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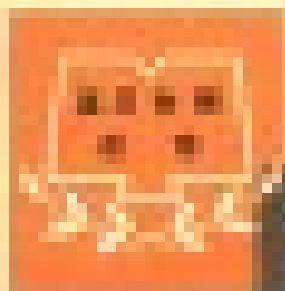
LIFE WITH FATHER

吕叔湘 译注

跟父亲一块儿过日子

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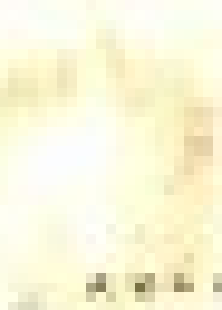
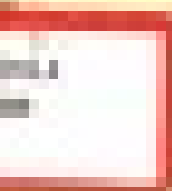
天津人民出版社



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生活与父亲

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天津人民出版社出版

天津新华印刷二厂印刷 天津市新华书店发行

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787×1092毫米32开 3.5印张 70千字

一九八二年十月第一版 一九八二年十月第一次印刷

印数：1—12,000

统一书号：7072·1229

定 价：0.30 元

序

本书作者 Clarence Day (1874—1935)，美国人，耶鲁大学出身。大学毕业后从事商业，也常写文章在杂志上投稿。本来也没有什么大名声，晚年才拿他幼年时的家庭生活做题材，陆续发表，后来集成三本书：God and My Father (1932)，Life with Father (1935)，Life with Mother (1938)，这三本书让他出了名。这三本书里边的中心人物是‘父亲’，一个证券商人，作者把他写得极其生动，我们读这些文章，简直觉得‘父亲’要从书上跳出来跟我们说话，不，吵架。分析起来，‘父亲’其实只是个极其平凡的人，爱吃，爱喝，怕生病，自以为是，要别人顺从他。这种人本来不讨人喜欢，可是‘父亲’也有可取之处，那就是率真。作者抓住这一点，竭力描写，于是‘父亲’的缺点也就显得可以原谅，甚至有几分可爱了。除‘父亲’以外，作者叙写其余的人物和大大小小的事情，也无处不显出他的谙知人性，洞达世情，这几本书的风行一时，确非偶然。后来有两位剧作家摘取书中情节，改编成剧本，卖座历久不衰，而且有许多人来问，原作者怎么会知道他们家里的事情如此清楚，法国人问他是不是到过法国，波兰人问他是不是到过波兰——对于一本书还有比这个更好的评语吗？

这些文章从1920年起就陆续发表在刊物上，最初一部分，‘父亲’本人还读到，还常常跟儿子辩驳。三本书中最重要的一本，《跟父亲一块儿过日子》，出版于1935年6月，同年12月作者就去世，《跟母亲一块儿过日子》（那里边的主角还是父亲）是他的妻子搜集遗稿编成的。

这个译注本是1947年我给开明书店编《译注现代英文丛刊》的时候编的，这次重印，译文和注释都稍微做了些修改。原书一共三十篇，这里只选了六篇，读者要是觉得好——不会不觉得的——务必找一本原书来从头到尾读一遍。

吕叔湘

1981年5月

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注 释

Father Tries to Make Mother Like Figures

FATHER was always trying to make Mother keep track of the household expenses. He was systematic by nature and he had had a sound business training. He had a full set of account books at home in addition to those in his office—a personal cashbook, journal, and ledger—in which he carefully made double entries. His home ledger showed at a glance exactly how much a month or a year his clothes or his clubs or his cigar bills amounted to. Every item was listed. He knew just how every one of his expenses compared with those of former years, and when he allowed the figures to mount up in one place, he could bring them down in another.

Before he got married, these books had apparently given him great satisfaction, but he said they were never the same after that. They had suddenly stopped telling him anything. He still knew what his personal expenses were, but they were microscopic compared to his household expenses, and of those he knew nothing, no details, only

the horrible total. His money was flowing away in all directions and he had no record of it;

Every once in so often he tried to explain his system to Mother. But his stout, leather-bound ledgers, and his methodical ruling of lines in red ink, and the whole business of putting down every little expense every day, were too much for her. She didn't feel that women should have anything to do with accounts, any more than men should have to see that the parlor was dusted. She had been only a *débutante* when she married, not long out of school, and though she had been head of her class, and wrote well and spelled well, and spoke beautiful French, she had never laid eyes on a ledger. Every time Father showed her his, she was unsympathetic.

