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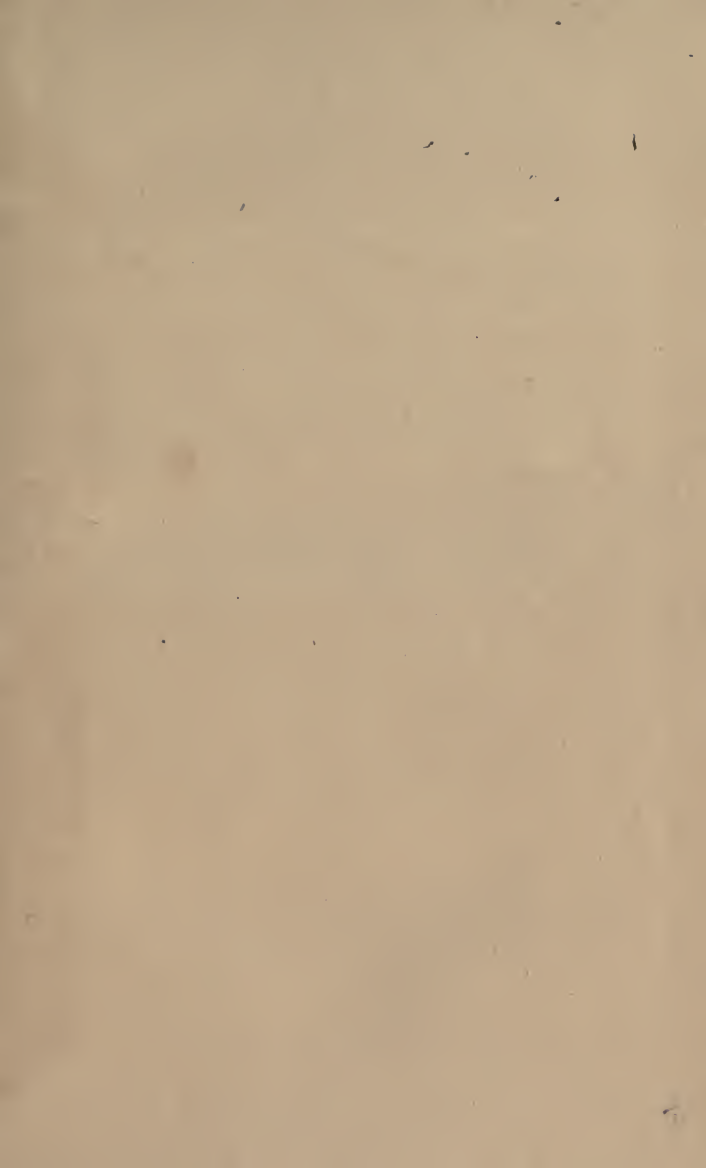
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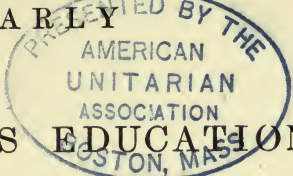
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EARLY
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



CONSIDERED AS

THE DIVINELY APPOINTED WAY

TO THE

REGENERATE LIFE.

BY

WILLIAM G. ELIO'1,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH, ST. LOUIS.

"Feed my lambs."



BOSTON:
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

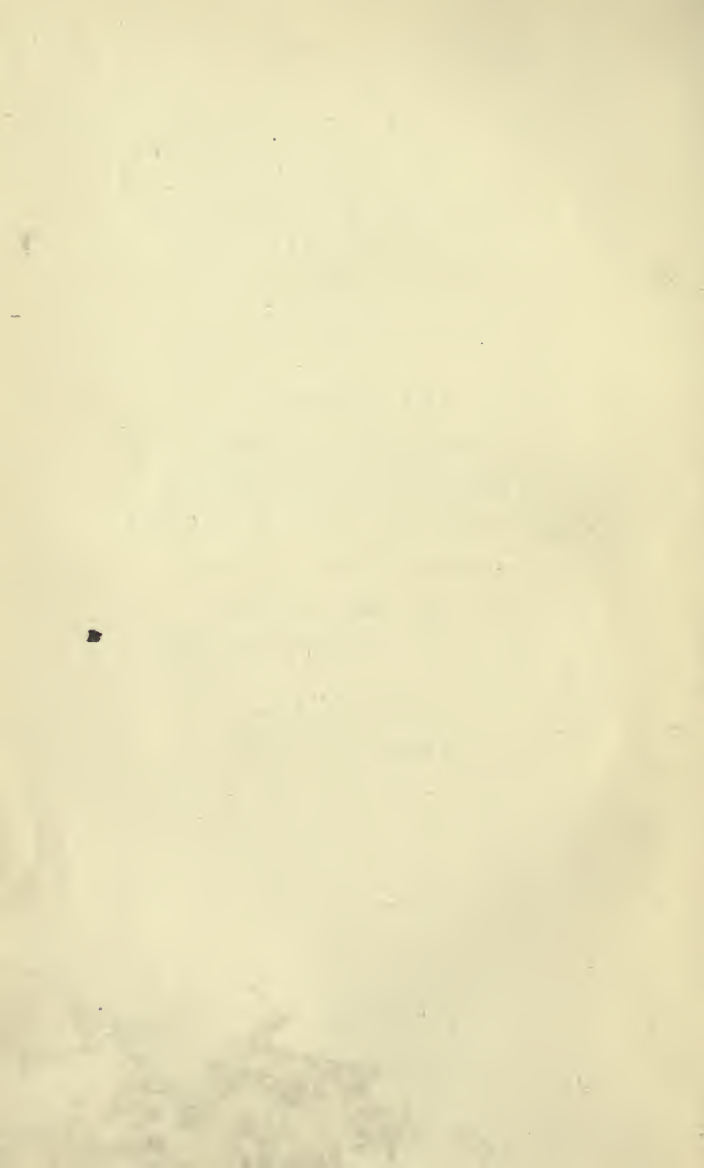
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TO
MY MOTHER,
THE ONLY SURVIVING PARENT
OF CHILDREN WHOSE DEBT OF GRATITUDE,
FOR HER UNWEARIED CARE IN LEADING THEM
BY CHRISTIAN PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE
TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH,
CAN NEVER BE ADEQUATELY EXPRESSED,
THIS ESSAY
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.



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CHAPTER I.

THE REGENERATE LIFE.

IN the following Essay, I propose to speak of the Religious Education of the Young, considered as the divinely appointed means of Christian Regeneration. My object is to call the attention of parents to duties and responsibilities which are too apt to be neglected, and by neglect of which the spiritual welfare of their children is sometimes sacrificed.

But, to avoid misapprehension, a few words may first be said concerning the spiritual or regenerate life of which we speak. What is Christian Regeneration? Is it a reality, or only a figure of speech to which no definite meaning needs to be given? Is it something that every one must, sooner or later, experience, in the formation of the Christian char-

acter, or is it only a matter of historical interest,—the change from one religion to another, as from Judaism or Heathenism to Christianity? Can it properly be called a change of heart, or is it anything more than that general improvement in manners and morals, the desirableness of which every one admits, but to which no such radical expression can, without exaggeration, be applied? According to the answer given to these questions, the whole subject of early religious education assumes greater or less practical importance.

“If any man is in Christ,” says the Apostle Paul, “he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Cor. v. 17.) We ask attention to the plainness and strength of this language,—“a new creature.” But, strong as the words are, they do not convey the full meaning of the original, which is, “a new creation.” That is to say, he who is in Christ is created again; and, lest the words may fail to be apprehended, the idea is further expressed,

“old things have passed away and all things have become new.”

Nor is this the only instance in which the Christian regeneration is thus described. It is the common Scriptural mode of expression. The state of the regenerate is declared to be the absolute renunciation of one life and the assumption of another. As St. Paul again said, “I am crucified with Christ,”—put to death with him; “nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” The word “regeneration” indicates the same thing, for it is, literally, a new or renewed birth. And thus the Saviour himself spoke, when he said, “Except a man be born again,”—or born from above, by a higher, creative, spiritual birth,—“he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Whatever we may make of such words, there can be no doubt of their containing a leading Scriptural doctrine. They are so often repeated, and in such variety of form but unity of substance, that we cannot keep them out of sight if we would. After all our ingenuity in explaining them away, as having

only a temporary application, or whatever other method may be taken to avoid their force, they return upon us and refuse to be explained away or disregarded. They contain the vital strength and efficacy of our religion. That we are capable of the regenerate life is our divine birthright, and its necessity to us as the means of reconciliation with God is the divine law under which, as spiritual beings, we live. If there is any doctrine of the Bible which is abstractly and absolutely stated as a universal truth, that which we now consider is so expressed; namely, that the Christian or spiritual life is essentially different from the worldly or natural life, and that, by becoming Christians, we undergo a real and radical change. Not, of course, that we are literally created over again, for this would be the same literal perversion of words into which Nicodemus fell. But it is evidently a real and radical change of the heart and life of which the Scripture speaks,—a change which affects us to such a degree that the words “new birth” and “new creation,” although figurative, are

strictly appropriate, and the most intelligible that can be used in its description. There is, undoubtedly, a Christian doctrine of regeneration which is intended to be received as a plain, practical truth, of universal application.

Yet there is in the minds of some persons a prejudice against it, and it is sometimes broadly denied. We have heard a Christian minister speak of "those who still believe in the doctrine of regeneration." As a spiritual experience it is called imaginary, and as a statement of truth it is ridiculed as being unphilosophical and absurd. Particularly do men of highly educated minds turn from it with distrust or contempt, as if it were the preaching of ignorance and superstition. But, by so treating the subject, we think that they go as far towards one extreme as the most ignorant and superstitious go towards the other. To deny the doctrine of regeneration and to remain a Christian, indicates either the misuse of words or an imperfect knowledge of the Scripture.

The prejudice to which we refer is not,

however, without foundation. Although not properly directed against the Scriptural doctrine, it has been very naturally excited by the unscriptural mode in which the doctrine is often preached. Sudden, miraculous conversion, wrought by divine power, independently of the human will, is the form in which it is sometimes presented;—a conversion, namely, by which the sinner of yesterday is the saint of to-day; a conversion by which the laws of the mind are annulled, the principles of human nature subverted, and as great a miracle wrought in the soul as by raising the dead to life. We do not wonder that well-educated and practical men resist such a doctrine as this. It is false in *theory*, for it would be the destruction of responsibility and freedom. It would make us the blind and helpless instruments, or rather subjects, of divine power, instead of being the willing servants of God both in seeking after and in accomplishing the Christian life. It is equally false in *practice*, for those who are most sure of having been themselves thus miraculously converted,

and who are recognized under the usual tests as genuine converts, do yet manifestly retain the same individuality, and are practically the same men they were before. No miracle seems to have been wrought in them, no degree of goodness suddenly attained, or which we may not account for by ordinary causes and the use of ordinary "Gospel means" of improvement. Sometimes, together with the reformation of outward life, a corresponding degree of spiritual pride creeps in, from the persuasion that they are the special recipients of divine favor; by which their simplicity of character is lost, and almost as much harm done in one way as good in the other. Whenever a man begins to "thank God that he is not as other men are, or even as this publican," he is in great danger.

