

New York, December 5, 1923

Mrs. Harry B. Holcombe,
Marston, N.C.

My dear Mrs. Holcombe:

The Editor of "Good Housekeeping" has sent your letter of November 6 to me - the author of the article in the November "Good Housekeeping" which interested you.

I am sure it is needless to say that your comments interested me deeply, and that I am much gratified that I have been able to say something that would arouse so thoughtful a rejoinder. It comes down to this between us, that you think the woman cannot drive a double team with success, and that I believe she can. You base your judgment, as I do mine, on what you have seen done. You say that you have never seen it worked out successfully - I certainly have.

If I understand you, your observations and your experience force you to the conclusion that the children must suffer if a mother attempts to carry out a career.

Now, if this be true, that a woman's trade or profession must be carried on at the expense of childhood, I agree entirely with you that it is too costly. There is nothing so valuable to her or to the world as the child. It should be the first consideration to everybody, man or woman, and to neglect in any way the growing body, intellect and character of a child is little better than crime, as I look at it. I do not believe that it necessarily follows that a mother practicing a profession must do this. She must of course have help in the training of the child, but I am inclined to believe that the quality of mind, the enlarged outlook and the refreshed spirit that she will bring to the child as the result of her professional life will fully compensate for the fewer hours she spends in his presence.

Have you never felt, dear Mrs. Holcombe, that a child often suffered from too much mother, just as a mother suffered from too much child? It seems to me sometimes that there is a good deal of selfishness in a mother's feeling that she cannot allow anybody else to have anything to do with her little one. She wants to absorb it, to be its sole influence, and in that effort she narrows its outlook, builds up dependence instead of independence, creates a limited impression of human relations. The child that ^{knows} other people beside

its mother, knows how to get on without its mother when necessary, is, I think, the better for the experience. And the mother herself, absorbed in that one little life, grows dependent upon it, unfitted for the social, intellectual, and now political tasks that she ought to be fulfilling, in order to do her full duty towards the child.

The education of women, a larger and freer life for women with whatever development it brings, has always seemed to me to find its chief reason in the hope that you might thus get a mother that saw her great duty in a larger light. I am afraid, dear Mrs. Holcombe, that what many, many mothers give in their beautiful, concentrated devotion to their children is a superior care of the body. That in itself is so important and absorbing task that they neglect intellect and character or relegate to a second place. If the mother could divide this training of children with competent assistants in order to give her who a daily change and refreshment in an entirely different kind not primarily for the sake of that work or what it may bring, -- for the sake of being a bigger person and thus being able to contribute more to the life of her children, I am inclined to think that we would get greater results in child development.

Please believe me, it is not a career, as we call it, for women, for the sake of her economic independence that I am interested in. There is a good deal of selfish twaddle about the economic independence of women; it is not in her chance for self-expression that I am interested, though I believe that she ought to have it, though never should she have it at the expense of the little life that she has brought into the world - that should be her first and chief interest. I do claim, however, that for the sake of that life she should have the chance to make the most of all the power that is in her.

Please do not suppose that I think it is an easy task - I think it is an enormously difficult one. I doubt very much whether I would have been able to carry it off as a young woman. If I were not altogether too old to have children now, I should like to make the trial at my age; but I would not want to make it unless I had a husband that understood what I was attempting. And of course there is one difficulty in driving your double team - you cannot do it successfully if there is an unfriendly hand forever yanking at the bits.

Another thing that I am sure of, too, is that no woman should attempt this double life, if you please so to call it, unless she thoroughly believes that it can be done and thoroughly wants to make the experiment. She ought to come to it with the fullest possible understanding, and always with the determination that whether

she succeeds with the career or not, that the child is the first claim and that her highest ambition is to do her part towards its full development, whatever becomes of her profession.

You say you "cannot have your cake and eat it, too." I agree. You certainly cannot. But I am not looking at a career, dear Lady, as cake. I am looking at it as part of the problem of self-development for the sake of the largest development of the child. I do not mean to intimate of course that all women should drive the double team. There can be no rigid rules for lives. You must start where you are, with what you have, and make the most of what comes to you. I, trying to do that, came out without having had what I consider the most developing and ripening experience of life - motherhood, home making. I have struggled for substitutes and have been fairly successful in finding them. You have the great opportunity, the great joy. I certainly should be the last to say that to what you have, you should add a career. I should judge that you are finding in your home the kind of mental development and refreshment that I thoroughly believe a woman should have to do her full duty to her children. I congratulate you on that; but I urge you to keep your eyes open for a successful driver of this double team. You will find her, sooner or later, I am sure.

Very sincerely yours,

HARRY B. HOLCOMBE

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MARSTON, N. C.

Nov. 6, 1923.

Wm. F. Bigelow,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

If I knew the name of the author of the article appearing in the November Good Housekeeping under the caption: "I Wish I Had Married and Found Life." I could write to her direct and not bother you. As it is, I hope that you will forward this to her.

While speaking to you, Mr. Editor, I take pleasure in telling you that if we ever found it necessary to cut down on our numerous magazines Good Housekeeping would be the last one I would feel that we could afford to let go. I simply couldn't keep house without it. Like the slogan for Trenton Fair, or rather, to repeat Trenton Fair's slogan, "It is Educational, Inspirational and Entertaining."

The article above mentioned interested me intensely, as a matter of fact, it stirred me profoundly. So much so that I can not let it pass without adding a word. Right here I had better state that I have a couple of kiddies of my own, aged five and two, so that my viewpoint is necessarily that of the mother, but I also have been intimately acquainted with that "bursting desire", that "searching, vague, overwhelming desire to DO something", the evincing no one particularly strongly marked talent. I state this to show that I appreciate both sides of the question, to show that I have thought about both sides of this question for a long time even though I am not so very old yet.

