

# THE MOTHER'S BOOK

*A Handbook for the Physical, Mental  
and Moral Training of Children*

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## THE GOOD MOTHER

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

WHEN all is said, it is the mother, and the mother only, who is a better citizen even than the soldier who fights for his country. The successful mother, the mother who does her part in rearing and training aright the boys and girls who are to be the men and women of the next generation, is of greater use to the community and occupies, if she only would realize it, a more honorable, as well as a more important, position than any successful man in it.

Nothing in this life that is really worth having comes save at the cost of effort. I am glad when I meet men who have fought for their country, have served faithfully and well year after year for their country at the risk of their own lives; I respect them because they have had something hard to do and have done it well. When we look back to the Civil War, the men whom we hold in honor are not the men who stayed at home, but the men who, whether they wore the blue or wore the gray, proved their truth by their endeavor; who dared risk all for "the great prize of death in battle," as one of our noblest poets has phrased it; who spent year after year at what brought them no money reward, at what might result in the utter impairment of the chance of their earning their livelihood, because it was their duty to render that service. In just the same way no life of self-indulgence, of mere vapid pleasure, can possibly, even in the one point of pleasure itself, yield so ample a reward as comes to the mother at the cost of self-denial, of effort, of suffering in childbirth, of the long, slow, patience-trying work of bringing up the children aright. No scheme of education, no social attitude, can be right unless it is based fundamentally upon the recognition of the necessity of seeing that the girl is trained to understand the supreme dignity, the

supreme usefulness, of motherhood. Unless the average woman is a good wife and good mother, unless she bears a sufficient number of children, so that the race shall increase, and not decrease, unless she brings up these children sound in soul and mind and body—unless this is true of the average woman, no brilliancy of genius, no material prosperity, no triumphs of science and industry, will avail to save the race from ruin and death. The mother is the one supreme asset of national life; she is more important by far than the successful statesman or business man or artist or scientist.

There are exceptional women, there are exceptional men, who have other tasks to perform in addition to, not in substitution for, the task of motherhood and fatherhood, the task of providing the home and of keeping it. But it is the tasks connected with the home that are the fundamental tasks of humanity. After all, we can get along for the time being with an inferior quality of success in other lines, political, or business, or of any kind; because if there are failings in such matters we can make them good in the next generation; but if the mother does not do her duty, there will either be no next generation, or a next generation that is worse than none at all. In other words, we cannot as a nation get along at all if we haven't the right kind of home life. Such a life is not only the supreme duty, but also the supreme reward of duty. Every rightly constituted woman or man, if she or he is worth her or his salt, must feel that there is no such ample reward to be found anywhere in life as the reward of children, the reward of a happy family life.

#### MAN IS THE DEBTOR OF WOMAN

I abhor and condemn the man who is brutal, thoughtless, careless, selfish, with women, and especially with the women of his own household. The birth-pangs make all men the debtors of all women. The man is a poor creature who does not realize the infinite difficulty of the woman's task, who does not realize what is done by her who bears and rears the children; who cannot even be sure until the children are well

grown that any night will come when she can have it entirely to herself to sleep in. I abhor and condemn the man who fails to recognize all his obligations to the woman who does her duty.

But the woman who shirks her duty as wife and mother is just as heartily to be condemned. We despise her as we despise and condemn the soldier who flinches in battle. A good woman, who does full duty, is sacred in our eyes; exactly as the brave and patriotic soldier is to be honored above all other men. But the woman who, whether from cowardice, from selfishness, from having a false and vacuous ideal, shirks her duty as wife and mother, earns the right to our contempt, just as does the man who, from any motive, fears to do his duty in battle when the country calls him. Because we so admire the good woman, the unselfish woman, the far-sighted woman, we have scant patience with her unworthy sister who fears to do her duty; exactly as, for the very reason that we respect a man who does his duty honestly and fairly in politics, who works hard at his business, who in time of national need does his duty as a soldier, we scorn his brother who idles when he should work, who is a bad husband, a bad father, who does his duty ill in the family or toward the state, who fears to do the work of a soldier if the time comes when a soldier's work is needed. All honor to the man or woman who does duty, who renders service; and we can only honor him or her if the weight of our condemnation is felt by those who flinch from their duty.

#### WISDOM AND COMMON SENSE

You must bring more than one quality to your task. No mother can do her duty in her own home without genuine tenderness of heart, genuine sentiment; but if she has only sentiment and only tenderness of heart she may through folly do more harm than another could through weakness. You must have the tenderness, you must have the sentiment; but woe to you and woe to the children who come after you if that is all that you have. With the sentiment, with the tenderness of heart, encourage the common sense that will enable

you to correct the tenderness when it becomes weakness and injustice.

#### INTELLECT VS. LOVE

In addition, cultivate what in the long run counts for more than intellect, for more than sentiment—and that is character, the sum of those qualities which really make up a strong, brave, tender man or woman. You cannot get along, you nor anyone else, if you develop your intellect to the point that you lose all other things, all other qualities. It does not make any difference how intelligent a woman is, if she looks upon her children only with intelligence, they are not going to care overmuch for her in return. Do not forget that love must come first; that love is what the family is based on; but don't do children, don't do grown people, the dreadful injustice—through a love that is merely one form of weakness—of failing to make the child or, I might add, the man, behave itself or himself. A marriage should be a partnership where each of the two parties has his or her rights, where each should be more careful to do his or her duty than to exact duty from the other partner; but where each must, in justice to the other partner no less than to himself or herself, exact the performance of duty by that other partner.

So with the children. A hard and unloving mother does infinite harm to her children; but she does no more harm than the loving but weak and foolish mother who does not train the children to behave with respect for the feelings of others, who permits them to be selfish or cruel or thoughtless. I remember reading a story, years ago, that greatly interested me. It described how a worn, tired-looking woman was riding in the cars with her son, she sitting by the window. The son was a thoughtless boy, and soon began to whine and complain until he made his tired mother move away from and let him sit by the window. The observer, looking on, remarked that in the future there would be some unfortunate wife who would wonder "why men are so selfish," instead of placing the blame where it really ought to be placed—upon the lack of strength of character, the lack of wisdom, the lack of genuine love on

the part of that woman in not bringing her boy up to be unselfish and thoughtful of others, so that he might live decently in his own household, and do his work well in the world at large.