In expressing belief, therefore, in regeneration, we do not speak of a *sudden* work. There is but one sense in which sudden conversion is possible, which is, that a beginning may be, and often is, abruptly or suddenly made. The thoughtless man may be unex-

pectedly brought to reflect, and the sinner to repent. There may be, and not unfrequently is, a turning-point of character,—an epoch which is the beginning of a new era in the life. In this sense, no one will dispute the fact; but we must remember that, after the direction of life is changed, the whole progress of life is to be accomplished. Nor do we teach *miraculous* conversion, except in that sense which belongs to God's providential dealing with us, and to the unseen, unobserved influences of God's spirit, which work together with our spirits, and in accordance with the laws of our own minds. Upon this divine help, which is at once natural and supernatural, we are always dependent. But we cannot separate it, as a miraculous interference, from our own thoughts and affections, our own aspirations and prayers. For, "as the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth, so is every one who is born of the spirit." It is at once arrogant and dangerous to claim direct and extra-

ordinary guidance. It is virtually to claim inspiration, and that which begins in humility ends in pride.

But we still hold to the plain and practical meaning of the Scriptural words, "Whosoever is in Christ is a new creature." There is not only a seeming difference, but an essential, radical, and thorough difference, between the religious and the worldly life. By becoming Christians we undergo a change, not only of habit, nor chiefly of habit, but chiefly a change of heart; or, in other words, of affection and of inward character. For nothing else than this can be reasonably intended when a change of heart is spoken of; — the same experience which is variously expressed, in the fifty-first Psalm, by the words, "Create within me a clean heart," and then by the equivalent words, "Renew a right spirit within me."

Every one must feel that his real or inward character is not always indicated by his ordinary outward conduct. "We know men by their fruits," but we judge of the fruit, not by its looks, but its taste and wholesome quali-

ties. A man's real character can be told only by knowing his leading motives, his ruling passion or affection, the prevailing purpose of his life. Of course, therefore, it can be known but imperfectly to any one but himself and his Maker; and wisdom should keep us from too positive judgments concerning each other. But it is none the less evident that, if the ruling principle be changed, the whole man is changed. Not suddenly, indeed, and perhaps not quickly, for the new element may take a good while to work itself into the affections, so as to modify the whole character. But a complete change is then begun, which requires only time for its working.

For example, let the spendthrift be taught that the possession of money, and not its foolish expenditure, commands the respect of the world, and let the love of money begin to take precedence of the love of pleasure. How quickly and how thoroughly is he changed! How different are his enjoyments, and what a complete revolution is wrought in his whole character! He is a new man, so that his

friends scarcely know him. And yet this is, comparatively speaking, a superficial change. His inward character may be just the same that it was before. It is only a change from one kind of selfishness to another; and his lavish generosity in the first stage, and his avaricious meanness in the second, are but different modes of the same self-seeking. The change, therefore, however great seemingly, is not like that which is wrought by substituting kind and generous affections for those which are narrow and selfish.

As an illustration of this greater change, take one who is at the head of a family, the husband and father, who, from motives of respectability, provides for his household, but who consults chiefly his own comfort, to which everything must bend, and who, by the indulgence of a tyrannical will, makes himself feared more than loved. What a thorough reformation would be wrought in him, and how would the warm rays of sunlight stream through his house, if you could cure him of that selfishness and petty tyranny,

by leading him to think of others instead of himself! Teach him to love his wife and children for their own sake, and not merely because they belong to him. Teach him to find his happiness in their happiness, instead of making their enjoyment depend upon his selfish whims. We acknowledge that this is a very difficult change to effect, but, if once wrought, its greatness will not be denied. A new feeling pervades the household, and everything said and done has a new and better expression. Yet even here you may not have reached the inmost character of all. The Scriptural change of heart in such a man may not yet have been accomplished. His affections have become genial, instead of contracted, he is kind and considerate, instead of selfish and exacting, which is a great change; but the spiritual life may yet be unknown to him; his relation to those around him may be an earthly, present relation only; and the law of righteousness, the Christian law of self-consecration, by submission to which we seek to present our bodies a living sacrifice

to God, may be yet entirely unknown or disregarded.

We may partly see, therefore, how radical is the change which the Christian religion proposes, and how thoroughly it must pervade the whole life in the process of its accomplishment. It substitutes the principle of right for that of expediency. It makes the will of God our law, instead of our own changing desires, or the customs of the world. Instead of selfishness and self-seeking, whatever form they may take, it teaches self-denial, and, it may be, self-sacrifice. It requires us to live for others, not only by separate acts of kindness, but by going about to do good, and by making the ordinary occupations of life the means of usefulness. It teaches us to regard everything in this world chiefly with a view to its uses in the formation of that higher, spiritual life, which begins here, to be perfected in heaven. It goes, therefore, to the depths of the soul, and changes the purpose of its existence. It changes the meaning of life and the end to be accomplished. It requires the change of our

ruling affections, and by infusing a new spirit into everything done, it effectually changes the whole conduct and conversation. Even that which seems to be the same, such as the common routine of life, is really changed, because its purpose and meaning are changed. If it be but the working for one's daily bread, the religious spirit supervenes to make it the working for the bread of eternal life. Without being what is commonly called a miraculous change, therefore, it is a complete, and, I believe, a divinely-wrought change from that which the Scriptures term the natural and worldly state of mind. For whatever views we may take of the metaphysical disputes about the origin and explanation of sin, we must certainly admit that the human heart does not fashion itself, in its natural development and under the ordinary influences of the world, according to the heavenly image. To become a Christian is, therefore, as the Scriptures teach, to undergo a change, and being such a change as we have indicated, it is, philosophically and fairly speaking, not less than

Scripturally speaking, a change of everything. "He who is in Christ is a new creation. Old things have passed away, and all things are become new."

But how absurd it is, let me again say, to speak of it as a renovation suddenly and completely wrought! We might rather say, and I here express it as my own deliberate and earnest conviction, that the work of regeneration is seldom effectually accomplished, unless when it begins by the Christian education of childhood, and goes on under the exercise of Christian influences through the whole life. Nor is the whole life too long for the result to be attained.

We do not deny the reality of that change which may come in mature years, to those who have led worldly and irreligious lives. But we do say, and it is of the utmost importance to say, that the Christian regeneration is better and more perfectly wrought in those who learn "to remember their Creator in the days of their youth." When the religious education is made to keep pace with the in-

tellectual; when the mind grows by its unconscious and early development into Christian habits of thought; when the lesson of self-control is so early learned that it becomes like the alphabet of life, with which all the subsequent history of life may be written;— then does the Christian regeneration become most perfect. The innocence of childhood, its simplicity, its gentleness, its confiding humility, are thus retained, while the active principle of Christian virtue is gradually introduced, to work like leaven in the character, and bring it, by a progress so natural that we almost hesitate to call it a change, up to the Christian standard. We may not be able to mark the time of conscious self-consecration to God, nor to observe the steps by which the will is brought towards it; but the result is none the less sure, the change effected none the less real. We may dispute about words, but such development and growth, like the springing up of seed from the ground, are in themselves a new creation.

As the complete ignorance of infancy is to

the advanced attainments of science, and as the infant's mind to the mature mind of the philosopher, so is the child's innocence, at the best, to the mature excellence of Christian goodness. No change can be greater, although, if it comes by the process of early education, it is less marked than a smaller change would be in later life, when the transition from ignorance to knowledge, or from selfish to Christian principles, is more easily observed. But commonly speaking, if you wish to make a learned or wise man, you must begin by educating the child. And equally, if you would do the work of Christian regeneration well, you must bring children to the familiar presence of Jesus, that he may lay his hands upon them and bless them. We shall thus save them from the wrongs done to the soul, by which its beauty is so often spoiled, and from the stains which the tears of repentance can scarcely wash out. We shall bring them to that mature strength of Christian principle which is the renewal of the Di-

vine image, the only real humanity of the immortal soul.

These truths therefore seem to me sure and undeniable : —

First, there is an essential, radical difference between the worldly and selfish life and that which the Christian religion demands.

Secondly, the Christian life does not come of itself, by the natural development of the mind and character, any more than science and learning come of their own accord.

Thirdly, the Christian life is the result and working of Christian principles, under the Divine impulse and guidance, which modify the whole character and conduct, so that the meaning and tendency of life are entirely changed.

Lastly, and as the result and consequence of the foregoing, the sooner these Christian principles are introduced, so as to become the nutriment by which the soul receives its growth, the better and the more effectually will the work be done. Our households must be filled with Christian children, or our church-

es will never be filled with Christian men and women.

Would it not be a new creation? Is not the Christian child, to whose lips the words of prayer are familiar, whose impulses are already restrained by the fear of God, whose standard of demeanor is the character of Christ, and who has already chosen the path of Christian virtue and truth,—is not such a one essentially a different creature from what he would have been under worldly influences? The Christian graces are never so beautiful as when they are thus formed in the unstained childhood of the soul.

Such are the views of the Scripture doctrine of regeneration which are our starting-point in this Essay. As seekers of the regenerate life, we need to be patient with ourselves, and with continued, earnest striving, having adopted the Christian principles of life, to endeavor, little by little, but with a radical working, to make them pervade the whole character and conduct, until they become the spirit in which we live. But in our care of

the young, the children whom God commits to our keeping, we have a different duty. It is to educate them to be Christians. It is our duty to bring them up at the feet of Jesus, and thus to educate them, perhaps not for earth, but certainly for heaven.

CHAPTER II.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

IF my views concerning Christian regeneration are correct, it is a work which should begin in early childhood, instead of being delayed, as it generally is, until the character is already formed. Its difficulty becomes greater with every advancing year, and confirmed habits of worldliness and self-indulgence require so great exertion for their change, that it is seldom attempted, still more seldom accomplished. We should therefore educate our children to be Christians. Their earliest training should be Christian training, and their submission to the law of Christ, both in faith and conduct, should be so gently instilled as to become like an unconscious or instinctive direction of the whole character. This

would be Christian nurture, the true religious education;—a work of great difficulty, I admit, and implying on the part of parents and teachers higher attainments than are usually possessed. But the duty does not the less exist, and to recognize it as a duty is at least one step towards its accomplishment. I fear that, generally speaking, it is neither recognized nor acknowledged.

The proper and rational ideas of religious education are not generally admitted, and are very often distinctly denied. School education is everywhere insisted upon, and all needful provision for the development of the intellect and for the accumulation of knowledge is made. The manners are formed with care, and the common moralities of life duly enforced. But Christian education, which is the inculcation of faith in Jesus Christ,—the Gospel education, by which not only a moral, but a religious character is formed,—is a work which many refuse to undertake.