Figures were so absorbing to Father that for a long time he couldn't believe Mother really disliked them. He hoped for years that her lack of interest was due only to her youth and that she would outgrow it. He said confidently that she would soon learn to keep books. It was simple. Meanwhile, if she would just make a memorandum for him of whatever she spent, he would enter it himself in the accounts until he could trust her to do it.

That day never arrived.

Father knew where some of the money went, for part of the expenses were charged. But this was a poor conso-

lation. Although the household bills gave him plenty of data which he could sit and stare at, in horror, he said that many of the details were not clear to him, and most of the rest were incredible.

He tried to go over the bills regularly with Mother, as well as he could, demanding information about items which he did not understand. But every now and then there were items which she didn't understand, either. She said she wasn't sure they were mistakes, but she couldn't remember about them. Her mind was a blank. She behaved as though the bill were a total stranger to her.

This was one of the features that annoyed Father most.

Mother didn't like these sessions a bit. She told us she hated bills, anyhow. When they were larger than she expected, she felt guilty and hardly dared to let Father see them. When some of them seemed small to her, she felt happy, but not for long, because they never seemed small to Father. And when she spotted an error—when she found, for instance, that Tyson, the butcher, had charged too much for a broiler—she had to fly around to the shop to have it corrected, and argue it out, and go through a disagreeable experience, and then when she told Father how hard she had worked he took it as a matter of course, and she indignantly found that she never got any credit for it.

Sometimes I had to do this kind of thing, too. There was a man named Flannagan over on Sixth Avenue who supplied us with newspapers, and I used to be sent to rebuke him when he overcharged. Father said Flannagan had no head for figures. After checking up the addition and recomputing the individual items, he would generally discover that the bill was anywhere from three to four-teen cents out. He then sent for me, handed me the correct amount of change and the bill, and told me to go over to see Flannagan the next day, after school, and warn him that we wouldn't stand it.

I got used to this after a while, but the first time I went I was frightened. Flannagan was a large man who looked like a barkeeper and whose face was tough and belligerent. When I marched into his dark little shop and shakily attempted to warn him that we wouldn't stand it, he leaned over the counter, stared down at me, and said loudly, "Har?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Flannagan," I repeated, "here is your bill but it's wrong."

"Har?"

"It seems to be just a little wrong, sir. Eight cents too much for the Sun."

Flannagan snatched the bill from me and the money, and went to his desk. After working over it with a

thick pencil, and smudging the bill all up, front and back, he snarled to himself, and receipted it the way Father wished. Then he shucked it disdainfully on the counter; I picked it up and got out. "Confound it all," Father said when he got it, "don't muss my bills up so."

"It was Mr. Flannagan, Father," said Mother. "Well, tell him he must learn to be tidy," said Father. "Yes, sir," I said, hopelessly. I liked figures myself, just as Father did, and I thought it was queer Mother didn't. She was as quick at them as anybody, yet she didn't get any fun out of writing them down and adding them up. I liked the problems in my school arithmetic, and I deeply admired Father's account books. I didn't dare tell him this, somehow. He never offered to let me examine those big, handsome books. He kept them locked up in a desk he had down in the front basement. If I showed Father one of my arithmetic lessons, he was interested—he got up from his chair and put down his newspaper and sat at the dining-room table with a pencil and paper, to see how well I had done. But Mother didn't want to go into such matters.

Every month when the bills came in, there was trouble. Mother seemed to have no great extravagances. But

she loved pretty things. She had a passion for china, for instance. She saw hundreds of beautiful cups and saucers that it was hard to walk away from and leave. She knew she couldn't buy them, and mustn't; but every so often she did. No one purchase seemed large by itself, but they kept mounting up, and Father declared that she bought more china than the Windsor Hotel.

