

“Character Building” (Chapter 4 from *Beautiful Girlhood*)

“Let every man take heed how he buildeth.”* ([I Corinthians 3:10](#))

The most precious earthly treasure a girl can have is character. Her character is what she really is. If she will look beyond what she appears to be, and what people think of her, and look at her heart fairly and honestly, judging herself by the standards of right and wrong to which her own conscience gives sanction, then she can know whether she has a good character. When a girl is misunderstood and misjudged, it is comforting to know that deep in her heart she has been true. But it will rob even her friends' praises of the real pleasure if, in her heart, she knows she has been untrue.

Character is not given to us; we build it ourselves. Others may furnish the material, may set before us the right standards and ideals, may give us reproof and correction, may guide our actions and mold our thoughts—but after all, we build our own character. It is we, ourselves, who take of the influence about us, copy the ideals, reach the standards, and make ourselves what we are.

Youth is the building time. From infancy, throughout childhood, material has been brought together which we may use in our building. There are home influences and teachings, moral and intellectual instructions received in school, religious precepts and counsels of church and Sunday school, the moral standards of our childhood's playmates, the characters of the men and women we know, and countless other avenues by which instruction has come to us, bringing material which we may use in our building. The girl who has been reared in a Christian home, and by careful, watchful parents, has a far better opportunity to build a good character than she whose life has been less guarded. It is in the days of youth that this assembled material is built into character. The nature is then pliable, and habits are more easily formed and more easily broken than in later years. Day by day the girl, whether conscious of what she is doing or not, is taking of the material which she has about her, and is putting it into her character. Truth or falsehood, honesty or deceit, love or hatred, honor or reproach, obedience or rebellion, good or bad, day by day the building is going on. Through her infancy and childhood her parents have been responsible for her conduct; but now, when she has reached these important years, their responsibility is lessening and hers is increasing. Sometimes girls who have been quite submissive and obedient through childhood become independent and rebellious at this period, building into their characters that which is a lifelong regret. But contrariwise, others who have been unruly as children now wake to their responsibility and begin laying into their building those things that are good, upright, honest and noble. But more often she who has learned to obey in her childhood builds the better character.

Character building is a serious undertaking. You would never guess it by watching the foolish behavior of some girls. Sometimes I have wondered that to youth should be given the responsibility of laying the foundation of life's character, just when the heart is the gayest and the thoughts the least settled. But if the responsibility came later, it would be at a time when the help of parents and teachers is not to be had. The builder would then

have to work alone, while now she has many helpers. And since to youth is given such a serious undertaking, ought not our girl to take earnest thought to what she is doing, that no wrong material is placed in her building? Can she afford, for the sake of present fun and frolic, to place in her building that which will give her weakness all through her life?

Character building goes on every day. There is not a day that does not tell for good or bad. Each sees another stone in the building, hewn straight and true, or all misshapen and crooked. If temptations have been resisted and obstacles overcome, if evil thoughts and feelings have been quenched, and kind and noble thoughts encouraged in their place, then a stone has been hewn for victory and right. But if temptations have been yielded to, and evil thoughts and feelings have been harbored and cultivated, if wrong motives have been allowed, then the stone is unfit for a good building. So, as the days go by, the builder sorts out and uses of the material at hand that which is put into the character which shall be hers through life.

A pattern is needed. No dressmaker would undertake a garment without some idea of how it should look when finished. She must by some means form in her mind the picture of the dress as it is to be when it is done. Nor would she undertake a lady's cloak by a kimono pattern. She would ask for a perfect pattern to work by. A carpenter would not start a building until he first had a draft which made clear to his mind just how the finished edifice should look. More than that, he would ask for a perfect pattern of every part of the building, so that he might have it correct all the way through. No character is built good and true if the builder has not in her mind a picture of the woman she wants to be. And the pattern for a good character must be chosen carefully. The carpenter will not undertake a pretty cottage from the print of a barn, nor can a girl build a good, true character if she patterns after those whose lives are not good and true. She who has an ideal character is first of all pure and true, then earnest and sincere, patient and gentle, and more ready to serve than to be served. It is easier to build a bad than a good character. One can always go downhill with less difficulty than up, and glide with the current than row against it, and it is easier to drift with the crowd than to stand for the right. The bad character grows without effort. Just to be careless and indifferent to consequences may be the cause of downfall in one who would like to be noble. They who fall have been weak, for good character is strong.

Choose well as the days go by. Build for all time, not just for present pleasure. What you are building will bring you praise and satisfaction all your life, or it will be your curse and disgrace. Keep your measuring rod at hand and use it without stint. Reject all that falls short, no matter how pleasant it may look. "Is it right?" "Would it be for my good?" "Does it meet the approval of my parents or teachers?" "Is it forbidden?" are questions which you should be continually asking yourself as you decide what to do and what to leave undone. Many things that are fun end in wrong, much that seems pleasurable after awhile comes to be evil, and everything like this should be rejected without hesitation. To do right will often cost a struggle, but it is always worth the effort. We dare not allow ourselves to be continually guided by what others do. Christ is our Perfect Pattern, and only those who form their lives after Him are building the best character. He is the one great Pattern for us, His children.