Perhaps it is not too much to say, that the majority of young persons, even in Christian

families, are permitted to grow up without any decided religious education at all. They come to what are called the years of discretion, and enter upon all the serious duties of life, almost without knowing whether they believe in Christ or not. They have not learned to think of religion as a personal interest, and their only natural and easy progress is one which leads them further from the religious life every day. For if we do not educate our children to be Christians, they will be educated by worldly influences away from Christianity. And this is the actual result. In Christian congregations, how small a part of the young, of those, I mean, from fifteen to twenty years of age, have either assumed the Christian name, or distinctly admitted to themselves their obligation to do so! In religious belief and personal religious character, how many of them occupy a negative position! They do not know their own thoughts, and have not yet formed a definite religious purpose. They have not yet chosen their principles of conduct, at a time when

they would be ashamed not to have chosen their worldly pursuit, and are already ambitious of worldly influence.

Such is the actual state of things in the Christian Church. False theories of religion have prevailed to such an extent, that it has relied upon revivals and conversions, instead of Christian education, as the means of growth. It has not expected the young to be Christians, and is yet astonished that when older they do not become so. Therefore it goes on struggling in unequal contest with the powers of evil, and, instead of converting the world to Christ, cannot guard its own ranks from frequent desertion. Children of Christian parents fail to become Christians, and the majority of those who worship before the Christian altar never come to conclusions sufficiently definite to justify them in the distinct assumption of the Christian name. They are still waiting, and perhaps need to wait, for the Christian change. The work which ought to have been done in childhood and youth is still delayed, and they have not yet quite made up

their minds whether God or Mammon should be served.

Against such a state of things we protest, as being equally unchristian and wrong. The root of the evil lies far back, in the early education of childhood and the training of youth. Children need to be directed and formed in their religious character, as carefully as in the intellectual. They need to be taught religion as much as to be taught science. In one word, we must educate them to be Christians, or there is great danger of their never becoming Christians at all.

But in the statement of this proposition we are met by objections from two opposite sources. First, there are objections of indifference and mistaken liberality; and secondly, of superstition and mistaken doctrine. Both of these need to be considered.

We hear a great deal said about leaving the minds of children unbiassed;—that upon all religious subjects they should be left free, so that, upon arriving at years of discretion,

they may choose for themselves, and decide upon all disputed questions without prejudice. But what does this really mean? Is it the language of those who are themselves deeply interested, and whose religious convictions are deep and earnest? Is it not rather the language of men who care very little about the subjects of which they speak,— who have scarcely any positive convictions of their own, and are therefore indifferent about the opinions of others? This is commonly the case. It sounds like liberality; it is indifference. †

Religion, if regarded at all as a personal interest, becomes the chief interest in life, and we cannot help loving that which we not only believe, but to which we look for our daily comfort and strength. We may begin by conceding that every form of Christianity has enough truth for the salvation of the soul, and yet that which we have ourselves embraced as our own must be to us the dearest, and we cannot help desiring that those whom we most dearly love should think and feel with

us. Even if it were a matter of absolute indifference what a man believes, it would be so only as an abstract proposition. Our social enjoyments spring from community of thought, of feeling, and of interest. With our thoughts turned in different directions upon religious subjects, and with different religious sympathies, it is difficult — I do not say impossible, but difficult — to retain the cordial and intimate communion one with another upon which domestic happiness depends. This one divided interest affects all other interests, and there is constant danger that feelings of alienation and of almost angry impatience may be aroused.

Such is the common practical working, as everybody knows. However closely a family may be united, difference of religious opinion and religious sympathies may easily become a disturbing element, the introduction of which is therefore to be accounted a danger and a misfortune. † To guard against it, is no proof of bigotry or of illiberal feeling. It is but the natural desire to sympathize most closely with

those whom we love most dearly.† The fact being as it is, and human sympathies working as they do, the husband ought to desire to hold the same religion with his wife, and the wife with her husband. It is a misfortune when they cannot worship at the same altar, and a severer trial of affection than they are at first willing to believe. Between parents and children the same principle holds true, and therefore the natural desire and duty of the parent unitedly lead him to use all proper means to train his children in the same religious sympathies with himself. † In fact, he must do so, or neglect their religious education altogether. † If he directs them at all, it must be according to his own convictions of truth, and he cannot help feeling regret when they come to conclusions essentially different from his own. His duty towards them requires that he should place them under what he believes to be the best influences, and educate them in what he believes to be the truth. If he cares anything about religion, he cannot be indifferent as to their train-

ing, but will seek to direct them in the right way. Or if he cares nothing about the truth for its own sake, and thinks that one religion is, in itself considered, as good as another, practical good-sense will teach him that one religion is commonly enough for one household, and that to agree in religious opinion is one of the strongest bonds of domestic love.

† It is said, that, by thus directing the young in their religious education, we should train them to be narrow-minded and bigoted. Even that would be better than the blank and negative indifference in which they are so often permitted to grow up, which is almost sure to end in scepticism or unbelief, and by which the young are left without the restraints of religious principle through the whole forming period of life.✕ But the assertion is founded in mistake. The most prejudiced persons are often those who have had no specific instruction, and who are ignorant as to what they believe and what they reject. The most bigoted are often the least instructed, and most

unable to tell the grounds on which their opinions rest.

We may teach children to be fair-minded and open to conviction, while we instruct them in what we believe true. † We need not claim absolute authority over them, nor insist upon our own opinions as if there were no possibility of mistake. We may seek to develop their minds and help them to think for themselves, while giving them the benefit of our own more mature thoughts. We may guard them against unjust prejudices, and teach them to look with respect upon those from whom we differ. In a word, our object should be, not to make bigoted sectarians, but practical Christians; not to fill their minds with dogmatic theology which they cannot understand, but to lead them, as their minds are developed, to a familiar acquaintance with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, by obedience to whom they may become Christians. By such instruction there is no danger of their becoming bigoted. They gradually learn to form their own opinions, and always with a su-

preme regard to truth. Above all, they will have a positive religious training, both of mind and heart, which will almost certainly result in a practical Christian character, — the great end to be attained.

Unhappily, those who recognize the duty of giving a religious education to their children are apt to begin in the wrong way, and work with a wrong spirit. They begin with dogmatic theology, and before the child can understand the Lord's Prayer, he is made to learn by rote creeds and formulas of doctrine, about which the most learned men have always disputed, and will always continue to dispute. They are taught to answer the most difficult questions about predestination and election, about the nature of God and of Christ, in words no more intelligible to them than Greek or Hebrew, and are at the same time told that any deviation from those answers or any departure from the doctrines taught would be attended with the utmost peril to their souls. This is indeed a training to make them bigoted and narrow-minded. They learn

to feel that it is dangerous to think for themselves, and that in religion it is not necessary to think at all. They look with horror upon those who differ from them, and, being absolutely assured that they are themselves right, do not hesitate even without examination to condemn all others as wrong. Their minds are not open to conviction, for it has always been impressed upon them that a change of opinion would be rebellion against God.

For those who grow up under such influences, there is commonly but one alternative. Either they will retain their religious education at the expense of fairness of mind, liberality of feeling, and freedom of thought, — thus becoming defenders of their own sect rather than lovers of truth, and seeking to do God service by the heartiness of religious hatred, — that is to say, becoming sectarians and bigots, instead of Christians; or, on the other hand, by being disgusted with the contracted ideas which have been forced upon them as religion, they are gradually weaned from religion itself, sceptical of all religious

truth, rebellious against all religious authority, and disposed to treat with contempt all religious institutions.

Such is the explanation of a great deal of the scepticism and infidelity prevalent in the Christian world. It is the reaction of the mind against the arbitrary instruction of early years, and is sometimes a generous protest against intellectual bondage. It is not always the proof of a depraved heart, nor is it in its commencement generally so. At first, it is generally no more than the honest refusal to believe that which does not seem to be true, a refusal to submit to an authority which is evidently not divine. If it stopped there, it would be well, and the Christian faith might yet be retained. But the mind, once released from its moorings, drifts away, it knows not where. The scepticism of an unbelieving heart follows. The early restraints of religion are forgotten, and the habitual practice of sin makes a return to faith difficult, if not impossible. Such is the natural and frequent result of wrong religious education. Thousands of

those who are now the enemies of Christ, or at least who refuse to be his friends, can distinctly trace the misfortune and the sin to the irrational treatment of their childhood, to the stern and arbitrary instructions to which, in childhood, they were required to submit. x

We do not wonder, therefore, that, in view of such severe and unwise training, objections are sometimes made to all religious education. But the opposite extreme is equally unwise and unphilosophical. There are some who will not allow their children to enter a Sunday school, nor encourage them to attend at church, and who refuse to converse with them upon religious subjects, or to give them books from which religious instruction can be gained, through this exaggerated fear that some undue bias may be given to their minds, or some undue restraint placed upon the subsequent freedom of their thoughts. Such persons are committing, I fear, as great and serious a mistake as that which they avoid. The vacancy of mind and almost complete ignorance upon

religious subjects in which their children grow up is extremely unfavorable to their subsequent exercise of sound judgment. The child craves religious instruction, and will find it of some sort or other. As the thoughts and affections are developed, the soul instinctively looks upwards, and yearnings after God and immortality are felt, which may be discouraged, but cannot be suppressed. Some religious education or other children will have, and their questionings will somewhere find an answer. The only point for us to determine is, whether we shall leave it to chance, or provide the best means of instruction and the best religious influence within our reach. We may keep them uninformed, but we cannot keep their minds inactive ; and by leaving them without instruction, they contract prejudices, instead of forming opinions. They yield to the first strong influence to which they happen to be exposed, and, instead of becoming impartial seekers after truth, they become Protestant or Catholic, superstitious or sceptical, believers or unbelievers, Christian or infidel,

just as it may happen. And so families are divided, domestic comfort disturbed, bigotry and indifference sit at the same board, and regard each other with mutual pity or contempt, through the irrational and absurd experiment of neglecting, in our systems of education, the most important part of the child's nature. Parents may sometimes bring themselves to a state of philosophical indifference about religion, as if it were no matter what one believes concerning God and eternity; but intelligent children cannot be kept from inquiring, and if a right direction is not given to them, they will find a wrong direction for themselves. Their minds may be kept torpid upon any other subject more easily than upon this. Their moral nature demands opportunity of development; the conscience seeks for a guide; and no more dangerous experiment can be tried, than to tell them that they must wait until mature years before thinking of those subjects which involuntarily crowd upon their thoughts almost as soon as they begin to think at all.

I would rather go to the other extreme, and say that religious education, rightly considered and rightly conducted, is the whole education. It is certainly the most important part, and is the only right foundation on which a practical and useful education can be based. For moral and religious education cannot be separated from each other. It is religion which fixes the standard of morality, and enacts the law by which our conduct is to be regulated. The morality which we would teach is not the system of Zeno or Epicurus, but Christian morality, with the sanctions and penalties which Christ has established. No moral instruction can be of much value unless enforced by higher authority than the parents' command. The child must be taught to feel that he is living in a spiritual world, and that the highest relations of life are not with a world of sense, but with things unseen and eternal. He must be taught that the life of the soul is the real life, and the law of God the supreme law, and if we would make him a Christian, he must also be taught that Jesus Christ is the divinely

authorized messenger of God, whom we are bound to believe and obey.

