

GRADUATION FOR PARENTS



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THE season is approaching when, all over the country, boys and girls, young men and young women, pour out of trade schools and high schools, colleges and universities—and, with a diploma in one hand, and the instrument chosen for carving out a future in the other, begin their life's work and their independent existence.

This tumultuous exodus, significantly made at the most lambent and lovely, the most provocatively promising period of the year, as well as the most lambent and lovely, the most provocatively promising period of human life, is invariably the signal for the release of boundless advice, directed towards the self-sufficient young creatures, who, even when they are timorous and dazed at what lies before them, nearly always regard it with impatience, suspicion or anger. Before they attained their new-found freedom they did not resent advice so much; even if they did not pay much attention to it, they accepted it as part of the established order of an inevitably trammled dependence. Later on when they have discovered—for themselves—that all is not gold which glitters, that the pursuit of happiness is not synonymous with the possession of it, and that, on the other hand, loneliness and liberty, success and solitude, very often are synonymous, they may actually seek the solace and support of good counsel. But meanwhile they want none of it. Therefore why waste it on them? Why not instead strive to say something that will prove illuminating and stimulating to the fathers and mothers whom their fledglings' flight has left filled with a sense of bewilderment and bereavement rather than with a realization of glorious opportunity?

For the parents should have graduated too, though they are slow to recognize this fact, and so stupid about taking advantage of it. They have left behind them that primary period when their all-absorbing concern was to insure pure milk and fresh air and uninterrupted naps and immaculate surroundings for their babies; when it took

Freedom, a new life, call to our young graduates, but why not to parents, too? Here is cheer for them, and much graceful advice

real planning for them to leave home together for a couple of hours, unhampered by grueling anxiety as to whether Grandma or Cousin Emma or Katie were really looking after their offspring properly during their absence.

FATHERS and mothers, as they look back on this primary period, have a blessed way of forgetting the anxiety, the self-sacrifice and the suffering with which it was permeated; remembering only the mysterious and beautiful sense of fulfilment and rapture which transfigures the fruition of union, the joy in the strange and precious possession of lovely little creatures trustfully seeking sustenance and sympathy. This forgetfulness—like that which so swiftly dims the memory of the agony of childbirth—is normal and providential and glamorous. None of us would wish to forfeit it. But we should not permit it to numb our intelligence to the extent of pretending to ourselves that we took *unalloyed* pleasure in our children during their infancy; because such an attitude is apt to make us overlook the fact that we can take an equal amount of pleasure—though of a different kind—in them at any age.

Neither should we remain unmindful that almost any

parents, of average intelligence and average character, can pass through this primary period successfully. The tests made upon them are elementary and simple. Instinctively parents respond adequately to the helplessness of babies; they do not deserve half as many special credit marks for this as they will if they respond with equal sympathy to the helplessness of youth.

The next step forward which men and women are called upon to take in pursuit of an adequate education in parenthood is apt to be much harder—so much harder, indeed, that some of them begin to stumble before they are out of the "grammar grades," and never achieve even a "junior-high"; while others, though they "skin through" the course to the end, complete it without much credit either to their children or to themselves.

As long as the needs of children are largely physical, most modern parents manage to meet these competently, as I have tried to indicate.

But when these needs begin to be spiritual and mental they are far more often unfulfilled; and while the financial requirements of a little child are usually met unflinchingly, an older one is often deprived of benefits which a similar amount of self-sacrifice on the part of his parents would easily provide.

I never shall forget the shock of horror I once experienced, when a charming boy of twenty, whose family is both wealthy and distinguished, and who was spending a week-end with one of my sons, asked casually as we were leaving church—the last place, he informed us cheerfully, where he would ever have thought of going on Sunday morning—what the communion service was supposed to represent!

At first I thought he had been guilty of an extremely ill-considered jest; but I quickly discovered that he was genuinely puzzled, curious and interested! I spent most of the rest of the day reading the gospel of St. Luke aloud, with such general comments as I hoped might be enlightening. But without the slightest attempt (*Turn to page 58*)