

THE HOME  
EDUCATION SERIES

VOLUME 5

# FORMATION OF CHARACTER

CHARLOTTE MASON

'Home Education' Series

VOLUME V.

# Formation of Character

By

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Part I

**Some Studies in Treatment**

*(Weissall's Following)*





# I

## THE PHILOSOPHER AT HOME

“HE has *such* a temper, ma’am!”

And there, hot, flurried, and generally at her wits' end, stood the poor nurse at the door of her mistress's room. The terrific bellowing which filled the house was enough to account for the girl's distress. Mrs Belmont looked worried. She went up wearily to what she well knew was a weary task. A quarter of an hour ago life had looked very bright—the sun shining, sparrows chirping, lilac and laburnum making a gay show in the suburban gardens about; she thought of her three nestlings in the nursery, and her heart was like a singing-bird giving out chirps of thanks and praise. But that was all changed. The outside world was as bright as ever, but she was under a cloud. She knew too well how those screams from the nursery would spoil her day.

There the boy lay, beating the ground with fists and feet; emitting one prodigious roar after another, features convulsed, eyes protruding, in the unrestrained rage of a wild creature, so transfigured by passion that even his mother doubted if the noble countenance and lovely smile of her son had any existence beyond her fond imagination. He eyed

his mother askance through his tumbled, yellow hair, but her presence seemed only to aggravate the demon in possession. The screams became more violent; the beating of the ground more than ever like a maniac's rage.

"Get up, Guy."

Renewed screams; more violent action of the limbs!

"Did you hear me, Guy?" in tones of enforced calmness.

The uproar subsided a little; but when Mrs Belmont laid her hand on his shoulder to raise him, the boy sprang to his feet, ran into her head-foremost, like a young bull, kicked her, beat her with his fists, tore her dress with his teeth, and would no doubt have ended by overthrowing his delicate mother, but that Mr Belmont, no longer able to endure the disturbance, came up in time to disengage the raging child and carry him off to his mother's room. Once in, the key was turned upon him, and Guy was left to "subside at his leisure," said his father.

Breakfast was not a cheerful meal, either upstairs or down. Nurse was put out; snapped up little Flo, shook baby for being tiresome, until she had them both in tears. In the dining-room, Mr Belmont read the *Times* with a frown which last night's debate did not warrant; sharp words were at his tongue's end, but, in turning the paper, he caught sight of his wife's pale face and untasted breakfast. He said nothing, but she knew and suffered under his thoughts fully as much as if they had been uttered. Meantime, two closed doors and the wide space between the rooms hardly served to dull the ear-torturing sounds that came from the prisoner.

All at once there was a lull, a sudden and complete cessation of sound. Was the child in a fit?

“Excuse me a minute, Edward;” and Mrs Belmont flew upstairs, followed shortly by her husband. What was her surprise to see Guy with composed features contemplating himself in the glass! He held in his hand a proof of his own photograph which had just come from the photographers. The boy had been greatly interested in the process; and here was the picture arrived, and Guy was solemnly comparing it with that image of himself which the looking-glass presented.

Nothing more was said on the subject; Mr. Belmont went to the City, and his wife went about her household affairs with a lighter heart than she had expected to carry that day. Guy was released, and allowed to return to the nursery for his breakfast, which his mother found him eating in much content and with the sweetest face in the world; there was no more trace of passion than a June day bears when the sun comes out after a thunderstorm. Guy was, indeed, delightful; attentive and obedient to Harriet, full of charming play to amuse the two little ones, and very docile and sweet with his mother, saying from time to time the quaintest things. You would have thought he had been trying to make up for the morning’s fracas, had he not looked quite unconscious of wrong-doing.

This sort of thing had gone on since the child’s infancy. Now, a frantic outburst of passion, to be so instantly followed by a sweet April-day face and a sunshiny temper that the resolutions his parents made about punishing or endeavouring to reform him passed away like hoar-frost before the child’s genial mood.

A sunshiny day followed this stormy morning; the next day passed in peace and gladness, but, the next, some hair astray, some crumpled rose-leaf under him, brought on another of Guy's furious outbursts. Once again the same dreary routine was gone through; and, once again, the tempestuous morning was forgotten in the sunshine of the child's day.

Not by the father, though: at last, Mr Belmont was roused to give his full attention to the mischief which had been going on under his eyes for nearly the five years of Guy's short life. It dawned upon him—other people had seen it for years—that his wife's nervous headaches and general want of tone might well be due to this constantly recurring distress. He was a man of reading and intelligence, in touch with the scientific thought of the day, and especially interested in what may be called the physical basis of character—the interaction which is ever taking place between the material brain and the immaterial thought and feeling of which it is the organ. He had even made little observations and experiments, declared to be valuable by his friend and ally, Dr Weissall, the head physician of the county hospital.