This is, properly speaking, the child's religious education. It is the instruction by which he learns that his moral nature is his highest nature, that goodness is better than knowledge, that self-denial must be the rule of life, and that obedience to Christ, the teacher come from God, is the highest freedom. It is therefore not so much the inculcation of doctrines, concerning which there may be dispute, as of principles of conduct and faith, concerning which all Christians agree.

It is this practical Christian education upon which we so strongly insist;—that life should thus be made to rest upon the Christian basis;—that the whole education should thus be pervaded by a Christian spirit. The instruction may be directly and indirectly given, by direct precept and silent example, by the institutions of religion and the Sunday school, and especially by the timely aid which none but parents can give to meet the growing wants of the mind. They who have thus given at-

tion to the subject find no practical difficulty, and soon learn that no necessity exists for undue influence, or for arbitrary dogmatical instruction. Nearly all the disputed points of religion may be silently deferred until the young are able to understand the points of difference; and while they are instructed, they are thus left free.

The fundamental, undisputed doctrines of religion are more in number, and of greater importance, than commonly supposed. A child may be intelligently educated as a Christian, without ever having heard of a great part of the doctrines about which theologians dispute. When his mind is turned towards them, his inquiries should be aided so far as practicable; but in general the subjects which are interesting to the young are such as belong to practical, not speculative religion. The authority of Christ, his precepts and promises, his history on earth and his ascension to heaven, the attributes of God, the hope of immortality, human duty and responsibility, and other topics such as these, are the ones to

which youthful minds turn, and by instruction in which they are made Christians. Disputed points of belief are often a hinderance to religious education, instead of a help. The young must learn the alphabet before they can read, and the elementary principles of science before they can study to advantage its higher truths. In religion the same judgment should be exercised. A great part of their religious education can be accomplished before the metaphysical difficulties of religion are introduced, and when the proper time for their consideration comes, there would then be such a groundwork laid of practical religion and personal religious feeling, that the difficulties of disputed doctrine would offer no hinderance to religious growth.

I do not deny that children, growing up under positive religious influences such as these, would, in all probability, be brought to the same opinions with their parents or teachers. Their first conclusions will not be so much their own deliberate convictions as a reflection of the minds of others, to whom they

are accustomed to look for guidance. They take for granted that what their parents believe is true, and accordingly become Quakers or Episcopalians, Protestant or Catholic, believers in the Unity or the Trinity, according to the circumstances under which they are placed. Nor is this to be regretted, but, on the contrary, it is as it ought to be. Families should be thus held together by common religious sympathies and belief. If differences and divisions must come, they come soon enough when compelled by the mature re-examination of early opinions. Until the time of that mature and strictly personal study arrives, it is far better that decided religious preferences should exist, or, if you please to call it so, religious prejudices, by which we are attached to the religion of our fathers. The family is not well taught in which such preferences do not exist. They are the conservative influence by which the religious world is kept from being like the waves of the sea, driven about and tossed. It is time enough to change our belief when it becomes an ur-

gent duty, which we cannot, without wrong done to our consciences, avoid. Until then, let families continue to worship at the same altar and the same church, and thank God that they are permitted to do so.

Instead, therefore, of denying that such would be the result of the religious training which I now recommend, I would urge it as one of the advantages to be gained. The child of Trinitarian parents ought to grow up a Trinitarian in belief, and remain so, until his own thoughts and study show the necessity of change. And so of other forms of doctrine. To have fairness of mind and readiness to receive new light, is one thing; but to have no opinions, no preferences, no prepossessions, is quite another.

But although the most judicious religious education will thus lead the young, by an unperceived and almost irresistible force, to the first adoption of the parent's belief, I again deny that it will make them bigoted or narrow-minded, or, in a bad sense of the word, prejudiced against what others believe. On

the contrary, it will have made practical and spiritual religion so much more important than dogmatical and controversial religion, that all unchristian asperities of feeling will be easily avoided. The charity which abides will be placed so much higher than the knowledge which passes away, that differences of belief will not be able to destroy the unity of Christian faith. Children may be taught to be bigots, if the lesson of hatred and spiritual pride is carefully instilled, but they do not become so under the proper influence of practical Christian education. Nor do they become narrow-minded, or unwilling to look for further truth. For, together with all their instruction, they will have learned not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. They will have learned their individual responsibilities to God and the duty of seeking diligently and always after truth. They will have been taught to condemn no opinion without examining it, and to remember, that, however decided in their own convictions, they are not infallible, and that there-

fore those from whom they differ may be right, and themselves wrong ; that neither has a right to judge the other, and that to his own master each one must stand or fall. Let such principles be taught, so that they may become the pervading spirit and character of the mind, and there is no danger of narrowness either of thought or feeling.

The child may have a distinctive religious education without being bigoted, just as the scholar may be educated in one school of learning without being pedantic. Largeness of mind, freedom from unjust prejudice, willingness to learn, and sincere love of truth for the truth's sake, are themselves a part of religious education which should modify all the rest. If these were rightly taught, our different churches might continue to teach conflicting views of doctrine, and yet dwell together in the unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. The bigotry with which the Christian world is so full, and by which it is so cursed, does not come from careful religious instruction, but from the perti-

nacity of ignorance and the deliberate refusal to examine. Both young and old are taught that the desire to examine is a temptation of the Evil One, and that the highest safety consists in the completest want of individual thought. To go to no other church, to hear no other doctrine, to investigate no other creed, to walk in no other company, is the instruction given. It is not instruction, so much as a command not to think. It is not religious education, so much as sectarian drilling. We need say nothing more in its condemnation than to speak of it as it is. It is an error into which few or none of those whom I address are likely to fall. Our tendency, as claiming to be Liberal Christians, is towards the other extreme. We are more likely to advocate too little doctrinal instruction, than too much. We are more likely, through the desire of leaving the youthful mind free, to withhold the assistance which is really needed, than to impose our own thoughts by arbitrary command. But what we should seek for is a wise and just medium, which consists

in the fair and rational treatment of those whose education is intrusted to our care. We ask for the application of common sense to religious things. We desire the same fairness, but also the same faithfulness, in religious education, that are needed in other departments of education. There should be the same respect for the child's understanding, the same recognition of his own right to think ultimately for himself, but also the same diligence in choosing subjects for thought, and in helping him to form right opinions. The instruction given should be carefully adapted to the capacity of those who learn, and therefore the more abstruse and difficult subjects of religion should not be the first taught; but the great principles of religion should be early and carefully inculcated, the principles of Christian conduct and of Christian faith, so that they may become the pervading principles of thought, the governing principles of the life. Christian morality and Christian hopes are as intelligible to the child as to the adult. He can understand a great part of Christ's in-

structions, he can read intelligently the history of Christ's life, he can discern the divine beauty of his character, and be taught to receive him as the Son of the Living God. The historical evidences of Christianity may be unknown to him, and as yet he may not see those difficulties either of doctrine or fact which will afterwards, with his growing years, bring perplexity and sometimes doubt. But the great evidence on which Christian truth and all truth rests is already perceived,—nay, wrought into his soul,—the evidence which consists in the inward perception of truth by reason of its adaptation to supply the wants and satisfy the aspirations of the soul.

The excellence and glory of Christian truth in its teaching concerning God and eternity fill the youthful mind with reverence and awe. The Sermon on the Mount may be a part of the child's first reading, and his childish fears are quieted when he is taught that without his Heavenly Father not even a sparrow falleth to the ground. He may learn to think of heaven as wisely as the most learned, for even

when our faith is strongest, our knowledge, notwithstanding all our ingenious speculations, continues small. Almost every practical truth and precept, almost everything which constitutes a practical religion, resting upon divine authority and given by divine command, is plain enough to be apprehended by the youthful mind. Children may be brought to Jesus Christ so as to become properly speaking his disciples. They may be Christians in faith and conduct long before their intellects can understand the subtleties of scepticism or the denials of unbelief. It is an inwrought faith by which the spiritual nature is developed and the spiritual world made real. It is a childlike, may I not say Christ-like obedience, which brings them under the benediction which Jesus spoke, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." We do not say that such religious training is an easy task, or carelessly to be accomplished. In its perfection, it is the highest education of the soul. It is, I believe, the great work which the Christian parent has to do. It cannot be be-

gun too early, or prosecuted with too great care. The one great purpose continually present in the parent's heart should be to bring his children nearer to Jesus, and to make the Christian principles, under Christian authority, the commanding influence of their lives.

But we may be asked, Would not this make them Christian believers by an authority which they can hardly resist, and from which they can afterwards hardly escape? Does it not settle the question for them, before they are in a position to choose for themselves, that Jesus is a divine teacher, and his doctrines a divine command? Unquestionably it does, and unquestionably it is what we are bound to do. If there are any who care so little about religion as to wish their children to be left so free that they are as likely to be infidels as believers, heathens as Christians, their liberality goes so far beyond my own, that there can be no sympathy between us. If they do not concede that religion of some sort or other is a necessity, and that the purest and best religion of which we know anything is the

Christian, and the purest morality that which Christ taught, there is no common ground for us to stand upon. But if this is admitted, if we must have some religion, some object of worship, some divinely sanctioned law, and if the Christian religion and the Christian law are the best of which we know, it follows surely that we are bound, by the love which we bear to our children and by our responsibility for them to God, to spare no pains in bringing them to that which is conceded to be the noblest and the best. Unquestionably they would be brought by such a course to be Christians, and that is precisely the result which we would secure. What sect in Christendom they may join, in maturer years, would be comparatively uncertain, and, if they are left without undue restraint, would depend upon the natural bent of their minds and the later instruction they may receive. But almost uniformly they would remain Christians; Christians, I mean, in personal faith and in personal allegiance to Jesus Christ. Let the divine principles of his Gospel be once thor-

oughly instilled into the youthful character, let the divine beauty of the life of Jesus be once revealed to the youthful heart, let the divine truths which Jesus taught once take possession of the youthful mind, and scepticism, although it may in after years disturb the thoughts, so that the unimportant outworks may be threatened, will never be able to enter the citadel of the soul, or to disturb its unchanging faith. Once having lived upon the heavenly food, we must be indeed prodigals to desire the husks that the swine do eat. And if, through the waywardness of sin, we become prodigals, the memory of our early home remains, until we say in our hearts, We will arise and go to our father. The early Christian instruction of which I speak can scarcely by any means be eradicated. It is not so much the inculcation of opinions as the formation of character. It is the surest process, under the grace of God, by which "the life of Christ" can be formed in the soul. It is therefore the way to Christian regeneration, the new and spiritual birth. Early Chris-

tian education thus becomes, by the grace of God, the most effectual means of salvation, and although we may call it a human instrumentality, it is that with which the Divine Spirit most effectually works.

