp before they graduate; work in camp for other students is elective. The camp is well equipped, and offers facilities for canoeing and swimming, as well as for scouting and athletics. The nature-study and health-education departments of the school have charge of the camp.—*School Life*.

#### SCHOOLROOM HUMOR

##### FOOLED!

Where is the story of the college youth of whom his professor inquired how it happened that when he usually received a grade of forty-five on his history examinations, he had suddenly made ninety-eight, and of his chagrined answer: "What! Was that an examination? I thought it was one of those 'Ask me anothers.'"

##### PAINLESS, TOO

"Where did you find this wonderful follow-up system? It would get money out of anybody."

"I simply compiled and adapted the letters my son sent me from college."

##### CULLS FROM EXAM PAPERS

William the Conqueror was thrown from his horse and wounded in the feudal system and died of it.

In Holland the people use water power to drive their windmills.

Cereals are films shown in the pictures.

People of Iceland are called equinoxes.

Queen Elizabeth was called the Virgil Queen because she knew Latin.

John Bunyan was an eminent specialist on foot troubles.

Glaciers are the guys that fix windows when they are broken.