

The Care and Education of Children

By: Susannah Wesley

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The writing of anything about my way of education, I am much adverse to. It cannot, I think, be of service to anyone, to know how I, who have lived such a retired life for so many years, use to employ my time and care in bringing up my children. No one can, without renouncing the world, in the most literal sense, observe my method; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully and unsuccessfully managed.

1. It had been observed that cowardice and fear of punishment often lead children into lying till they get a custom of it which they cannot leave. To prevent this, a law was made that whoever was charged with a fault of which they were guilty, if they would ingenuously confess it and promise to amend should not be beaten. This rule prevented a great deal of lying, and would have done more if one in the family would have observed it. But, he could not be prevailed upon, and therefore was often imposed on by false colors and equivocations which none would have used but one, had they been kindly dealt with; and some in spite of all would always speak truth plainly.

2. That no sinful action as lying, pilfering at church or on the Lord's day, disobedience, quarreling, etc. should ever pass unpunished.

3. That no child should be ever chide or beat twice for the same fault, and that if they amended they should never be upbraided with it afterwards.

4. That if ever any child performed an act of obedience, or did anything with an intention to please, though the performance was not well, yet the obedience and intention should be kindly accepted, and the child with sweetness directed how to do better in the future.

5. That propriety (the rights of property) be invariably preserved, and none suffered to invade the property of another in the smallest matter, though it were but of the value of a farthing or a pin, which they might not take from the owner without, much less against his consent. This rule can never be too much inculcated on the minds of children. And from the want of parents or governors doing it as they ought, proceeds that shameful neglect of justice which we may observe in the world.

6. That promises be strictly observed. And a gift once bestowed, and so the right passed away from the donor, be not resumed, but left to the disposal of him to whom it was given, unless it was conditional, and the condition of the obligation performed.

7. That no girl be taught to work till she can read very well; and that she be kept to her work with the same application and for the same time she was held to in reading. This rule also is much to be observed, for the putting children to learn sewing before they can read perfectly is the very reason why so few women can read fit to be heard and never to be well understood.