Lay aside, then, all sectarian views, if you please, and let the youthful mind be treated with fairness and respect. But being Christians ourselves, holding to the Christian law as the perfection of reason, to the Christian faith as the source of all consolation, to the Christian standard of life as the highest practical development of humanity, we must desire that our children should grow into the Christian faith and life, and it is our bounden duty to secure its accomplishment, if we can.

CHAPTER III.

THE PARENT'S DUTY.

How is it to be secured, and by what agency? Who shall be the teachers, and where shall the lesson be taught? These are the practical and vital questions, upon the right answer to which our success depends. But there is no part of education upon which such foolish and false theories prevail as upon this. Whenever religious subjects are approached, many persons seem to think that common sense is to be laid aside, and the laws of the human mind disregarded. Let us, therefore, look at the analogies of common education.

In forming the manners of children, to make them ladylike and gentlemanly in conduct, every one knows that it is chiefly a household work, to be done by parents themselves. If

the father is rude and coarse, and the mother unladylike, it is a matter of almost absolute destiny that the children must become so too. Awkwardness and vulgarity are contagious, and no external means of polish will give true refinement to those who do not live in an atmosphere of refinement at home. The mother must be a lady, or the daughters will be but imitation ladies at the best. The father must be a gentleman, and have gentlemen for his associates, or the sons will probably grow up without knowing how a gentleman should behave. They may wear gentlemen's and ladies' clothing, and by the magic power of money be welcomed into what is called the best society, but it will require not only a long training, but also an unusual aptness to learn, to work out the leaven of early life, and to remove the original taint of vulgarity. It may be done, unquestionably; but only by a hard and slow process.

In all the nicer shades of education, such as the correct use of language and the cultivation of taste, similar remarks hold true. Bad

grammar habitually heard at home outmasters the teacher's skill, and sets the rules of Murray at defiance. Teaching a thousand times over does not avail, and words continue to be misplaced and misused, with insuperable, because it is an unconscious, pertinacity. It rarely happens that those whose early education has been thus deficient, and whose "mother tongue" is ungrammatical and inelegant, ever learn to use language with purity and correctness. They may know how, and in writing or set speech may avoid great mistakes; but the moment that they are off their guard, their former way of speaking returns. The highest finish of scholar-like education is not always enough to train the ear to that delicate perception of grammatical and rhetorical elegance, which should have been taught and learned in the nursery and at the fireside.

This is still more true of that unobserved cultivation of taste, which begins so early that it seems like a natural tendency of the mind. An ideal of beauty and excellence, implanted

in the mind of the child, is apt to remain there always. The pleasures and enjoyments which he is then accustomed to prize, will probably give direction to his pursuit of happiness through his whole life. Early associations impart a charm and a relish either to frivolous amusements, novel-reading, games of chance, and other idle occupations, or to the more intellectual and quiet pleasures of conversation and useful reading, of music and of art.

A close observer will therefore almost always be able to determine what were the early influences under which a man grew up, by a few hours' conversation and familiar intercourse with him. Colleges and universities may have done wonders, and he may have travelled the world over, in pursuit of knowledge and for the cultivation of taste; but, with rare exceptions, the groundwork of early home-education will appear through all the coloring and polish afterwards laid on.

What I have now said with regard to general education will be admitted, proper allow

ance being made for exceptions, by almost all. Therefore the first demand of all popular educators and of all writers upon the subject of education is this, — *educate mothers*. Not that they are expected to do the work of the school-teacher, but that they may not do a work of perversion from the first; that they may establish right tendencies of thought and speech, of manners and taste, before the work of school-teaching begins; that home education may not be all the time undoing what teachers and school-education are vainly trying to do; that the instructions of the school-room may be only the theoretical explanation of what is daily illustrated at home. It is universally conceded, that the best appliances of school-education can but imperfectly overcome the pernicious influences of uneducated homes.

It would therefore require the continued improvement of two or three generations, to work a social reform in education. But what are they to do who are already on the stage of action, whose own education has been neg-

lected, but to whom, as parents, the care and responsibility of children are intrusted? We answer, that they should be only the more diligent to do the best they can; for, at the best, their children's education will be conducted at great disadvantage. But above all, let them endeavor to remove their own unfitness, and to qualify themselves, though late, for the duties which, as parents, they ought to perform. Let them supply the deficiencies of their own early education by reading and study. Let them observe and learn, and diligently seek for the instruction which they need. Let them learn with their children, and from them, if need be, and thus become learners and teachers at once. If they have good sense enough to do this, they will remove a great part of the difficulty, by increasing their children's respect for learning, and making them appreciate the better advantages which they enjoy. The household in which such principles prevail is altogether an improving household, and if such principles generally prevailed, one generation would accom-

plish as much as, under other circumstances, would be done by three. For this reason it is, that adult schools and popular lectures, libraries and reading-rooms, and other means of general improvement, are so important. The educators of children need to be educated, so as to become more competent to fill the position which they hold.

But my subject is not intellectual education, nor education in a general sense. It is religious education; and upon this all I have been saying is intended directly to bear. For the same principles apply, the same course of thought may be followed, and strictly analogous conclusions may be deduced. Nay, the principles apply more closely, the argument is still stronger, the conclusions are still more absolute. Religious education must *chiefly* be home education. The parents must be religious persons, and the sentiment of religion must pervade all they do, or the religious education of the child will be, at the best, very imperfect. Sunday schools may do

something, and are an important aid to the parent's exertions; but they cannot do everything, nor can they supply the deficiency at home. Pastoral influence and the institutions of public worship may do something, but very little when they work alone. Well-selected books, and well-chosen associates, are perhaps a more powerful agency, and come nearer to the home influence which is chiefly desired. But put them all together, and make them as strong as you well can, yet, if the parental influence is wanting, the best religious education cannot be supplied. An irreligious education is, in fact, going on all the time at home, which vitiates or annuls the good learned elsewhere. The more delicate perceptions of right and wrong, the feeling of habitual reverence for God and Christ, the unconscious reference of all we do to the Christian law, and whatever else constitutes the inward and spiritual life of the child, can seldom be thoroughly learned, except at home. The nursery and the fireside are the schools of religion. A Christian mother is worth

more to her children in their religious and moral, that is to say their Christian training, than all Sunday schools and churches, preachers and libraries, put together. She alone upon one side, and all the world upon the other, and she is most likely to prevail. Let her be heartily a Christian woman, and her children are almost sure to be Christians. Add to her influence that of the father; let her gentle persuasions be enforced by his authority, and let both parents thus co-operate with each other, as they ought always to do, and their children would assuredly grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

We must make allowance, I know, for errors of judgment, where there has been no fault of intention, — too much indulgence at one time, and too great severity at another, — so that the apparent exceptions to the rule may be many; and irreligious persons always make the most of them, as an argument against religion itself. But the exceptions are generally such only in appearance. They

are attributable either to unwise methods of education, or to peculiar and exceptional waywardness in the child. But whatever force may be allowed to the exceptions which really or apparently occur, the rule still remains, with regard to religious education, as to all other education, that what we learn at home is the most thoroughly learned. The surest way to secure the good education of the young, is previously to have secured the good education of their parents. The surest, and commonly the only, way to secure the Christian training of our children, is to be Christians ourselves. It is the hardest way, but no one will deny that it is the surest and the best way. For then we shall be teaching them always. A silent, unperceived, but almost irresistible force, leads them in the path in which they should go. The name of Jesus becomes dear to their hearts. The thought of heaven mingles in their dreams. The natural selfishness of their hearts is restrained and prevented from becoming sinful. A religious feeling mixes with their enjoyments,

to purify, but not to lessen, their delight. Duty loses its stern aspect, and appears as beautiful as it really is. Self-denial, prompted by love, ceases to be a hardship, and is exercised with cheerful good-will. The graces and excellences of Christian character are almost unconsciously formed, and the divine spirit, working through parental agency, silently effects the regeneration of the soul. The spiritual life is thus born within the heart of the child, he himself scarce knows how; and as he comes to maturer years, his part is only to adopt, by deliberate and conscious choice, that which he has already learned to love and revere. Having thus been educated to be a Christian, under the parental influence of united precept and example, he becomes a Christian almost as certainly as he becomes a man. It may seem to be a natural progress, and, to those who continually "ask for a sign," it may not have mystery enough, or enough outward demonstration, to satisfy their demands. But it is, in fact, the divinely appointed growth, through divinely ap-

pointed agencies, under the Divine blessing and guidance, to a divine and blessed result. The parent is the best religious teacher, and our homes are the school-rooms and the churches where religion may be most perfectly taught.

These considerations have established a usage in some parts of the world and in some churches, under which a profession of Christian faith, by partaking of the communion, is made a prerequisite to marriage, and both parties come under express obligation to bring the children who may be committed to their care under the influences of Christian education. It is a usage founded in just views of the parental relation, and, if it could accomplish its purpose, might be strongly recommended. But it has almost always degenerated into a mere form, and been attended to as a matter of course and of necessity, so that its moral and religious efficacy has been greatly impaired. Wherever it has prevailed, however, its general conservative influence has been felt, and the distinct recognition of re-

ligious duty on the part of parents to their children must have a good effect. It would certainly be better than the total disregard of all such considerations so common in modern times, and especially in this country. If it be true, as it certainly is, that moral and religious culture is the most important part of education, and the part on which our happiness and usefulness in this world chiefly depend, whatever may be its bearing upon the world to come, and if this moral and religious culture is chiefly the result of parental influence and home education, then it follows, plainly enough, that those who are not competent to exert a healthful influence upon the moral and religious training of their children ought not to have them committed to their charge. When the incompetency is extreme, the law itself takes cognizance of it, and rescues children from the care of intemperate or notoriously depraved parents. But this is seldom done except when, besides the intemperance and depravity, the additional crime of poverty is found to exist. Then inability to maintain

the child is the principal alleged cause of interfering in his behalf.

Nor would we have it otherwise, considered as the regulation of civil law. Public interference with private rights is always a dangerous experiment, and it is better for children to suffer a great deal of neglect or mismanagement at home, than to destroy the providential arrangement by which they are brought into families. The legislation by which parental rights are annulled, should be charily and tenderly administered.

Still we cannot help feeling that a wrong is done, and a hardship endured, when children full of natural promise, and who have a natural right to be educated in truth and virtue, are placed under a control which they cannot resist, by which a bad direction is given to their whole lives from the first. By the irreligious, worldly, and sinful character of their parents, they are born to an inheritance of evil, upon which they are almost sure to enter. The nursery is to them an infant school of fretfulness and ill-tempered selfishness. The

father's lips teach them to despise religion, and the mother's example leads them to regard frivolous pleasures as the great charm of life. They learn no habits of self-government or self-denial, because they see nothing but self-indulgence around them. They gain no exalted ideas of duty, for they are practically taught that to eat, drink, and be merry is the great object of life, and that money is the root of all excellence and the foundation of all respectability. They know that nominally they belong to a Christian family; but for all they learn of the religion of Christ, they might as well be heathens.