For a whole month he spread crumbs on the window-sill every morning at five minutes to eight; the birds gathered as punctually, and by eight o'clock the "table" was cleared and not a crumb remained. So far, the experiment was a great delight to the children, Guy and Flo, who were all agog to know how the birds knew the time.

After a month of free breakfasts: "You shall see now whether or no the birds come because they see the crumbs." The prospect was delightful, but, alas!

this stage of the experiment was very much otherwise to the pitiful childish hearts.

“Oh, father, *please* let us put out crumbs for the poor little birds, they are so hungry!” a prayer seconded by Mrs Belmont, met with very ready acceptance. The best of us have our moments of weakness.

“Very interesting;” said the two savants; “nothing could show more clearly the readiness with which a habit is formed in even the less intelligent of the creatures.”

“Yes, and more than that, it shows the automatic nature of the action once the habit is formed. Observe, the birds came punctually and regularly when there were no longer crumbs for them. They did not come, look for their breakfast, and take sudden flight when it was not there, but they settled as before, stayed as long as before, and then flew off without any sign of disappointment. That is, they came, as we set one foot before another in walking, just out of habit, without any looking for crumbs, or conscious intention of any sort—a mere automatic or machine-like action with which conscious thought has nothing to do.”

Of another little experiment Mr Belmont was especially proud, because it brought down, as it were, two quarries at a stroke; touched heredity and automatic action in one little series of observations. Rover, the family dog, appeared in the first place as a miserable puppy saved from drowning. He was of no breed to speak of, but care and good living agreed with him. He developed a handsome shaggy white coat, a quiet, well-featured face, and betrayed his low origin only by one inveterate habit; carts he took no notice of, but never a carriage, small or

great, appeared in sight but he ran yelping at the heels of the horses in an intolerable way, contriving at the same time to dodge the whip like any street Arab. Oddly enough, it came out through the milkman that Rover came of a mother who met with her death through this very peccadillo.

Here was an opportunity. The point was, to prove not only that the barking was automatic, but that the most inveterate habit, even an inherited habit, is open to cure.

Mr Belmont devoted himself to the experiment: he gave orders that, for a month, Rover should go out with no one but himself. Two pairs of ears were on the alert for wheels; two, distinguished between carriage and cart. Now Rover was the master of an accomplishment of which he and the family were proud: he could carry a newspaper in his mouth. Wheels in the distance, then, "Hi! Rover!" and Rover trotted along, the proud bearer of the *Times*. This went on daily for a month, until at last the association between wheels and newspaper was established, and a distant rumble would bring him up-a demand in his eyes. Rover was cured. By-and-by the paper was unnecessary, and "To heel! Good dog!" was enough when an ominous falling of the jaw threatened a return of the old habit.

It is extraordinary how wide is the gap between theory and practice in most of our lives. "The man who knows the power of habit has a key wherewith to regulate his own life and the lives of his household, down to that of the cat sitting at his hearth." (*Applause.*) Thus, Mr Belmont at a scientific gathering. But only this morning did it dawn upon him that, with this key between his fingers, he was letting

his wife's health, his child's life, be ruined by a habit fatal alike to present peace, and to the hope of manly self-control in the future. Poor man! he had a bad half-hour that morning on his way Citywards. He was not given to introspection, but, when it was forced upon him, he dealt honestly.

"I must see Weissall to-night, and talk the whole thing out with him."

"Ah, so; the dear Guy! And how long is it, do you say, since the boy has thus out-broken?"

"All his life, for anything I know—certainly it began in his infancy."

"And do you think, my good friend"—here the Doctor laid a hand on his friend's arm, and peered at him with twinkling eyes and gravely set mouth—do you think it possible that he has—er—*inherited* this little weakness? A grandfather, perhaps?"

"You mean me, I know; yes, it's a fact. And I got it from my father, and he, from his. We're not a good stock. I know I'm an irascible fellow, and it has stood in my way all through life."

"Fair and softly, my dear fellow! go not so fast. I cannot let you say bad things of my best friend. But this I allow; there are thorns, bristles all over; and they come out at a touch. How much better for you and for Science had the father cured all that!"

"As I must for Guy! Yes, and how much happier for wife, children, and servants; how much pleasanter for friends. Well, Guy is the question now. What do you advise?"

The two sat far into the night discussing a problem on the solution of which depended the future of a noble boy, the happiness of a family. No wonder

they found the subject so profoundly interesting that 'two' by the church clock startled them into a hasty separation. Both Mrs Belmont and Mrs Weissall resented this dereliction on the part of their several lords; but these ladies would have been meeker than Sarah herself had they known that, not science, not politics, but the bringing up of the children, was the engrossing topic.

*Breakfast-time three days later. Scene, the dining-room.*

NURSE *in presence of* MASTER *and* MISTRESS.