Father couldn't see why charge accounts should be a temptation to Mother. They were no temptation to him. He knew that the bill would arrive on the first of the month and that in a few days he would pay it. He said he had supposed that Mother would have the same feelings that he had about this.

But Mother was one of those persons for whom charge accounts were invented. When she bought something and charged it, the first of the next month seemed far away, and she hoped that perhaps Father wouldn't mind—he might be nice about it for once. Her desire for the thing was strong at that moment, the penalty was remote, and she felt.

She was a different woman entirely when she had to pay cash. It was hard to get cash out of Father, she never got much at one time, and as she looked in her pocketbook she could see her precious little hoard dwindling. She fingered a purchase and thought twice about it before she

could bear to part with the money. But shopping on a charge account was fun. She tried not to let herself be tempted, but of course she was, all the time, and after she had conscientiously resisted nine lovely temptations, it didn't seem really wicked to yield to the tenth.

Father did his level best to take all the fun out of it for her. Once every month regularly he held court and sat as a judge, and required her to explain her crimes and misdemeanors. When she cried, or showed that she was hurt, it appeared that Father, too, felt hurt and worried. He said again and again at the top of his voice that he wished to be reasonable but that he couldn't afford to spend money that way, and that they would have to do better.

Once in a while when Father got low in his mind and said that he was discouraged, Mother felt so sorry that she tried hard to keep count of the cash for him. She put down all sorts of little expenses, on backs of envelopes or on half-sheets of letter paper of different sizes, and she gave these to Father with many interlineations and much scratching out of other memoranda, and with mystifying omissions. He would pore over them, calling out to her to tell him what this was, or that, in a vain attempt to bring order out of this feminine chaos.

Mother could sometimes, though not very often, be

managed by praise, but criticism made her rebellious, and after a dose of it she wouldn't put down any figures at all for a while. She had to do the mending and marketing and take care of the children, and she told Father she had no time to learn to be a bookkeeper too. What was the use of keeping track of anything that was over and done with? She said that wasn't her way of doing things.

"Well," Father said patiently, "let's get at the bottom of this, now, and work out some solution. What is your way of doing things? Tell me."

Mother said firmly that her way was to do the very best she could to keep down expenses, and that all her friends thought she did wonderfully, and the Wards spent twice as much.

Father said, "Damn the Wards! They don't have to work for it. I don't wish to be told what they spend, or how they throw money around."

Mother said, "Oh, Clare, how can you! They don't. They just like to have things go nicely, and live in a comfortable way, and I thought you were so fond of Cousin Mary. You know very well she is lovely, and she gave the baby a cup."

Father declared that he might be fond of Cousin Mary without wanting to hear so damned much about her. He said she cropped up every minute.

"You talk of your own family enough," Mother answered.

Father felt this was very unjust. When he talked of his own family he criticized them, and as severely as he knew how. He held tightly onto himself in an effort to keep to the subject. He said that the point he was trying to make was that Cousin Mary's ways were not his ways, and that consequently there was no use whatever discussing them with him.

Mother said, "Goodness knows I don't want to discuss things, it's always you who are doing it, and if I can't even speak of Cousin Mary—"

"You can, you can speak of her all you want to," Father hotly protested. "But I won't have Cousin Mary or anyone else dictating to me how to run things."

"I didn't say a word about her dictating, Clare. She isn't that kind."

"I don't know what you said, now," Father replied; "You never stick to the point. But you implied in some way that Cousin Mary—"

"Oh, Clare, please! I didn't! And I can't bear to have you talk so harshly of her when she admires you so."

Something like this happened to every financial conversation they had. Father did his best to confine the discussion to the question at issue, but somehow, no matter

how calmly he started, he soon got exasperated and went galloping fiercely off in any direction Mother's mind happened to take; and in the middle of it one of the babies would cry and Mother would have to go off to see what was wrong, or she would have to run down to leave word for Mrs. Tobin, the washerwoman, to do Father's shirts differently, and when Father complained Mother reminded him reproachfully that she had to keep house;

Father was baffled by these tactics; But every time he went back down to the basement and ruled neat lines in his ledgers, he made up his mind all over again that he wouldn't give up;