The evil is greater or less according to the degree of refinement and general education under which it appears; but under all circumstances, whether of poverty or riches, of vulgarity or refinement, of ignorance or intellectual culture, the moral and religious incompetency of parents is a wrong and a misfortune to their children. A trust is thereby committed to those who are not morally able to discharge it. A responsi-

bility rests upon them to which they are not equal. They are teachers without having been taught themselves, and guides over a road upon which they have never travelled. Their children ask them for bread, and they give them a stone; for a fish, and they give them a serpent.

We say that it is a wrong done and a hardship endured. But how shall it be corrected? how shall it be prevented?—questions which are hard to answer, but which society must answer, at its peril. The regeneration of the world, and the safety of the Christian Church, under whatever organization it may appear, depend upon the issue. The rising generations of our land must be educated to be Christians, with greater care and faithfulness than heretofore exercised, or they will not grow up Christians at all, or only nominal Christians at the best. Parents must be the principal educators, and the greater part of parents are incompetent to the task. So incompetent are they very often, that they do not recognize the duty, and are perhaps throw-

ing their influence into the wrong scale. These are the facts of the case, and constitute the real difficulty to be encountered. We would do what little we can to call the attention of religious-minded people to the subject, and through them to secure the diffusion of correct ideas.

For, to acknowledge the difficulty, and distinctly to recognize the duty, is a large part of the reform to be effected. Let parents be taught the obligation under which they have come, the solemn responsibility in which their lives are passed. It is not children to be fed and clothed, but immortal souls to be educated, who are placed under their care;—to be educated, not chiefly in knowledge, but in practical wisdom;—to be taught how to learn and how to live; to be taught how to govern themselves under the law of obedience to God; to be directed in the formation of the moral and religious character;—in a word, to be educated as Christians, with the hope of Christian salvation. This is the great work which parents have to do; and by doing it,

they act as the agents of God in the regeneration of the world.

Let the parental duties and obligations be thus seen and acknowledged, and our thoughtlessness in entering upon them, and our negligence in discharging them, would cease. But we are reluctant to discern the truth of our position, because we feel incompetent to its duties;—an incompetency which does indeed generally exist, for although it is sad to say, yet it is true, that comparatively few parents are, by their own education and character, competent guides in leading their children to God. Their own religious knowledge is so imperfect, and their own religious attainments are so small, that their direct teaching is full of mistakes, and the indirect teaching of their example still more full of blemishes. They therefore try to escape from the duty, and devolve it upon others. But they cannot escape. Whether they will or no, they are the principal teachers of their children, and, either for good or evil, are the chief directors of their moral and religious life.

What, then, should they do? If they are conscientious persons, they will become learners, that they may teach. They will learn with their children and from them, becoming guides while they are themselves seeking the way. By their earnestness of purpose, they will make up for their deficiency in attainment, and by their own endeavor to advance in the religious life, will excite their children to the same desire. They will thus, while acknowledging their deficiency, be doing their best to remove it, and will give to their children an example, although not of unblemished goodness, yet of sincere Christian endeavor. And this is the main thing. This is the most important end to be secured. We might almost say that the child's heart will find its own way to God, if encouraged to seek for it. The most important part of religious education is to impress upon the child the supreme importance of duty and the necessity of a religious life. Whenever this has been duly enforced and duly impressed upon him, his regeneration has begun.

It is not the incompetency of parents, therefore, but their indifference, which stands in the way. With the Gospel in their hands as a text-book, they cannot go far wrong in teaching, so long as they are themselves trying to learn, and to follow the instructions they give. Make all requisite allowance for their incompetency, and for all other difficulties of the case, and yet we must acknowledge, that, if the present generation were to be formed under such general influences as those of which I speak, the next generation would be morally and religiously far in advance of our own. Our great trouble, at the present day, is also the worst omen for the future. It is the neglect of the moral and religious home education. It is the disposition of parents to devolve upon schools and teachers that which they ought to do themselves. Their children are expected to learn religion at the church and Sunday school, while they are learning worldliness, sin, and irreligion at home. The bad home-influence, which lasts all the week, is to be counteracted by one or

two hours on the Lord's day. A vain hope, which no one who deserves to be the parent or guardian of the young would entertain. In the nursery and at the fireside must the Christian morality be taught, or they will be but seldom learned. Parents must lead the way, or children will not follow. They must be the teachers, or children will not learn. They must, by precept and example, avow the necessity of a Christian life, or children will not feel its obligation.

I would not undervalue the external aid which the Sunday school and church may lend to the religious education of the young. Unless very badly conducted, the Sunday school affords a great amount of religious instruction, and by the affectionate influence of good teachers leads the child, almost unconsciously, to the religious life. As an aid to parental influence, it is invaluable, and even as a substitute for parental influence, often accomplishes a great deal. Children will often carry home with them moral and religious principles, which save them, in part, from the

deleterious example of parents themselves. Parents are therefore performing part of their duty by placing their children under this instruction, which may partially supply their own neglect. But such was not the intended agency of the Sunday school, nor can it, under such circumstances, accomplish its best result. It was intended as an aid, and not as a counteracting influence ; to confirm the parental teaching, not to conflict with it ; to help the parents in their work, and not to take the work out of their hands. Let the Sunday school be so used and cherished, and it becomes, strictly speaking, of infinite value ; but if made an apology for parental neglect, its best efficacy is destroyed.

In like manner of the Christian Church. All its arrangements should have more or less reference to the interests of the young. The Saviour said to Peter, " If thou lovest me more than the rest, feed my lambs," and the Christian pastor is very unfaithful who neglects the more youthful part of his flock. He should bring them as near himself as possible,



so as to interest them in the subjects and ministrations of religion in their early years. He should take the Sunday school under his general care, and do whatever he can, both at the church and from house to house, in directing the religious education of the young. His influence upon them will ultimately be the strongest influence which he exerts. He may modify and improve the character of his adult congregation, but he may sometimes mould, and almost create, the character of children.

But while I say this, it is manifest that he must work with parents, not against them; to insure the success of their efforts, rather than to originate a work of his own. He may become the most efficient help by adding the religious sanction to the parental authority; but he can do almost nothing if left to work alone.

In this respect parents are not unfrequently themselves to blame, when most ready to find fault with the ministers of religion. They expect all the religious influence to come

from him, as if it were his exclusive business, and do little or nothing themselves. They regret to see their children growing up almost without religious education, and complain that their pastor is not more diligent in looking after the lambs which wander from the fold. But they are giving him a task which no one man, nor ten men, can do. It is a task, or rather a labor of love, which God has divided among many, giving to each father and mother their several duties to perform. They are the true pastors to their children, the ministers of religion, to bring them to Jesus Christ. The utmost faithfulness on the part of the public minister cannot make the children of his congregation devout, unless the home ministrations of religion, through the precept and example of religious parents, are daily laying the foundation on which he builds. We come, therefore, again to the same truth, that, if children are to be educated at all as Christians, they must be so educated at home.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOL EDUCATION.

I MAY, perhaps, without impropriety, here allude to a subject which constitutes one of the points of controversy among the friends of education. How far should the schools and seminaries of learning, to which children are sent for ordinary education, be intrusted with their religious and moral culture? Should any religious influence be exerted, or not? Shall the Bible be used as a class-book, or altogether excluded? Shall it be read as a school exercise, and shall the teacher be authorized to explain it? This is the general question in its most general aspect. It assumes a more definite and narrow form in what are called parochial schools, the object of which is to give to each religious denomi-

nation, and if possible to each pastoral charge, exclusive control in the education of the children under its care. They make the school-teacher also the religious teacher, and the clergy or church the acting superintendents and directors of the school. Such is the system which the Church of Rome has always followed, and almost all other churches which have been established by law. In England, the majority of the people, being dissenters, are unwilling to submit to such a system, and the Church, being established by law, is unwilling to consent to any other; and therefore no effective system of popular education has ever been adopted. In this country the voluntary system is followed in religious affairs, and common school education is made a subject of law. The intention has been to separate the public schools entirely from sectarian religion, and it has been accomplished, generally speaking, except in so far that, as the great majority are Protestants, the American system of common school education has a general, but a decided, Protestant character. The same

may be said of our private schools and other seminaries of learning, except those established by particular religious sects for the furtherance of their own religious views.

I cannot go into the minute discussion of a subject so large and complicated as this, and would only express my opinion upon the general point at issue. The broad principle can be settled, although practical difficulties in its application may sometimes occur. In a Christian community, it is certainly not too much to say that Christian education should be encouraged, and that Christian principles of education should prevail. That is to say, Christian morality should be taught, and a general Christian tone should pervade the school, both in its instruction and its discipline. The teacher should be, in general terms, a Christian believer, and both in manners and moral conduct above an average standard of Christian demeanor. Otherwise he is not a fit teacher for the children of Christian parents, and will do more harm to their morals than good to their minds. But

to require of him to become the direct teacher of religion would be, I think, to expect too much, and by requiring it we should incapacitate him from performing his other duties. There must be division of labor, and there is a time and place for everything. The school-house is intended for mental culture and the attainment of knowledge. The religious influence which it exerts should be chiefly indirect and incidental,—an influence which is undoubtedly very strong, either for good or evil, but which depends upon the personal character of the teacher more than upon the direct instructions given. The Bible may or may not be used as a school-book, according to the particular circumstances of each case. In some form we should decidedly prefer, and almost insist upon, its use, if only by reading such portions of it as govern the moral conduct, and concerning which there can be no sectarian dispute; for its use in any way is a distinct recognition of Christianity as the law of life. But to make religion and religious opinions a regular study, just as grammar and

algebra are taught, would be the conversion of good day-schools into bad theological seminaries, and the great purposes of school education would be defeated. Not one teacher in a hundred would be competent to the task, and children would become disgusted with religion, as being the dullest part of their school exercise.

We need scarcely say, therefore, that the more narrow system of parochial schools, the express object of which is to inculcate a system of belief, is one with which we have no sympathy. At the best, and when best conducted, they undertake to do a work which properly belongs to the household and to the Church, and by attempting to do it neglect the work which properly belongs to themselves. They are, therefore, very seldom good schools, and seldom make good scholars. Their course of study is generally contracted, and there is a certain moral pressure, a weight of authority, brought to bear upon the youthful mind, by which its vigor is checked and its individuality destroyed. A decent average of

scholarship is attained, and a stereotyped uniformity of character, as the best result which can reasonably be expected. Nothing can be more unfavorable to the just development of the youthful intellect than to know that previously determined opinions must be formed. To feel one's self restrained from inquiry, and to see on every side the limits beyond which we must not go, as if it were a predestined order of Providence that we must remain in this or in that sectarian connection, so that we must be kept even from familiar intercourse with all except those of our own way of thinking, is an influence almost as pernicious as any that could be devised. The vigorous mind rebels against it, and becomes impatient of all restraint. The feebler intellect yields to the contracting force, and is educated into imbecility.