"You have been a faithful servant and good friend, both to us and the children, Harriet, but we blame you a little for Guy's passionate outbreaks. Do not be offended, we blame ourselves more. Your share of blame is that you have worshipped him from his babyhood, and have allowed him to have his own way in everything. Now, your part of the cure is, to do exactly as we desire. At present, I shall only ask you to remember that, Prevention is better than cure. The thing for all of us is to take precautions against even one more of these outbreaks.

"Keep your eye upon Guy; if you notice—no matter what the cause—flushed cheeks, pouting lips, flashing eye, frowning forehead, with two little upright lines between the eyebrows, limbs held stiffly, hands, perhaps, closed, head thrown slightly back; if you notice any or all of these signs, the boy is on the verge of an outbreak. Do not stop to ask questions, or soothe him, or make peace, or threaten. Change his thoughts. That is the one hope. Say quite naturally and pleasantly, as if you saw nothing, 'Your father wants you to garden with him,' or, 'for a game



of dominoes'; or, 'Your mother wants you to help her in the store-room,' or, 'to tidy her work-box.' Be ruled by the time of the day, and how you know we are employed. And be quite sure we *do* want the boy."

"But, sir, please excuse me, is it any good to save him from breaking out when the passion is there in his heart?"

"Yes, Harriet, all the good in the world. Your master thinks that Guy's passions have become a habit, and that the way to cure him is to keep him a long time, a month or two, without a single outbreak; if we can manage that, the trouble will be over. As for the passion in his heart, that comes with the outer signs, and both will be cured together. Do, Harriet, like a good woman, help us in this matter, and your master and I will always be grateful to you!"

"I'm sure, ma'am," with a sob (Harriet was a soft-hearted woman, and was very much touched to be taken thus into the confidence of her master and mistress), "I'm sure I'll do my best, especially as I've had a hand in it; but I'm sure I never meant to, and, if I forget, I hope you'll kindly forgive me."

"No, Harriet, you must not forget any more than you'd forget to snatch a sharp knife from the baby. This is almost a matter of life and death."

"Very well, sir, I'll remember; and thank you for telling me."

Breakfast time was unlucky; the very morning after the above talk, Nurse had her opportunity. Flo, for some inscrutable reason, preferred to eat her porridge with her brother's spoon. Behold, quick as a flash, flushed cheeks, puckered brow, rigid frame!

“Master Guy, dear,” in a quite easy, friendly tone (Harriet had mastered her lesson), “run down to your father; he wants you to help him in the garden.”

Instantly the flash in the eye became a sparkle of delight, the rigid limbs were all active and eager; out of his chair, out of the room, downstairs, by his father’s side, in less time than it takes to tell. And the face—joyous, sparkling, full of eager expectation—surely Nurse had been mistaken this time? But no; both parents knew how quickly Guy emerged from the shadow of a cloud, and they trusted Harriet’s discretion.

“Well, boy, so you’ve come to help me garden? But I’ve not done breakfast. Have you finished yours?”

“No, father,” with a dropping lip.

“Well, I’ll tell you what. You run up and eat your porridge and come down as soon as you’re ready; I shall make haste, too, and we shall get a good half-hour in the garden before I go out.” Up again went Guy with hasty, willing feet

“Nurse” (breathless hurry and importance), “I must make haste with my porridge. Father wants me *directly* to help him in the garden.”

Nurse winked hard at the fact that the porridge was gobbled. The happy little boy trotted off to one of the greatest treats he knew, and that day passed without calamity.

“I can see it will answer, and life will be another thing without Guy’s passions; but do you think, Edward, it’s *right* to give the child pleasures when he’s naughty—in fact, to put a premium upon naughtiness, for it amounts to that?”

“You’re not quite right there. The child does not know he is naughty; the emotions of ‘naughtiness’ are there; he is in a physical tumult, but wilfulness has not set in; he does not yet *mean* to be naughty, and all is gained if we avert the set of the will towards wrong-doing. He has not had time to recognise that he is naughty, and his thoughts are changed so suddenly that he is not in the least aware of what was going on in him before. The new thing comes to him as naturally and graciously as do all the joys of the childish day. The question of desert does not occur.”

For a week all went well. Nurse was on the alert, was quick to note the ruddy storm-signal in the fair little face; she never failed to despatch Guy instantly, and with a quiet unconscious manner, on some errand to father or mother; nay, she improved on her instructions; when father and mother were out of the way, she herself invented some pleasant errand to cook about the pudding for dinner; to get fresh water for Dickie, or to see if Rover had had his breakfast. Nurse was really clever in inventing expedients, in hitting instantly on something to be done novel and amusing enough to fill the child’s fancy. A mistake in this direction would, experience told her, be fatal; propose what was stale, and not only would Guy decline to give up the immediate gratification of a passionate outbreak—for it *is* a gratification, that must be borne in mind—but he would begin to look suspiciously on the “something else” which so often came in the way of this gratification.

