

"CERTAINLY, SIR!"

by Herbert W. Armstrong (Plain Truth 1957)

"I would like another pat of butter, please."

"Certainly, Sir," replied the bus-boy as we breakfasted in a San Francisco hotel.

It was not so much what he said. It was the manner in which it was spoken that started a train of thought.

"Why is it," I began philosophizing to my wife, "that we Americans are so ill-trained in good manners and the use of the English language? This bus-boy is evidently English. I doubt if one in a hundred college seniors in America, ready for graduation from college, could speak and act with the grace and culture of this English bus-boy. Yet in every other phase of education they would probably show much further advancement than this young man.

"In other words, he probably has no more than a high school education, yet because he has been reared in an English home he *appears* to have more education than the average American college graduate."

Judged by Our Speech

"Remember when we were in England?" I continued. "Even servants and people with very little education, in the more humble stations of English life, spoke and acted with better speech, more poise and culture, than most Americans of considerable education.

"Did you notice the *manner* in which this bus-boy said 'Certainly, Sir?' It bespoke a developed, experienced *personality*. It wasn't said in a hesitant, self-conscious manner. It was spoken in the manner to which he is accustomed by long experience. Back of it, and reflected in his voice, was a personality habitually trained in easy, courteous, respectful and fluent self-expression."

We have just come to our room from breakfast, and so here I am turning this idea into an article for our readers.

This type of self-expression--this personality development--this training in good speech and good manners, cannot be instilled in the school classroom alone. The English example demonstrates that it must be developed in the home--in a happy, cultured, well-mannered family life, where certain restraints are enforced by the parents, and slip-shot carelessness, undue familiarity, and general letting down of the bars is not tolerated.

This requires careful diligence on the part of parents. When they, themselves, let down the bars, become careless about personal appearance, cocking feet on tables or chairs, speaking crossly, losing tempers, scarring the furniture or moving it out of place, they may expect their children to mature into uncouth, ill-trained, ignorant-*appearing* men and woman.

Even when young parents firmly resolve to start out their family life with the most careful training, it is exceedingly difficult in an America with its public-school playgrounds, where young children come into daily contact with ill-trained youngsters from other homes.

I remember when our boys, along about the second or third grade, were heard saying, "Aw, that ain't no good."

"Where on earth did you learn that kind of language?" I asked.

"Why, at school, Daddy."

I was amazed. But of course they didn't learn that kind of grammar in the classroom. They got it from other children on the playgrounds.

When students who have graduated from high school come to Ambassador College, with most grades in the "A's" or "B's," proficient in mathematics, history, and other subjects, but are not so well-trained in their English, we require them to take a special course in Remedial English for which no credit is given. We want Ambassador students not only to be well educated in the sense of possessing a large fund of knowledge, and sound understanding, but we want them to *appear* educated by the way they express themselves -- in personality, in speech, and in manners. It is our most difficult task.

They study English, and composition, and public speaking, and use of the voice in speaking, and foreign languages, under very competent professors. Still, we find, it takes constant diligent drill, and it takes time, and it takes patience.

But I must add, there is a great deal of satisfaction in the realization that progress is really greater than we usually realize, watching the day-to-day development of students.

I would recommend to all parents whose children are still young that they take some reputable and approved corresponding course in good English and good speech. Take inventory in your own home.

Ask yourselves, "Do we eat at our family table with the same manners we would if we were visiting some friends or relatives? Do we speak softly, or do we yell? If we wish to speak to another of the family in another part of the house, do we remain where we are and shout, or do we go to the other room and speak quietly?"

"Do we teach the children to obey the fifth commandment, and honor their parents by courteous and polite speaking as well as in other ways? Or do we permit our children to 'sass' us, and speak impudently and disrespectfully?"

"Do we always put things back in their proper place after use, and diligently enforce this practice on our children, or do we carelessly leave everything just where we last used it, thus teaching the children by example to do likewise, and creating clutter and confusion?"

Remember, God is not the author of confusion. A real Christian home will be one that is neat, clean and orderly, and where the family speaks softly with good manners. Otherwise you are breaking some of the Commandments of God, living in disorder and confusion, and doing serious harm and injury to the future of your children.

In all things, let us be circumspect and walk orderly.