Such is the common working of sectarian schools. In proportion as they become sectarian, they fail in making learned or strong-minded men. The best teachers cannot neutralize the narrowing influence of the system

under which they are thus compelled to work, and, generally speaking, good teachers refuse to work under such a system at all. However fixed their own religious belief, they will rarely consent to become the tools even of their own sect. They feel the necessity of working freely to work well, and the restricted precincts of a sect do not suit them as a place of working. Sectarian schools, therefore, generally have but second-rate teachers, and are avoided by all persons who wish their children to be well and thoroughly taught. The religious influence of home instruction and example is enough, when added to that of the church and Sunday school, without endeavoring to exclude all other influences. We advocate the parental and conservative influence in the early formation both of opinions and character, but we do not advocate a degree of restraint which destroys freedom. The outside influences should be allowed and encouraged for the very purpose of preventing the conservative, household influence from becoming too strong. Children should grow

up with the sense of freedom, even while they are directed, and although encouraged to adopt the faith of their fathers, should not be denied the opportunity of thinking for themselves. They should be allowed to hold familiar and equal intercourse with those who are taught differently from themselves, and their religious preferences should thus be prevented from becoming ignorant and unjust prejudice. Such is the intended effect of what may be called the American system of education. It is a Christian system, because Christian morality is its basis, and the validity of Christian institutions is recognized. It is becoming more and more Christian, I think, because higher moral attainments are daily required from those who become teachers of the young. In former times the intellectual competency of the teacher was too exclusively cared for, and teachers of bad habits and ungovernable temper were employed. But the standard of character and of moral qualification is becoming higher every day. This is getting to be understood as the teacher's most

legitimate moral and religious influence, and the importance of making it a silent, but strong, Christian influence, is more and more clearly discerned. A salutary change is therefore taking place, both in public and private schools, by which a better moral and religious influence upon the young is attained. The office of teacher is regarded more as a profession, not to be taken up for a few years as a stepping-stone to something else, but to be adopted as the business of life, and the first qualification insisted upon is a good moral character. I can remember when such a question would hardly have been asked. Habits of intemperance and profanity, and other moral deficiencies, were winked at, and scholars were often kept under demoralizing influences without any thought being given to the subject. There is yet great room for improvement, but the tendency is now in the right direction. While sectarian influence is discouraged or forbidden, more attention is given to the general moral influence exerted, and the foundation of the religious character

is thus in part laid by those who are not allowed to be direct teachers of religion. It is a decided Christian influence of which I speak, and upon which I would insist, without sectarian bias. If the teacher's character is what it ought to be, the whole weight of his authority will be given in favor of the Christian virtues and graces, and by their submission to him and respect for him his pupils will be continually taught the great practical lesson of life.

But does not this silent influence of the teacher's character involve sectarian not less than Christian principles? I think not. The great Christian principles of faith and obedience, or, as we might express it, the principles of religious morality, are the same to all Christian sects. The Beatitudes belong to all Christian believers. When questions of practical goodness are proposed, sectarianism is put to silence. Teachers may have, and ought to have, their own individual opinions, and may therefore belong to one sect or another, according to the dictates of their own consciences

but the judicious teacher may instruct for years without his scholars knowing to what sect he belongs. He need not know at what churches they are taught to worship on the Lord's day, and may yet be helping them all to attain that Christian character upon which all their religious teachers insist. The young who are thus brought together and thus treated are saved from narrow prejudices, by their intercourse with each other; and they learn the great practical lesson, that opinions may differ among those whose religious principles are the same.

The whole working of sectarian schools is in contravention, and often in contradiction, to this. Under whatever name they are established, they must proceed upon the restricted and separatist principle of sect. They are Episcopal, or Methodist, or Catholic schools, and their distinctive sectarian name becomes to their pupils, respectively, the representative idea of all goodness and truth. They make youthful bigots, and inculcate religious prejudices, very often to the neglect of religious principle.

The more I see of them in their practical working, the more I dislike them. They may increase sectarian strength, but do not promote the cause of true religion, while they are a sad hinderance to the cause of learning. In the latter respect, particularly, they are to be strongly condemned. They do not make scholars, nor allow men to become such. Try them by this practical test, and they will be found wanting. How few of the eminent men of this country were educated in sectarian schools! Take as an illustration the Jesuit colleges, which have had the advantage of large means and of learned teachers, so far as books can make learned men, and how small a number of their Alumni have become distinguished in any department of science or literature, of statesmanship or learning! I believe that this general principle may be laid down, and is sustained by fact, that, in this country at least, the seminaries and universities which have allowed the least sectarian influence have uniformly made the best scholars. From such institutions have our men of large

minds and practical ability come. It is almost impossible to be at once scientific and sectarian, and he whose mind is large enough to be a statesman or philosopher cannot easily be a bigot. So far as the support and endowment of schools or colleges may be concerned, they may be under the care of different sects for the sake of securing greater unity of administration and greater energy of action. But the object ought not to be sectarian, and all sectarian influence should be studiously excluded. Let the foundation be as broad as Christianity itself, and a superstructure can be raised thereupon for the true advancement of science and learning, for the full development of a strong and manly character, and at the same time for the cherishing of Christian virtue under the Christian law.

The view now taken of this subject is strongly confirmed by a report lately presented to the New York Legislature, in the case of Columbia College of that State. The charge brought against the institution was that of sectarian influence in the election of

Professors, and was substantially proved. But the circumstances under which the wrong was done, and the manner in which it was done, were such as to exempt the Trustees from legal prosecution, and the decision was therefore given, according to the letter of the law, in their favor. It was proved that they had rejected a candidate whom they would otherwise have gladly received, simply and solely because of his obnoxious religious opinions. But it was done without technical violation of their charter, and, although a great moral outrage, could not be treated as a legal offence. The committee, however, by whom the investigation was made, take the opportunity of expressing themselves very strongly against all sectarian institutions of learning. They denounce all sectarian influence, from whatever direction it may come, as injurious to the cause of education and to the real prosperity of all institutions in which it is allowed. They say:—

“Indeed, it is a question worthy the consideration of the statesman, the Christian, and the scholar, whether our

seminaries of learning and colleges throughout the State do not suffer more from the sectarian character that is given them, or is assumed by them, than from any other cause, and whether their want of success and prosperity may not generally be attributed to the sectarian influences that surround them, and whether there is any way by which their condition can be improved, except by becoming in fact what they are in theory, free from all sectarian control."

Such is the decision of experienced and practical men. Institutions of learning and science must be surrounded by a free atmosphere, or the mind will have only a contracted and imperfect growth. The condition of freedom is indispensable to the pursuit of knowledge. Both teacher and scholar must feel that no restraint is placed upon them, except that of the divine law, and that no penalty, either direct or indirect, will be visited on them in consequence of their exercising the freedom which God has given, the liberty wherewith Christ has set them free. Under no other circumstances can the generous love of truth for its own sake exist. Under no other circumstances can the youthful mind

and character receive that just and manly training which is needed to make scientific and learned men. **SUBJECT TO GOD ALONE**, is the motto under which all systems of school and collegiate education should be conducted, and under no other will the mental and moral character receive its best development.

Will it be said that so great freedom may result in the rejection of Christianity itself, and of all religious faith? We again answer, No. There is no such danger, there need be no such fear. Let what we have now said be kept in connection with what has been urged upon the subject of home education and the direct religious influence of the Church, and there is no such danger, and need be no such fear. That early religious influence will be a direction to the mind sufficiently decided, and nothing more will be needful, except the inculcation of Christian morality and the silent influence of Christian teachers, to secure, in almost all cases, a Christian result. There is more infidelity created by the constraints and unfairness, the favoritisms and the penalties,

exercised by sectarian institutions, than would result from the greatest degree of religious freedom which, under Christian teachers, could possibly be allowed.

For let it be still observed, that it is only under Christian teachers that we desire this free system of education to be tried. Give as large and generous interpretation to the word Christian as any reasonable man would ask, and make allowance for all latitude of opinion which an honest man would claim for himself, while still claiming to hold the Christian faith; but we cannot depart from the fundamental principle already laid down, namely, that none should be intrusted with the care of education in a Christian community, except those who are, in general terms, Christian believers, and above the average standard of Christian demeanor. So far as they teach morality, by precept or example, it should be Christian morality, and although they may seldom speak the word *religion* or name the name of Christ, their scholars will breathe a Christian atmosphere, and, without perceiving

the source from which the assistance comes, will be aided in the Christian life. We would not by any means have sectarian schools, but we ought to require that the Christian influence of home education shall not be destroyed. Let school education, from the earliest to the latest stage, from the primary school to the university, be conducted on such principles, — conservative in respect to Christian faith and character, but free in respect to sectarian doctrines and disputes, — and we should have a genuine American system, properly belonging to a free country which, although free, is yet a part of Christendom. We should thus secure individual freedom, and, at the same time, do all that we properly can to establish and perpetuate that Christian allegiance which is the indispensable condition of our national prosperity.

CHAPTER V.

THE DIVINE METHOD.

WE proceed now to a different part of my general subject, which leads to an entirely different direction of thought. For, in the beginning, I proposed to myself two separate objects. First, to show the importance of early religious education, and the necessity of its being carefully attended to by parents, as the principal education of their children, which cannot be safely neglected or deferred. My second object is to show that this same early religious education, when wisely conducted, and especially when directed at home, is the most efficient and the divinely appointed means of Christian regeneration. To this point I have alluded from time to time, and my belief in its truth is my justification, if

any be needed, for introducing into a religious discussion so many topics which are generally treated as secular interests.

It is the want of perceiving this divinely appointed connection between education, as a work committed to human hands, and regeneration, as a work of the Divine Spirit, which has brought the duty of early religious education into comparative neglect. It has been considered only as a human work, with reference only to present human results, and as being no part of the greater spiritual work, the redemption of the soul. The latter has been regarded as God's department, in which human agency can do little or nothing. A mystical idea of religion, of regeneration and redemption, has been cherished, by which they are taken out of all ordinary experience, and put beyond all human control. Parents have therefore learned to excuse themselves for their neglect of moral and religious education, in the vague, but irrational hope, that, by and by, the grace of God will make it all right. They see their children's character becoming

very different from what it ought to be, under the worldly and irreligious influences which surround them, but they regard this as the natural and unavoidable working of a nature originally corrupt, nor do they feel responsible for the result. Even religious parents sometimes look upon the fatal progress without concern, as being something which subsequent religious experience can in a few days or hours rectify.

On the other hand, those who look upon the subject more rationally, so far as this world is concerned, and guard the moral training of their children with greater care, fail to perceive the spiritual efficacy of Christian education. They attend to it only as a worldly interest, and their work is therefore but imperfectly done.

I would elevate, if I could, the whole idea of education, — of intellectual, moral, and religious education, — so as to make it altogether a true Christian nurture, — a human agency, indeed, but divinely appointed, — the human means by which the Divine Spirit can

most effectually work. The redemption of the soul from sin is the great work of life, and Christian education is the most certain means by which that work can be accomplished.