Security has its own risks. A morning came when Nurse was not on the alert. Baby was teething and

fractious, Nurse was overdone, and the nursery was not a cheerful place. Guy, very sensitive to the moral atmosphere about him, got, in Nurse's phrase, out of sorts. He relieved himself by drumming on the table with a couple of ninepins, just as Nurse was getting baby off after a wakeful night.

"Stop that noise this minute, you naughty boy! Don't you see your poor little brother is going to sleep?" in a loud whisper. The noise was redoubled, and assisted by kicks on chair-rungs and table-legs. Sleep vanished and baby broke into a piteous wail. This was too much; the Nurse laid down the child, seized the young culprit, chair and all, carried him to the farthest corner, and, desiring him not to move till she gave him leave, set him down with a vigorous shaking. There were days when Guy would stand this style of treatment cheerfully, but this was not one. Before Harriet had even noted the danger signals, the storm had broken out. For half an hour the nursery was a scene of frantic uproar, baby assisting, and even little Flo. Half an hour is nothing to speak of; in pleasant chat, over an amusing book, the thirty minutes fly like five; but half an hour in struggle with a raging child is a day and a night in length. Mr and Mrs Belmont were out, so Harriet had it all to herself, and it was contrary to orders that she should attempt to place the child in confinement; solitude and locked doors involved risks that the parents would, rightly, allow no one but themselves to run. At last the tempest subsided, spent, apparently, by its own force.

A child cannot bear estrangement, disapproval; he must needs live in the light of a countenance smiling upon him. His passion over, Guy set himself labo-

riously to be good, keeping watch out of the corner of his eye to see how Nurse took it. She was too much vexed to respond in any way, even by a smile. But her heart was touched; and though, by-and-by when Mrs Belmont came in, she did say—"Master Guy has been in one of his worst tempers again, ma'am: screaming for better than half an hour"—yet she did not tell her tale with the *empressement* necessary to show what a very bad half-hour they had had. His mother looked with grave reproof at the delinquent, but she was not proof against his coaxing ways.

After dinner she remarked to her husband, "You will be sorry to hear that Guy has had one of his worst bouts again. Nurse said he screamed steadily for more than half an hour."

"What did you do?"

"I was out at the time doing some shopping. But when I came back, after letting him know how grieved I was, I did as you say, changed his thoughts and did my best to give him a happy day."

"How did you let him know you were grieved?"

"I looked at him in a way he quite understood, and you should have seen the deliciously coaxing, half-ashamed look he shot up at me. What eyes he has!"

"Yes, the little monkey! And no doubt he measured their effect on his mother; you must allow me to say that my theory certainly is *not* to give him a happy day after an outbreak of this sort."

"Why, I thought your whole plan was to change his thoughts, to keep him so well occupied with pleasant things that he does not dwell on what agitated him."

“Yes, but did you not tell me the passion was over when you found him?”

“Quite over; he was as good as gold.”

“Well, the thing we settled on was to *avert* a threatened outbreak by a pleasant change of thought; and to do so in order that, at last, the *habit* of these outbreaks may be broken. Don’t you see, that is a very different thing from pampering him with a pleasant day when he has already pampered himself with the full indulgence of his passion?”

“Pampered himself! Why, you surely don’t think those terrible scenes give the poor child any pleasure. I always thought he was a deal more to be pitied than we.”

“Indeed I do. Pleasure is perhaps hardly the word; but that the display of temper is a form of self-indulgence, there is no doubt at all. You, my dear, are too amiable to know what a relief it is to us irritable people to have a good storm and clear the air.”

“Nonsense, Edward! But what should I have done? What is the best course *after* the child has given way?”

“I think we must, as you once suggested, consider how we ourselves are governed. Estrangement, isolation are the immediate consequences of sin, even of what may seem a small sin of harshness or selfishness.”

“Oh, but don’t you think that is our delusion? That God is loving us all the time, and it is we who estrange ourselves?”

“Without doubt; and we are aware of the love all the time, but, also, we are aware of a cloud between it and ourselves; we know we are out of favour.

We know, too, that there is only one way back, through the fire. It is common to speak of repentance as a light thing, rather pleasant than otherwise; but it is searching and bitter: so much so, that the Christian soul dreads to sin, even the sin of coldness, from an almost cowardly dread of the anguish of repentance, purging fire though it be."

Mrs Belmont could not clear her throat to answer for a minute. She had never before had such a glimpse into her husband's soul. Here were deeper things in the spiritual life than any of which she yet knew.

"Well then, dear, about Guy; must he feel this estrangement, go through this fire?"

"I think so, in his small degree; but he must never doubt our love. He must see and feel that it is always there, though under a cloud of sorrow which he only can break through."

Guy's lapse prepared the way for further lapses. Not two days passed before he was again in a passion. The boy, his outbreak over, was ready at once to emerge into the sunshine. Not so his mother, His most bewitching arts met only with sad looks and silence.

