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“Children,” 1902 November 16.

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Please return copy to Rabbi Moses J. Gries, 45 Oakdale St., City.

November 16, 1902.

C H I L D R E N .

Children are the men and women of the future. The thought is familiar. It has become so commonplace we forget its truth. There is no more important work for us to do than to train the children who are to be the men and women of the next generation. Through them, we will advance civilization. They will carry forward the progress of the race.

Children are all kinds: physically, robust and puny; beautiful and far from beautiful; mentally, quick and slow, keen and dull, smart and stupid; morally, truthful and untruthful, straightforward and sly, honest and not honest. They are all children.— And they will be such men and women as we make them.

All the world loves children. The world wants them real and genuine. "There are no children any more." Thousands are robbed of their happy childhood. Too young in life, they are overwhelmed with the pressure of work and study. Children should have a chance to play and be children.

And then the vanity of parents, creating a foolish vanity in their children! O, pity the children, who by parental love are fashioned into human dolls, arrayed and decorated in grown-up doll clothes! How can we expect manhood and womanhood out of children ruined in their childhood?

It is true of the child as it is of the man and woman: the real test of the true child is not beauty or strength, mental powers or knowledge, but character always. Fine garments and fine manners do not necessarily make the fine child. If character is lost, then all is lost, even though beauty and the strength of the body, the powers and the knowledge of the mind, remain.

Teach your children no false distinctions. Let them not, early in life imagine that the children of the rich and the well-to-do are made of better stuff than the children of the poor. The Bible phrase, "In the image of God," has meaning for children as well as for men and women. The children of a republic should learn while they are children that they are to be valued by what they are in themselves, and not by how they were born. For this reason, if for none other, it is well that all the children of this country should attend our public schools. They should come in closest contact with the children of all the nationalities, races, classes and conditions that help to make this nation, and in earliest childhood learn to be genuinely democratic.

The average child goes to school. His purposes and hopes and life are naturally narrow. Children are interested in the things that are immediate. Their thought is not of the distant future. The child studies--is eager for knowledge--is right-meaning and right-doing--patient enough and obedient

enough--not quite respectful enough. We welcome education for all our children, to widen the horizon of their narrow life, to lead them up the heights, to ennoble their purposes, and to stir the finer impulses within them. They have introduction to a world unknown to their fathers: they will never be compelled to experience the hard grind of the generations past.

Why do we insist so strongly upon material ideals? Why do we urge education upon our children as a preparation for "getting on" in the world? Why are we so narrow and ^{so} wholly utilitarian--forgetting the larger and the finer life--unconscious of the true and the whole man? We have had the experience. We have fought our battle and been victorious. We have been successful. We have made money, and perhaps won fame and honor and position, ~~We have valued them all much, but~~ we know that character is of more value than all of these. Why not teach our children the truest and best ideals of life? We who are so eager that our children should be so successful--why not teach them to be truly successful? Do we want their success at the cost of honesty? Would fame be a prize without honor? If our children have the ability, let us choose for them such pursuits in life whose attractiveness is not altogether in the money to be made, but rather in the service they can render the world. Let us put before our children no false ideals of a false success. Which is the nobler life: the life

whose controlling motive is selfishness,--in which ^{all} the world should be of use to me,--or the life controlled by the motive that I should be of use to the world?

Jewish parents have always sacrificed for their children. I might tell a thousand stories of fathers and mothers who have denied themselves much that their children might have better opportunities in life. No parents are more eager for the education of their children, and none watch their success or failure with eye more vigilant or heart more anxious. We of this country would have our children thoroughly American in all things--some would even have them un-Jewish. Do we honestly desire that our children should hide their Jewish birth? Or do we wish our boys and girls to honor the name of Jew? Would we teach them to be ashamed of their Jewish ancestry and faith, or would we put within them the moral courage to stand proudly before the unkind sneer of unjust schoolmates? They should be American. They should be Jewish. American patriotism and Jewish loyalty can beat within their hearts with perfect harmony. Teach them a genuine Americanism. Teach them undying devotion to the cause of freedom and justice. It is of the very essence of freedom that they ~~and we~~ may be different in conviction and practice. Freedom and justice permit differences between the citizens of the republic.

