

DATE: May 3, 1970

SUBJECT: HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

How does your garden grow? I was reared in a , rural, county seat town as a child and in that small town almost every family had a plot along side of the house and this time of the year growing things began to appear in these garden plots. And quite often you would hear people in conversation and as they met on the streets, 'well how does your garden grow?' A man's garden told an awfully lot about himself. If the garden is rich with hearty plants then you know that that person has used good fertilizer, he has cared for the soil, he has nurtured the growth of the plants that are planted there. If the rows are straight and the ground is not rocky then immediately you know that here is someone who has devotion in the growing of his garden. If weeds grow it tells something else. If the ground is rocky it tells even more. You could always tell an awfully lot about a family by the crops they grew, what their tastes were and what they would be having on their table. A garden told an awfully lot about the family who lived in the house. How does your garden grow?

You know, of course, now I'm not referring to the garden plot alongside your house, because these are later times. We rarely see garden plots where a family grows its vegetables. Yet you are a garden tender, nonetheless. What grows in your garden is people. If were to come upon one definition of the family that is unique and yet is as valid as any other, it would be a family is a growing place.

My wife lived all of her childhood years in the same house and there's one door jam unpainted over the years, where her father marked off her growth in height from year to year as she grew in stature. Many of you perhaps have records of your growth. One thing is for certain, every child from the time of his birth is gradually getting taller and taller and that growth cannot be stunted until maturity has been reached.

But more importantly there is the growing mind, the growing character, the growing philosophy which becomes that child. And here comes the greatest importance that we can imagine that any adult role that any of us may ever assume - that of growing people. Young people invariably ask, where is the action? We find many avenues in life where action is to be identified. In the realm of science everyday we are amazed by the action, by what's happening. In the realm of medicine, in all of the related worlds in which we enter there is a time of acceleration and discovery unlike any previous time. Someone said that a century ago, a man lived in essentially the same environment as his grandfather; whereas today, seven years is equal to two centuries a century ago. Action is certainly the stamp on this generation. But no action can measure up to what takes place within the family; here is where the action really is.

The first seven years of a child's life will determine to a great extent what that child will become. Over the years of our life we come under the influence of many people. All of us can number off those personalities who in one way or another has changed our lives. Not one of them, or all collectively, can measure up to the influence that a parent has upon a child in those first seven years.

My parents tried hard to rear me according to their conviction that I might become the adult that they wanted me to be. Quite frankly they failed at some points because of the limitations of their own insights. The thought structure upon which they had built some aspects of their thinking and philosophy. And yet those feelings that were engendered in my life in those early years, though intellectually I have been able to grow away from them, I cannot escape them they are still there. Unfortunately, my parents were very prejudiced against the negro, being a southern family. Over the years it was unchanged and I grew up with those same feelings until I became able to think as a mature adult and I began to react against that part of my early life. And yet there are still scars in my thinking and in my life that I have not been able to escape because of those years. What a child become to a great extent is what we as parents put in it.

George R. Stuart was one of the great men of the Methodist Church, over the years. He was a member of Holston Conference. When he died he was pastor of First Church of Birmingham. Recognized by such love and devotion that on the day of his death the city of Birmingham observed an official day of mourning. If you ever visit Lake Junaluska you'll see the great auditorium there that bears his name. George R. Stuart said that not one person in his adult years has ever gone wrong but that it can be traced to something that was lacking in his home. Now I'm not sure that we could get agreement from all family counselors or psychochologists on this observation, yet at the same time we do recognize that is the tiny fissures or those vacuums left in the nurture of our children that ultimately become the core spots in their adult years.

When Lee Oswald assassinated John F. Kennedy, the news magazines began to trace back his life through his childhood and to show there the failure of his parents that went to a great length in making him the adult that he became. When Martin Luther King was assassinated, the story was all over again as the news magazines traced back into his early childhood years and pointed out things that ultimately made him into the adult that he became. The family remains as the most important unit in any society. How it distresses us to see in these days the emphasis drifted from the family and put elsewhere. The dees, the desentegration of those holes within the family unit, that makes it now a loosely organized group, rather than the family that previous generations have known.