He told his small scraps of nursery news, looking in vain for the customary answering smile and merry words. He sidled up to his mother, and stroked her cheek; that did not do, so he stroked her hand; then her gown; no answering touch, no smile, no word; nothing but sorrowful eyes when he ventured to raise his own. Poor little fellow! The iron was beginning to enter; he moved a step or two away from his mother, and raised to hers eyes full of

piteous doubt and pleading. He saw love, which could not reach him, and sorrow, which he was just beginning to comprehend. But his mother could bear it no longer: she got up hastily and left the room. Then the little boy, keeping close to the wall, as if even that were something to interpose between him and this new sense of desolation, edged off to the farthest corner of the room, and sinking on the floor with a sad, new quietness, sobbed in his loneliness; Nurse had had her lesson, and although she too was crying for her boy, nobody went near him but Flo. A little arm was passed round his neck; a hot little cheek pressed against his curls:

“Don’t cry, Guy!” two or three times, and when the sobs came all the thicker, there was nothing for it but that Flo must cry too; poor little outcasts!

At last bedtime came, and his mother; but her face had still that sad far-away look, and Guy could see she had been crying. How he longed to spring up and hug her and kiss her as he would have done yesterday. But somehow he dared not; and she never smiled nor spoke, and yet never before had Guy known how his mother loved him.

She sat in her accustomed chair by the little white bed, and beckoned the little boy in his nightgown to come and say his prayers. He knelt at his mother’s knee as usual, and then she laid her hands upon his.

“Our Father’—oh, mother, mo—o—ther, mother!” and a torrent of tears drowned the rest, and Guy was again in his mother’s arms, and she was raining kisses upon him, and crying with him.

Next morning his father received him with open arms.



“So my poor little boy had a bad day yesterday!”

Guy hung his head and said nothing.

“Would you like me to tell you how you may help ever having quite such another bad day?”

“Oh yes, please, father; I thought I couldn’t help.”

“Can you tell when the ‘Cross-man’ is coming?”

Guy hesitated “Sometimes, I think. I get all hot.”

“Well, the minute you find he’s coming, even if you have begun to cry, say, ‘Please excuse me, Nurse,’ and run downstairs, and then four times round the paddock as fast as you can, without stopping to take breath!”

“What a good way! Shall I try it now?”

“Why, the ‘Cross-man’ isn’t there now. But I’ll tell you a secret: he always goes away if you begin to do something else as hard as you can; and if you can remember to run away from him round the garden, you’ll find he won’t run after you; at the very worst, he won’t run after you more than once round!”

“Oh, father, I’ll try! What fun! See if I don’t beat him! Won’t I just give Mr ‘Cross-man’ a race! He shall be quite out of breath before we get round the fourth time.”

The vivid imagination of the boy personified the foe, and the father jumped with his humour. Guy was eager for the fray; the parents had found an ally in their boy; the final victory was surely within appreciable distance.

“This is glorious, Edward; and it’s as interesting as painting a picture or writing a book! What a capital device the race with ‘Mr Cross-man’ is! It’s like ‘Sintram.’ He’ll be so busy looking out for

‘Cross-man’ that he’ll forget to be cross. The only danger I see is that of many false alarms. He’ll try the race, in all good faith, when there is no foe in pursuit.”

“That’s very likely; but it will do no harm. He is getting the habit of running away from the evil, and may for that be the more ready to run when it’s at his heels; this, of running away from temptation, is the right principle, and may be useful to him in a thousand ways.”

“Indeed, it may be a safeguard to him through life. How did you get the idea?”

“Do you remember how Rover was cured of barking after carriages? There were two stages to the cure; the habit of barking was stopped, and a new habit was put in its place; I worked upon the recognised law of association of ideas, and got Rover to associate the rumble of wheels with a newspaper in his mouth. I tried at the time to explain how it was possible to act thus on the ‘mind’ of a dog.”

“I recollect quite well; you said that the stuff—nervous tissue, you called it—of which the brain is made is shaped in the same sort of way—at least so I understood—by the thoughts that are in it, as the cover of a tart is shaped by the plums below. And then, when there’s a place ready for them in the brain, the same sort of thoughts always come to fill it.”

“I did not intend to say precisely that,” said Mr Belmont, laughing, “especially the plum part. However, it will do. Pray go on with your metaphor. It is decided that plums are not wholesome eating. You put in your thumb, and pick out a plum; and that the place may be filled, and well filled, you pop in a—a—figures fail me—a peach!”

“I see! I see! Guy’s screaming fits are the unwholesome plum which we are picking out, and the running away from Cross-man the peach to be got in instead. (I don’t see why it should be a peach though, unpractical man!) His brain is to grow to the shape of the peach, and behold, the place is filled. No more room for the plum.”<sup>1</sup>

“You have it; you have put, in a light way, a most interesting law, and I take much blame to myself that I never thought until now of applying it to Guy’s case. But now I think we are making way; we have made provision for dislodging the old habit and setting a new one in its place.”