I don't know just how to get started at what I want to say. I think I will digress first and state that I wish more writers or even every writer, would emphasize the idea of marriage being, "not the shallow experiment so easily made and so easily dropped that so many of our contemporaries attempt to dignify by that name," but rather a life long business entered into thoughtfully and executed prayerfully. Like Henry Ford's Muscle Shoals offer, the business of marriage is on a long time payment basis and it is only by going thru the "successive stages, with their disillusion, possibly their agonies of hanging on," that a marriage ever really is a marriage and all its fruits and many blessings are enjoyed to the fullest extent; thru "the successive periods of youth, middle age, and old age."

Now I am coming to main point. I have lived in a great many communities and several different states and always have I been on the alert seeking out and watching at first hand these experiments of a woman driving a double team- combining the business of motherhood and a job, or a career, to dignify it. And it CANNOT BE DONE SUCCESSFULLY. By that I mean mostly that it cannot be done with any degree of success as regards the children. A mother occupies a position similar to that of the pilot of a boat. What happens when the pilot leaves the wheel? What happens when the driver of a car gives his attention to something else than the road

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~~VIRGIL SWANSON~~

before him and the wheel under his hand? What happens when the engineer in the cab takes his eye from the rails ahead or his hand from the throttle for any appreciable length of time? Disaster follows in the wake of every instance. Even so it is with the children; they lose in character whatever it is that the mother gains in economic freedom or whatever satisfaction she gets from personal expression. The home contains a very broad field for this personal expression we all rave about if we but have the eyes to see it with. Character is something that is built day by day. It is something that has to be sweated blood over, almost. And it cannot be given a child or instilled into a child by anyone better than by the mother. Of course the father has a most important part in this character building process too, but his time is necessarily limited to after business hours, Sundays and vacations. The father's time comes principally in the adolescent period.

A mother can hire a nurse to care for her child's body and often times that nurse can give the child's body more intelligent care than the mother can, unless she employed her spare time (a mother's spare time is a joke!) studying up on the care and nutrition of children. Or a mother could hire an instructor to teach her child what of knowledge was suitable for it's age. She could hire a cook who was entirely competent to plan and prepare a perfectly balanced ration for her child. All these things she could hire done and have her spare time to simply enjoy her children. A coming together time of the family unmarred by any tiring scenes of making clear a vexing point, entirely a time of joyful reunion. But there is not one case in a million where you can find a person, or persons, competent to teach YOUR child character, the tiny, insignificant acts that copied and committed a dozen or more times a day, form a habit. Our children are whatever it is they are most intimately associated with, for they are the greatest copy cats that ever were.

Granted that a mother happens not to be so very good an example herself, her intense love for her children, her longing to make them better than herself, makes her put her best foot forward. She tries hard to overcome her many faults and it is this that hallows motherhood. She invariably realizes her mistakes, sometimes subconsciously and often inarticulately, but there isn't a mother anywhere that doesn't wish better for her child than for herself; or hope that the child will be better than she ever was able to be, and that is the point I make. The poorest kind of a mother, in eighty cases out of a hundred, of course there are exceptions to all rules, the poorest kind of a mother, to repeat, is better than the best sort of person, or persons, one could hire to take the place of a mother for the simple reason that the mother has an unfailing supply of mother love, I do not mean maudlin and misdirected sentiment, but wise love, as wise as we are able to be, strong character building love is what I mean. This sort of love overcomes a lot of sins, atones for a lot of mistakes. Children left to paid attendants are cold and unnaturally lacking in spontaneous affection and appreciation. This is the reason that the Home, The Institutional Home, for the homeless children is such a very much to be deplored situation and such an inhuman arrangement. Those children in the institution cannot get the amount of intimate and personal love that a child needs.

HARRY B. HOLCOMBE

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Except for the fact that the children of mothers following careers are a bit more luxuriously looked after and surrounded is there a great deal of difference between their case and that of the homeless ones, homeless in very fact? I cannot see it. The mothers are the indulgent and superintending directors, not much more.

I think the whole situation can be summed up in the words: "You cannot have your cake and eat it too!" If you want your children to fine, straight forward, upstanding citizens you have got to begin with them at the tender age of nine months, six is a bit young but nine months is the starting point, (aside from feeding and sleeping habits which have to start right at birth,) I guess I had better say that you have to start the very day the child is born and the training does not stop until late in the teens. The years between one and six are the most important but I understand that the training gets harder from then on. If you get a solid foundation in before the child is six tho, I don't see how it is going to be such terribly rough sledding.

The point as I see it is to put in the early years with thoro and undivided care and attention to the children, the results will more than repay you, and when that crop is harvested, grown beyond your immediate and personal attention, then comes the grand age, the time when a woman is master of her destiny. Thru her children she has grown, she has kept abreast of the times. She has judgment, poise, experience; she is just coming into her own. She is worth at fifty a hundred times as much as she was at twenty five, provided of course, that she has taken sensible care of herself in all respects.

My one prayer is, guard me, help me, lead me, oh kind Father above us, until I reach the wonderful age of fifty and then maybe I'll be able to help myself!!!

I did not mean to write at such length but I sat down here and when I get started on this subject it is hard to stop. I could write for hours and illustrate my points with examples as I have seen them but I will save all that for the great story I hope some day to write.

Sincerely,

Louise Lambert Holcomb
(Mrs. Harry B. Holcomb)