Jewish children should not fall in with the prevailing religious practices, nor is it sufficient for them to accept

the conventional morality. For reasons historic, we are compelled to stand apart. Our children should be taught to explain and justify themselves. A peculiar responsibility is put upon every Jewish boy and girl. We parents should prepare them to meet it.

All parents should give attention to the religious development of their children--especially should Jewish parents. How careless we are! Hundreds of parents do not care to teach their children. Hundreds are unable to teach them. And some are neither able nor willing. Is the religious training so unimportant? Would we trust the education of our children in other departments to chance influences and to the few passing hours? The ordinary school branches are important, and we give to them many hours of every day. Even the unnecessary training in music, or in painting, and dancing, etc., have hours of instruction and hours for practice. The religious education of the child is neglected. It is most important. The character of our children determines their success or failure in life, and we who are so eager for their success risk it all by our thoughtlessness and negligence. Religion is concerned with the whole of life, and we cannot give too many hours to its study and practice.

Our children should grow up in a Jewish atmosphere, surrounded by hallowed Jewish customs, and participating naturally in the joy of our Jewish celebrations. We should not

surround them with non-Jewish customs of less meaning and too often of no meaning ^{to them} ~~at all~~. Our boys and girls should grow up, breathing in the pure atmosphere of a pure home whose thoughts and speech are pure, whose purposes and pleasures are pure. We cannot guard too carefully the games of our children--that they should enjoy the healthful, honest play which refines and ennobles.

Important also is the social life of the Temple. For our boys and girls especially it is a social center. Let them gather here for the best and purest purposes in life. Let them enjoy sensible and wholesome pleasures. Be not afraid that ^{pleasures} ~~they may~~ ^{come} be unholy because within the walls of The Temple. The truest success which The Temple can achieve is that success to be revealed in our boys and girls if they are filled with a finer spirit and controlled by the nobler purpose--if they lead the better and the higher life--if they are more genuine in their Americanism and more loyal to their Judaism.

The fewest among us are prepared to be parents. Young girls, hardly out of their teens, have put upon them the responsibility of motherhood. They shrink naturally from the physical burden. This is severe, but it is the least responsibility of the mother. A thousand times more important is the mother's responsibility for the character of the child. How is she prepared to meet it? It is true of men as well. The most of us are unfit to be parents. How few of us are masters

of ourselves in speech and habit and action! And where are the fathers and mothers who have been trained or who have trained themselves to be conscientious students of the nature of their children? Do not persuade yourself that you "pulled through" all right without any better training and perhaps not as much care. I am not so sure that we are all right--that there is no room for improvement, that we might not have been better--better men and better women--a thousand times better--if we had had a more intelligent training. Men and women will be finer in nature, stronger in character, nobler and purer in ideals, when they are trained to it as children. You ask me to explain how some children have developed so beautifully in their character in spite of the lack of training--in spite of ~~some~~ evil surroundings. This fact of life only deepens my faith in the native goodness instead of the native badness of our human nature. And then who knows what influences other than parental have shaped a human soul, and may it not be if better and nobler influences had been at work, character and life would have been still better and nobler?

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My simple rule is, Study your children, and equip yourself as best you can to meet and to solve the perplexing problems which every child brings to us. Be the best you can be. Parents are the ideal for their children. Are you worthy to be your children's ideal? Be the companion of your children. Renew your own youth with the innocent games of childhood. Be

not a parental despot. Neither let your children rule as favored despots in the home. Be wholly just with your children. Nothing estranges young hearts more than the rankling sense of injustice done. Lead your children by the bond of love. Love will bring a voluntary obedience and respect which no authority can compel. Introduce into your homes ~~daily~~ a happy children's hour. It will do you good and do your children good. Drive away care and anxiety and the ill-humors born of worldly strife by the laugh of innocent children; ~~and~~ by the love of our little ones we shall be made purer and happier.