“Don’t you think the child will be a hero in a very small way, when he makes himself run away from his temper?”

“Not in a small way at all; the child will be a hero. But we cannot be heroes all the time. In sudden gusts of temptation, God grant him grace to play the hero, if only through hasty flight; but in what are called besetting sins, there is nothing safe but the contrary besetting good habit. And here is where parents have immense power over the future of their children.”

“Don’t think me superstitious and stupid; but somehow this scientific training, good as I see it is, seems to me to undervalue the help we get from above in times of difficulty and temptation.”

“Let me say that it is you who undervalue the

<sup>1</sup> To state the case more accurately, certain cell connections appear to be established by habitual traffic in certain thoughts; but there is so much danger in over-stating or in localising mental operations, that perhaps it is safer to convey the practical outcome of this line of research in a more or less figurative way—as, the wearing of a field-path; the making of a bridge; a railway, etc.

virtue, and limit the scope of the Divine action. Whose are the laws Science labours to reveal? Whose are the works, body or brain, or what you like, upon which these laws act?"

"How foolish of me! But one gets into a way of thinking that God cares only for what we call spiritual things. Let me ask you one more question. I do see that all this watchful training is necessary, and do not wish to be idle or cowardly about it. But don't you think Guy would grow out of these violent tempers naturally, as he gets older?"

"Well, he would not, as youth or man, fling himself on the ground and roar; but no doubt he would grow up touchy, fiery, open at any minute to a sudden storm of rage. The man who has too much self-respect for an open exhibition may, as you know well enough, poor wife, indulge in continual irritability, suffer himself to be annoyed by trifling matters. No, there is nothing for it but to look upon an irate habit as one to be displaced by a contrary habit. Who knows what cheerful days we may yet have, and whether in curing Guy I may not cure myself? The thing can be done; only one is so lazy about one's own habits. Suppose you take me in hand?"

"Oh, I couldn't! and yet it's your only fault"

"*Only* fault! well, we'll see. In the meantime there's another thing I wish we could do for Guy—stop him in the midst of an outbreak. Do you remember the morning we found him admiring himself in the glass?"

"Yes, with the photograph in his hand."

"That was it; perhaps the Cross-man race will answer even in the middle of a tempest. If not, we must try something else."

“It won’t work.”

“Why not?”

“Guy will have no more rages; how then can he be stopped in mid-tempest?”

“Most hopeful of women! But don’t deceive yourself. Our work is only well begun, but that, let us hope, is half done.”

His father was right. Opportunities to check him in mid-career occurred; and Guy answered to the rein. Mr Cross-man worked wonders. A record of outbreaks was kept; now a month intervened; two months; a year; two years; and at last his parents forgot their early troubles with their sweet-tempered, frank-natured boy.

## II

### INCONSTANT KITTY

“BUT now for the real object of this letter—does it take your breath away to get four sheets? We want you to help us about Kitty. My husband and I are at our wits’ end, and would most thankfully take your wise head and kind heart into counsel I fear we have been laying up trouble for ourselves and for our little girl. The ways of nature are, there is no denying it, very attractive in all young creatures, and it is so delightful to see a child do as ‘tis its nature to,’ that you forget that Nature, left to herself, produces a waste, be it never so lovely. Our little Kitty’s might so easily become a wasted life.

“But not to prose any more, let me tell you the history of Kitty’s yesterday—one of her days is like the rest, and you will be able to see where we want your help.

“Figure to yourself the three little heads bent over ‘copy-books’ in our cheery schoolroom. Before a line is done, up starts Kitty.

“‘Oh, mother, may I write the next copy—s h e l l ? “Shell” is so much nicer than—k n o w, and I’m so tired of it.’

“‘How much have you done?’

“I have written it three whole times, mother, and I really *can't* do it any more! I think I could do—  
s h e l l. “Shell” is so pretty!”

“By-and-by we read; but Kitty cannot read—  
can't even spell the words (don't scold us, we know it  
is quite wrong to spell in a reading lesson), because  
all the time her eyes are on a smutty sparrow on the  
topmost twig of the poplar; so she reads, ‘W i t h,  
birdie!’ We do sums; a short line of addition is to  
poor Kitty a hopeless and an endless task. ‘Five  
and three make—nineteen,’ is her last effort, though  
she knows quite well how to add up figures. Half a  
scale on the piano, and then—eyes and ears for  
everybody's business but her own. Three stitches of  
hemming, and idle fingers plait up the hem or fold  
the duster in a dozen shapes. I am in the midst of  
a thrilling history talk: ‘So the Black Prince—’  
‘Oh, mother, do you think we shall go to the sea this  
year? My pail is quite ready, all but the handle, but  
I can't find my spade *anywhere!*’

“And thus we go on, pulling Kitty through her  
lessons somehow; but it is a weariness to herself and  
to all of us, and I doubt if the child learns anything  
except by bright flashes. But you have no notion  
how quick the little monkey is. After idling through  
a lesson she will overtake us at a bound at the last  
moment, and thus escape the wholesome shame of  
being shown up as the dunce of our little party.

