

Primary Source – John Abbott, *The Mother at Home* (1833)

Source: John S. C. Abbott, *The Mother at Home: Principles of Maternal Duty*, 1833.

“A good boy, generally makes a good man.” Said the mother of Washington, “George was always a good boy.” Here we see one secret of his greatness. George Washington had a mother, who made him a good boy, and instilled in his heart those principles, which raised him to be the benefactor of his country, and one of the brightest ornaments of the world. The Mother of Washington is entitled to a nation’s gratitude. She taught her boy the principles of obedience, and moral courage, and virtue. She, in a great measure, formed the character of the Hero, and the Statesman. It was by her own fire side, that she taught her playful boy to govern himself, and thus was he prepared for the brilliant career of usefulness which he afterwards pursued. We are indebted to God for the gift of Washington; but we are no less indebted to him for the gift of his inestimable mother. Had she been a weak and indulgent and unfaithful parent, the unchecked energies of Washington might have elevated him to the throne of a tyrant, or youthful disobedience, might have prepared the way for a life of crime and a dishonored grave.

...Mothers have as powerful an influence over the welfare of future generations, as all other causes combined. Thus far, the history of the world has been composed of the narrations of oppression and blood. War has scattered its unnumbered woes. The cry of the oppressed has unceasingly ascended to heaven. Where are we to look for the influence which shall change this scene, and fill the earth with the fruits of peace and benevolence? It is to Christianity, as taught from a mother’s lips. In nine cases out of ten, the first six or seven years decide the character of the man. If the boy leaves the paternal roof, uncontrolled, turbulent, and vicious, he will, in all probability, rush on in the mad career of self-indulgence. There are exceptions. But these exceptions are rare. If, on the other hand, your son goes from home, accustomed to control himself, he will most undoubtedly retain that habit through life. If he has been taught to make sacrifices of his own enjoyment, that he may promote the happiness of those around him, he will continue to practice benevolence, and consequently will be respected, and useful, and happy. If he has adopted firm resolutions to be faithful in all the relations of life, he in all probability will be a virtuous man, and an estimable citizen, and a benefactor of his race.

When our land is filled with virtuous and patriotic mothers, then will it be filled with virtuous and patriotic men. This world’s redeeming influence must come from a mother’s lips. She who was first in the transgression [i.e., Eve], must be yet the principal earthly instrument in the restoration. Other causes may greatly aid. Other influences must be ready to receive the mind, as it comes from the mother’s hand, and carry it onward in its improvement. But the mothers of our race must be the chief instruments in its redemption. The brightest rays of the millennial morn must come from the cradle. This sentiment will bear examining. And the more it is examined, the more manifestly true will it appear. It is alike the dictate of philosophy and experience. The mother, who is neglecting personal effort, and relying upon other influences for the formation of virtuous character in her children, will find, when it is too late, that she has fatally erred. The patriot, who hopes that schools, and lyceums, and the general diffusion of knowledge, will promote the good order and happiness of the community, while family government is neglected, will find that he is attempting to purify the streams which are flowing from a corrupt fountain.

It is maternal influence, which must be the great agent, in the hands of God, in bringing back our guilty race to duty and happiness. Oh that mothers could feel this responsibility as they ought. Then would the world assume a different aspect. Then should we less frequently behold unhappy families and broken hearted parents. A new race of men would enter upon the busy scene of life, and cruelty and crime would pass away. Oh mothers! reflect upon the power your Maker has placed in your hands. There is no earthly influence to be compared with yours. There is no combination of causes so powerful, in promoting the happiness or the misery of our race, as the instructions of home. In a most peculiar sense God has constituted you the guardians and controllers of the human family.