

Turn Back That Finger

By Carlos G. Beltran

AT THE end of that accusing finger, wagged in exasperation and anger... is the child whose mischief is typical of his age, whose fluctuating moods are very much a part of his normal self, and whose line of thinking cannot approximate the realism of the outside world. Beyond the scope of the narrow bounds that form his daily environment, the child falls prey to the circumstances thrust upon him or events not of his own choice or making, where his inexperience and youth have been wilfully used to justify measures to guide his growth along definite "grooves."

With the present pace and trend of daily living and in the face of economic "survival of the fittest" which saps up the concentrated efforts and attention of the home, the child has been relegated to the background of more pressing problems... more to be tolerated but taken for granted. Misunderstood, the child has emerged to be a victim of our own pre-conceived standards and norms of conduct. As a consequence, the child is often bewildered by the actuations of his elders which run counter to what has been dinned into his ears—actuations which we are too prone to commit and condone for ourselves yet will constitute an act punishable on the part of the poor child.

In such an atmosphere where absolute authority holds sway without making any provision or leeway for the child's emotional and physical outlets, a grow-

ing personality is neglected and consigned to the limbo of self-abnegation. A reticent attitude is engendered and the child becomes fearful that what he does and says, will meet with disapproval or incur the ire of the hand that spares not the rod.

The home itself, cannot escape unscathe from the blame for its petty cases of "tyranny"; occurrences that are commonplace rather than exceptions to the rule especially in the rural areas where educational attainments are pitifully low and inadequate and where poverty and degradation hold sway. Consider this typical incident: Mang Pedro was lying down in the sala, presumably easing his back from the strains of toil. In came his son, apparently without the least intent of disturbing his father but as the space for passage was so small as most rural homes would allow, unfortunately stepped on the outstretched foot of the former. Roused, Mang Pedro scolded his son, calling him disrespectful and one name led to the other until at the height of his temper, flogged the little offender.

The situation was reversed. The next day, the boy fell asleep in the midst of his play and curled up unconcernedly as if the sala was his own sleeping corner. In came Mang Pedro, drenched with sweat and grim from his labor in the fields and tripped on the little foot that barred the way. The tired father immediately flared up and demanded to know why the boy selected the sala, of all places, for his

nap and get in everybody's way. Verbal barbs flew thick and fast in a tongue-lashing against which the boy could offer no defense except to stare in bewilderment at his enraged parent.*

Or this: In trying to be helpful, eleven-year old Erlinda broke a plate while washing the dishes. Aling Atang immediately saw red at the sight of her new plate shattered into several pieces. A pinch and the inevitable "I told you so . . .," lecture ensued. A week later, Aling Atang's husband sideswiped a tray and half-a-dozen plates plummeted to the floor and broke up into a hundred fragments. There was not a word spoken, as if nothing ever happened. Slowly the little girl sidled up to her mother and whispered, "Mother, why don't you also scold Father for having broken so many plates?" To this day, the question has remained unanswered.

Have we set a demarcation line between our ac-
tuations as parents and those of our young wards, an inviolable creed that gives substance to an incompatible philosophy: "Do what I tell you to do but do not follow what I do?" Or, is there a separate code or norm for the child in his greener years and another for his elders already imbued with the accum-

* In the course of a routine home visit, the writer witnessed this incident where the stern finger of a father pointed in anger to the little child cowering in the corner. Will it not be but fair, for that finger to be turned back, too? Hence, this article, to ease that growing thought.

ulated experiences of years and somewhere in the remoteness of that gap, the twain shall meet? These questions deserve serious contemplation for the incidents cited above are just a few among the daily happenings in the home, just a mere drop in the bucket of our own inconsistencies . . . where the child is taken to task for petty offenses that can best be charged to inexperience and youth without any tinge of rancor.

How truthfully has it been said, "There never is a bad boy at heart. In every child is always a latent spark of goodness deep within." The child, as a growing individual with a personality definitely all his own, needs a great deal of sympathy, love, and understanding within the bounds of valid and sound reason in order to tide him over the rough struggles in life and from which he derives strength and fortitude to walk the righteous path on to manhood. A stalwart tree out of the tender sapling, at last.

In judging the child, we unwittingly pass judgment upon ourselves; for our handiwork can only be as strong and lasting as the zeal and patience and infinite care that went into moulding it. In order to see better where the light and shadows lie in our chartered course, it will do us well to turn back that accusing finger . . . everytime we let go of a hand or a word uttered in consternation . . . to ferret out what's wrong with ourselves!