“Kitty's dawdling ways, her restless desire for  
change of occupation, her always wandering thoughts,  
lead to a good deal of friction, and spoil our school-  
room party, which is a pity, for I want the children  
to enjoy their lessons from the very first. What do  
you think the child said to me yesterday in the most

coaxing pretty way? 'There are so many things nicer than lessons! Don't you think so, mother?' Yes, dear aunt, I see you put your finger on those unlucky words 'coaxing, pretty way,' and you look, if you do not say, that awful sentence of yours about sin being bred of allowance. Isn't that it? It is quite true; we are in fault. Those butterfly ways of Kitty's were delicious to behold until we thought it time to set her to work, and then we found that we should have been training her from her babyhood. Well,

"If you break your plaything yourself, dear,  
 Don't you cry for it all the same?  
 I don't think it is such a comfort  
 To have only oneself to blame.'

So, like a dear, kind aunt, don't scold us, but help us to do better. Is Kitty constant to anything? You ask. Does she stick to any of the '*many* things so much nicer than lessons'? I am afraid that here, too, our little girl is 'unstable as water.' And the worst of it is, she is all agog to be at a thing, and then, when you think her settled to half an hour's pleasant play, off she is like any butterfly. She says her, 'How doth the little busy bee,' dutifully; but when I tell her she is not a bit like a busy bee, but rather like a foolish, flitting butterfly, I'm afraid she rather likes it, and makes up to the butterflies as if they were akin to her, and were having just the good time she would prefer. But you must come and see the child to understand how volatile she is.

"Oh, mother, *please* let me have a good doll's wash this afternoon; I'm quite unhappy about poor Peggy! I really think she *likes* to be dirty!

"Great preparations follow in the way of little tub,



and soap, and big apron; the little laundress sits down, greatly pleased with herself, to undress her dirty Peggy; but hardly is the second arm out of its sleeve, than, *presto!* a new idea; off goes Kitty to clean out her doll's house, deaf to all Nurse's remonstrances about 'nice hot water,' and 'poor dirty Peggy.'

"I'm afraid the child is no more constant to her loves than to her play; she is a loving little soul, as you know, and is always adoring somebody. Now it's her father, now Juno, now me, now Hugh; and the rain of warm kisses, the soft clasping arms, the nestling head, are delicious, whether to dog or man. But, alas! Kitty's blandishments are a whistle you must pay for; to-morrow it is somebody else's turn, and the bad part is that she has only room for one at a time. If we could get a little visit from you, now, Kitty would be in your pocket all day long; and we, even Peggy, would be left out in the cold. But do not flatter yourself it would last; I think none of Kitty's attachments has been known to last longer than two days.

"If the chief business of parents is to train *character* in their children, we have done nothing for Kitty; at six years old the child has no more power of application, no more habit of attention, is no more able to make herself do the thing she ought to do, indeed, has no more desire to do the right thing than she had at six months old. We are getting very unhappy about it. My husband feels strongly that parents should labour at character as the Hindoo gold-beater labours at his vase; that *character* is the one thing we are called upon to effect. And what have we done for Kitty? We have turned out a 'fine animal,' and are glad and thankful for that; but that is all; the

child is as wayward, as unsteady, as a young colt. Do help us, dear aunt. Think our little girl's case over; if you can get at the source of the mischief, send us a few hints for our guidance, and we shall be yours gratefully evermore."

"And now for my poor little great-niece! Her mother piles up charges against her, but how interesting and amusing and like the free world of fairy-land it would all be were it not for the *tendencies* which, in these days, we talk much about and watch little against. We bring up our children in the easiest, happy-go-lucky way, and all the time talk solemnly in big words about the momentous importance of every influence brought to bear upon them. But it is true; these naughty, winsome ways of Kitty's will end in her growing up like half the 'girls'—that is, young women—one meets. They talk glibly on many subjects; but test them, and they know nothing of any; they are ready to undertake anything, but they carry nothing through. This week, So-and-so is their most particular friend; next week, such another; even their amusements, their one real interest, fail and flag; but then, there is some useful thing to be learnt—how to set tiles or play the banjo! And, all the time, there is no denying, as you say, that this very fickleness has a charm, so long as the glamour of youth lasts, and the wayward girl has bright smiles and winning, graceful ways to disarm you with. But youth does not last; and the poor girl who began as a butterfly ends as a grub, tied to the earth by the duties she never learnt how to fulfil; that is, supposing she is a girl with a conscience; wanting that, she dances through life whatever befalls—

children, husband, home, must take their chance. 'What a giddy old grandmother the Peterfields have!' remarked a pert young man of my acquaintance, But, indeed, the 'giddy old grandmother' is not an unknown quantity.