One hundred years ago, 1870, statistics showed that one out of every 35 marriages ended in the break-up of the home. Now one hundred years later, statistics show that one out of five marriages ends with the break-up of the home. It's a disturbing trend, a disturbing tendency to see that one solid factor at the heart of our nation beginning to weaken and disintegrate. There was a noted speaker who gave an address here in Gatlinburg a short time ago, his subject was America 50 years from now. He talked about the family. He said 50 years from now the family as we know it will no longer be in existence. But there will be contracts good only for 5 years at a time and at the end of every 5 the family can reunite itself for another 5 years or if they so choose it automatically becomes dissolved. No need for divorce, no need for legal action, it simply becomes a non-entity. If this should ever occur, then we are destroyed. For the family is the basic unity of growth and discipline and love and understanding.

Henry Grady is the South's greatest orator and newspaper editor. He has left a great legacy of his thoughts and insights. He told on one occasion of the first trip that he made to our nation's capitol. He said he wandered up and down through the maze of the streets of Washington, until he came to the nation's capitol. He stood there, unashamedly, tears ran down his cheeks as he looked upon this great edifice and in his heart he murmured, here lies the soul of America. Here are the roots of our greatness. He stood there almost hypnotically for a long time reminding himself of the great ideals upon which this nation is built and which sustain it. And all the while, his eyes carried him to the capitol, here is the symbol of all that is great in America. He said as he returned back to his home there was a great surge of patriotism that ran through his body, it lingered for days and even weeks. On one particular day he was forced to stay overnight in a farm home and as was the custom in those days without inns and without good highways, travelers were forced to take lodging overnight in a strange home. He sought out lodging in this farm home, he sat at the table that evening and ate the food that had been rigged from the labors in that home. After the dinner the father called them together before the hearth and they sat talking, sharing. He listened as they included him in this close portion of their family experience. After awhile as it just began to grow gray outside and a time in which his activity was just beginning, the father announced that it was time to go to bed. And silently they all waited while the father reached up to the mantle and pulled down the old Bible and he put it on his lap, lifted the glasses from the table and began to read from the Bible. And after he had finished, it was almost as if a signal had been given each member of that family uttered a short prayer and then silently each traced his way to his bedroom. He was forced himself to go to the place that had been prepared for him, since it was the custom for all to go to bed. And it being so early that he said he couldn't sleep that night, he said that he went to bed but he laid there and tossed upon the bed and thought. And his mind raced back to that experience a few weeks ago in the nation's capitol. Then he remembered what he had experienced these past minutes and he said in that moment I shook my head and said, "No, the nation's capitol is not the repository of America's greatness." The greatness of America is in her families. He never forgot that, it occurred over and over again in his writings in what makes America great. The solidarity of her families.

We face critical times as there's a gap of understanding between parents and children. We talk as though it's a phenomena of this day but it's always existed, the separation of ideas and concepts; but it is exaggerated today because we are living in exaggerated times. When I was a lad just the age of my son every Saturday morning at 10:00 I would go to the neighborhood theatre, I would go in and watch L. Buck Jones and Gene Autrey and Hoot Gibson replay the same old plots over and over again. All the neighborhood children would gather together and we would wear our guns and holsters on our hips into the movie house. We would sit there until 5:00 in the evening watching the same movie over and over again, month in and month out. My father could attend one of these movies and then we would never have any separation of interests to talk about because I never graduated to a higher level everything was always the same. But if one of you fathers has some time on hand on Saturday morning, sit down and watch what your children watch on television. And by the next week you're completely out of step with them. They are living in a time of change, progression exposure to things that many of us never dreamed of and at that very basic point we're already out of communication with one another.