"Are you saying to yourself, a prosy old 'great-aunt' is as bad as a 'giddy old grandmother'? I really have prosed abominably, but Kitty has been on my mind all the time, and it is quite true, you must take her in hand.

"First, as to her lessons: you *must* help her to gain the power of attention; that should have been done long ago, but better late than never, and an aunt who has given her mind to these matters takes blame to herself for not having seen the want sooner. 'But,' I fancy you are saying, 'if the child has no faculty of attention, how can we give it to her? It's just a natural defect' Not a bit of it! Attention is not a faculty at all, though I believe it is worth more than all the so-called faculties put together; this, at any rate, is true, that no talent, no genius, is worth much without the power of attention; and this is the power which makes men or women successful in life. (I talk like a book without scruple, because you know my light is borrowed; Professor Weissall is our luminary.)

"Attention is no more than this—the power of giving your mind to what you are about—the bigger the better so far as the mind goes, and great minds do great things; but have you never known a person with a great mind, 'real genius,' his friends say, who goes through life without accomplishing anything? It is just because he wants the power to 'turn on,' so to speak, the whole of his great mind; he is unable to bring the whole of his power to bear on the subject

in hand. 'But Kitty?' Yes, Kitty must get this power of 'turning on.' She must be taught to give her mind to sums and reading, and even to dusters. Go slowly; a little to-day and a little more to-morrow. In the first place, her lessons must be made *interesting*. Do not let her scramble through a page of 'reading,' for instance, spelling every third word and then waiting to be told what it spells, but let every day bring the complete mastery of a few new words, as well as the keeping up of the old ones.

"But do not let the lesson last more than ten minutes, and insist, with brisk, bright determination, on the child's full concentrated attention of eye and mind for the whole ten minutes. Do not allow a moment's dawdling at lessons.

"I should not give her rows of figures to add yet; use dominoes or the domino cards prepared for the purpose, the point being to add or subtract the dots on the two halves in a twinkling. You will find that the three can work together at this as at the reading, and the children will find it as exciting and delightful as 'old soldier.' Kitty will be all alive here, and will take her share of work merrily; and this is a point gained. Do not, if you can help it, single the little maid out from the rest and throw her on her own responsibility. 'Tis 'a heavy and a weary weight' for the bravest of us, and the little back will get a trick of bending under life if you do not train her to carry it lightly, as an Eastern woman her pitcher.

"Then, vary the lessons; now head, and now hands; now tripping feet and tuneful tongue; but in every lesson let Kitty and the other two carry away the joyous sense of—

“‘Something attempted, something done.’

“Allow of no droning wearily over the old stale work—which must be kept up all the time, it is true, but rather by way of an exciting game than as the lesson of the day, which should always be a distinct *step* that the children can recognise.

“You have no notion, until you try, how the ‘now-or-never’ feeling about a lesson quickens the attention of even the most volatile child; what you can drone through all day, you will; what *must* be done, is done. Then, there is a by-the-way gain besides that of quickened attention. I once heard a wise man say that, if he must choose between the two, he would rather his child should learn the meaning of ‘must’ than inherit a fortune. And here you will be able to bring moral force to bear on wayward Kitty. Every lesson must have its own time, and no other time in this world is there for it. The sense of the preciousness of time, of the irreparable loss when a ten minutes’ lesson is thrown away, must be brought home.

“Let your own unaffected distress at the loss of ‘golden minutes’ be felt by the children, and also be visited upon them by the loss of some small childish pleasure which the day should have held. It is a sad thing to let a child dawdle through a day and be let off scot-free. You see, I am talking of the children, and not of Kitty alone, because it is so much easier to be good in company; and what is good for her will be good for the trio.

“But there are other charges; poor Kitty is neither steady in play nor steadfast in love! May not the *habit* of attending to her lessons help her to stick to her play? Then, encourage her. ‘What! The doll’s tea-party over! That’s not the way grown-up ladies

have tea; they sit and talk for a long time. See if you can make your tea-party last twenty minutes by my watch!' This failing of Kitty's is just a case where a little gentle ridicule might do a great deal of good. It is a weapon to be handled warily, for one child may resent, and another take pleasure in being laughed at; but managed with tact I do believe it's good for children and grown-ups to see the comic side of their doings.

"I think we err in not enough holding up certain virtues for our children's admiration. Put a premium of praise on every finished thing, if it be only a house of cards. Steadiness in work is a step on the way towards steadfastness in love. Here, too, the praise of constancy might very well go with good-humoured family 'chaff,' not about the new loves, which are lawful, whether of kitten or playmate, but about the discarded old loves. Let Kitty and all of them grow up to glory in their constancy to every friend.

"There, I am sending you a notable preachment instead of the few delicate hints I meant to offer; but never mount a woman on her hobby—who knows when she will get off again?"