When I was in high school the worst thing that could happen to a boy was to be caught smoking a cigarette behind the gymnasium and then he was sent home for three days. How many parents today wish that were the worse thing to which their children were exposed. Schools that used to put on programs for children of direction in the classic ways now are addressing themselves to drugs, and deadly destructive forms that are now crippling our children. Its hard to be in communication because we are standing at such different vantage points and yet while we look at it simply from one extreme we need to realize that there needs to be understanding from both ends. There's an equal responsibility on the part of children to understand the culture and the social critique out of which his parents stepped. As well as the parents to understand, my children cannot abide by the same form by which I was nurtured and reared. Oh, when we would reestablish the home in America to what it wanted to be, we could place an old marble top table in the living room, put a family Bible on top of it, hang a moto over that mantle which reads: 'With loving stitches, home sweet home.' We could drap about our mother's shoulder a hand woven shawl and say we've restructured the American home. It's foolish to think in terms such as those. It's good for a Christmas card, for a birthday card, it's good for a Thanksgiving card or a mother's day card; it's good to dream about but it isn't real and we can't establish the American home on such a superficial basis as that. We've got to get with it to realize that we are living in an Atomic age, values have shifted, norms are not the same, there has to be communication or there is alienation. Action needs to be taken off the streets and put into the homes where life is really formed and shaped and molded.

When I was a student at the University the men raced over to the women's dorms and raided them and it got the front page cover. But look what's happened at Yale University just this week. And how many times wer are re-exposed to Berkley and other progressive universities throughout our land. Not a time of denouncement but of understanding and re-creation, restructuring.

I quoted George R. Stuart a moment ago, let me tell you something else he said. George R. Stuart said that the American family was the one unit where ideals, life and meaning are developed and preserved. He said that when he was pastor of Centenary Church in Chattanooga that he stepped outside one day and he saw an old cow lumbering down the street. No one was prodding her, no one was leading her she was just walking along. Then he noticed that just in front of her was a wagon, he walked over and examined it carefully and he saw that a calf was tied in that wagon. That cow was following the calf wherever it went. Even though it was in strange places, even though it might endanger her own welfare, she was unconcerned about that. She knew only that her calf was being led away and she was following close behind. He said that he looked up and he saw three boys longeing in front of a place of questionable reputation and he thought, that cow loves her calf more than the mother loves these children. She is concerned to know where her calf is. One of the area television stations flashes on the screne at 11:00, 'Do you know where your children are?' Quite frankly, many don't.

Unfortunately, I'm going to have to compress what I wanted to say because of lack of time. Simply to bring in two reins upon which our thoughts can hang. One is that we must revitalize the home to become the place of growth and nurture as it ought to be. It can be done if we will re-establish the concept of authority. There has to be authority in all of life. We cannot escape it. I would not dare stand in the pulpit of any church if I were independent of authority. We must be led by the authority of revelation and by the authority of my church superiors. I would not dare stand there on my authority alone. The world cannot exist without authority. It is that which gives meaning to all of life. When we cry out for freedom today what we're really saying most of all is looseness, turn me loose, let me go, let me wander, let me have no roots and that will destroy anything. Everything must have its roots. The family is the place of authority until one becomes so emotionally and intellectually mature that he can take his rightful place. This is not a cry to re-instate the hickory switch to beat a child in the way in which he should go; but to recognize that there are a father figure and a mother figure that are valid throughout all of history and it must manifest itself - this permissiveness has got to go. There has to be a reestablishment of purpose, of authority. If the child does not learn authority in the home from his parents, he will not respect authority in the classroom, he will not respect authority in society, he will not respect authority in religion. And ultimately his lack of respect for authority will be his destruction. We are all guided by laws and we must recognize those laws and we must respect those laws.

But high handed authority is not what we need above all else, we need guidance. Children, youth today, cry hypocrisy. They ask, 'why can I not smoke marijuana if my parents smoke cigarettes' and the package reads this is harmful to your health. They've got a point. Children, youth today, say why can't I experiment with drugs, my parents drink and it's no different, it's hallucinatory and mind expanding and the possibility of becoming an alcoholic is just as deadly as becoming a drug addict. And you know, they're exactly right. We can't preach to young people today because they have rejected preaching. But we can guide, we can lead, we can show that we have embraced ideals that are represented in our lives and beg them by our example to embrace those ideals as well. No child in his right mind will take the advice of his father to do something, when in turn he sees his father flaunting that same authority and that same rule. So the real cry for the re-establishment of the principles of the American home and the solidity of character development within the American home is that we become examples rather than authoritative voices. And just as a child will put on his father's shoes and his mother's hat, a child will to a great extent put on his father's character and his mother's ideals.

Look at your home, how does your garden grow? Full of weeds, and crooked rows, stones lying all about. Or have you put love into the soil, authority into its nurture and religion into its fiber.

Let us pray.