I do not question the Divine power, but nothing can be more certain than this, that, in all the working, both of God's providence and of his grace, he not only employs finite agencies to do his work, but uses them in accordance with the laws which he has made. This is true of the spiritual not less than of the natural life. The Divine action is not a lawless action, not arbitrary or eccentric, but equal and just. Under all theories of religion, however mystical they may be, we are compelled into this conclusion, that human means are used as a part of the needful means in the accomplishment of the Divine ends. Whenever the sinner is converted, and whenever the religious life begins, it is some human voice which brings the message, some warning of Scripture heard, some influence of example, some reawakening of earlier thought by providential events, or some other more or less

directly human means, by which the divine, regenerating influence is brought to bear. There may be seeming exceptions to this, but I doubt if any real exceptions do, as a matter of fact, exist. Even Saul of Tarsus, miraculously converted, had been prepared for his great work by a careful religious education, which only needed the purer light in fitting him to become the Apostle of Christ. A man of irreligious education and immoral life could not have been converted into the Paul who stood before Agrippa. It would have been a violation of the Divine law, a radical departure from the principles of spiritual growth. Even in grafting a tree to change the quality of its fruit, you should take a healthy stock, growing in the right soil, and a suitable climate, or your success will be small.

What I would say, therefore, is this, and I address it particularly to those who have been accustomed to think of regeneration as exclusively a divine work. I acknowledge it to be a divine work, but, inasmuch as it is done through subordinate agencies, we have a

right to suppose that it will be best done when the best agencies are employed. The uncorrupted mind can be brought nearer to God than that which has been debased by sin and worldly desire. The providential influences by which we are surrounded work to best advantage, and all the ministrations of God's word, and all the silent working of his spirit, are most likely to be effectual for the accomplishment of the designed end, if the heart has been prepared for them and educated to receive them from the first.

Even admitting the doctrine of original sin, by which the soul is born in corruption, we may still reasonably contend that the soul's conversion to God and its renewal in the Divine image may be more easily and more effectually attained before the additional burden of actual sin and personal transgression has been placed upon it. Or, in other words, the earlier the regenerating influence is brought into action, the better will the work be done. The earliest means employed are the most likely to be effectual, and the best means

which can be employed are parental influence and home education, aided by whatever external influences the ministrations of religion can supply. Upon such means the blessing of God is most likely to rest, and by such agency is the Divine Spirit most likely to work. Take almost what theory of religion you please, and unless we deliberately discard all the teaching of common sense and experience, we shall look to the early education of the young as the principal and most certain means of their salvation.

Yet it is not to be concealed that a great deal of the pulpit preaching and religious instruction of the day presents a different view, and undervalues the importance of the early religious training of which I speak. It is sometimes held up to suspicion, as if it were the preaching of morality instead of religion, of human agencies instead of the Divine Spirit. They who grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and who have been Christians in faith and practice from early childhood, are held to be less certain of

genuine conversion than those who have been steeped in guilt, and literally the enemies of God, up to the time of the tremendous conflict with which a new life begins. The long-continued iniquity which makes so great change needful, takes almost a meritorious place in the narrated experience, and those whose earlier life has been such as to prevent the necessity of violent conversion, are held to be self-righteous moralists and doubtful converts. Many a quiet heart, which has always reposed in God and always borne the cross of Jesus Christ in the spirit of self-denial and prayer, has been disturbed with misgivings and fear by such preaching as this. Many a true believer has been almost shaken from the Christian faith, by being taught the necessity of a change which has been long ago in early life experienced, and of which the practical fruits have been through a long life manifested, but which cannot, as a genuine experience, be felt again.

Still worse, and as the result of the same wrong instruction, there are many who are

betrayed into neglecting the religious education of their children, and there are many young persons who indulge themselves in continued habits of sin, because they think that a divine working, more mighty than human means, will interpose, and by a strong and outstretched arm save them from ruin. A sad and we might almost say fatal delusion; for even if that day of deliverance comes, the scars of former sins will remain, and the redemption, even if effectual, will be "so as by fire." The laws of our spiritual nature cannot be disregarded with impunity, and it is of children that it was most expressly said, when they were brought to Jesus, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Ask the convert himself, and, if he is a sincere man, he will confess that all his repentance, and all the operating grace of God, have not removed the bad consequences of youthful sin. He would give worlds to live over again those wasted years of early life, to do then effectually what he is now striving to do with agony and tears.

Give me, then, early religious education as

the best and divinely appointed means of the Christian, which is the Regenerate, life. Childhood and youth is the season when all education, intellectual, moral, and religious, is most successfully given, and by planting good Christian seed in the heart, no room will be left for the pernicious weeds of iniquity to grow.

Yet I read, only yesterday, in a religious publication, an account of a man who went into a prayer-meeting, being at the time past middle life, and who, after listening for a while, rose in his place, and said, that he believed himself to be as bad a man as ever lived; that he had been in all parts of the world, and practised the worst iniquities of every place, but that his conscience was now troubled, and he wished to be prayed for. Ten or fifteen minutes were accordingly spent in prayer, and he then rose and said that all tears were washed from his eyes, and the burden of sin taken from his heart. He received the congratulations of the assembly, and all united in thanksgiving for the redemption of his soul.

Not so was John Bunyan's pilgrim rescued, who spent days and nights in the struggle and the conflict, before the burden of his past sin fell off, and who then felt the necessity of still contending and pressing forward, as if the avenger were behind him, for the attainment of the prize.

The man may have been honest in his words, and his conviction of sin may have been sincere. But who among those who gave thanks for his redemption would have trusted him the next day? They would require weeks and months, nay, years, of trial, before they would confide to him the keeping of the charity purse; but one hour's religious experience is enough for the redemption of his soul! It would seem that common sense can be used everywhere but in religion, and men are wiser when they act as children of this generation than when they act as children of light. I would not speak disparagingly of the efforts to save the sinner, however hardened he may be. Nor would I withhold from him whatever encouragement may properly be

given. His case is not hopeless, however bad. He may yet turn, and, by resolute effort redeeming the time, save himself from the evil which impends. But I only say, that it would have been better for him to have been saved from his wanderings, and that it is more safe to trust in the religion of those to whom it comes in the unobserved, but effectual, experience of early life. The religious character formed by early education, is stronger and better than that which becomes good only by conversion. Considered as an education for practical life, it is far better and more worthy of reliance. Considered as the Christian regeneration, it is far more perfect, and is at least equally the work of the Divine Spirit. Revivals of religion may sometimes be good, and are often blessed in the conversion of wicked men; but to educate the young by bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is a work still more blessed and more sure of success. The preacher's voice may alarm the indifferent, — "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead,

and Christ shall give you light"; but the sweet voice of maternal love is still more eloquent, and the gentle influences of a Christian home are a stronger instrumentality by which the Heavenly Father draws us into the fold of Christ. In one word, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION is the great means by which, under the grace of God, the kingdom of Jesus Christ must be established, both on earth and in heaven. For myself, I thank God for this more than for all other blessings, that my childhood was passed in a Christian home. Most gratefully do I here acknowledge the obligation to faithful, religious parents, by whose instruction, of example more than of precept, the love of God seemed a natural affection, and obedience to the law of Christ was the common law of the household;—an obligation which cannot be repaid; but their children rise up to call them and their memory blessed.

The earnestness with which I have spoken, and the frequent repetition of the same leading idea, may have seemed unnecessary and tiresome. But I believe that no subject, either of

temporal or spiritual interest, is more important than that which we have now been considering. There is no subject upon which greater or more fatal mistakes are committed. They are fatal to the welfare of our children, and therefore to our own happiness. They hinder the prosperity of our churches, and prevent their growth. They give to all education a worldly and irreligious tone, by reason of which intellectual culture produces alienation from God. The one thing needful in the Christian Church, for its true revival, for the effectual renewal of its spiritual power, I firmly believe to be this of which I have now so earnestly spoken, and of which, if I had the power, I would yet more earnestly speak. It is the judicious attention to the young, the Christian education by which they may grow up in the knowledge and love of God. In an age when all intellectual influences are so active, and the youthful mind is so rapidly developed and the youthful character so early formed, religious influences must be made equally active, so as to give a heavenly direc-

tion to all. The Christian principles and faith must work with the development of the earliest affections, and the family circle become the household church of Christ. "Feed my lambs," is the word of Christ's commandment, to which his ministers should now give most earnest heed. Their most eloquent preaching will do little good, unless the youthful ear is reached. The churches of the land, however magnificent, will fall into contempt, unless youthful hands are laid upon the altar, and out of the mouth of babes and sucklings must the praise be perfected.

In other countries where religious institutions are maintained by law, and a strong religious conservatism is thus exercised, the young might be neglected with comparative safety. But with us everything depends upon them. The conservative principle must be planted in their hearts, or their precocious liberty will be used as a cloak of lawlessness. Religious faith must be made one of their earliest instincts, the law of their moral and intellectual life. The mother must therefore

be the teacher of religion, and the nursery become the sphere of religious instruction. The parental relation should be recognized as a religious guardianship, and the father's voice should teach the lesson of reverence towards God.

Then would the cause of religion begin to prosper. Then would our churches be filled with sincere worshippers. Then would the formality of religion cease, and its spiritual, which is its practical life, appear. For then would our young men become our religious men, and our daughters would grow up to become, in their youth and beauty, as the polished columns in the temple of God.

CHAPTER VI.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.

WE come then to this serious and almost startling result. The spiritual welfare of the child depends upon the parent. Our children enter upon an inheritance of good or evil influences, by which their moral and religious character is determined. Exceptional cases occur; but after we have made the most liberal estimate of them that facts justify, the rule still remains. The religious history of families and of communities may thus be traced, from one generation to another, with small danger of mistake. The child must possess unusual energy of will, or must be favored by unusual providential circumstances, to escape from becoming irreligious under the influence of an irreligious

home. The sins of the parent are, in this sense, visited upon the children. But when a Christian spirit pervades the household, the children breathe it and grow up in the Christian life. If I am stating this too strongly, let proper abatement be made, and there will still be left unquestioned enough to sustain me in my present argument.

It follows, therefore, that parents owe a duty to their children, which should engage their most earnest and prayerful attention. It is not only to feed and clothe them, and to provide for them the physical comforts which they need. To this the parent is prompted by the instinctive love of his offspring, and its intentional neglect would place him lower than the brute. Nor is it only to select good teachers and schools for intellectual culture, considered as a preparation for active and honorable usefulness in the world; for this would be our duty, as parents, even if we had no religion and no hope in Christ. The obligation imposed upon us by the parental relationship is

higher and more sacred than anything that belongs to physical comfort or worldly success. It is to form the character of our children in the religious life; to bring them into the fold of the Redeemer; to educate them as the children of God. They are intrusted to us, not only for time, but eternity; and it is our first and principal duty to lead them to that spiritual, regenerate life, which is the life with God, whether on earth or in heaven. Such is the parent's duty, under the providential appointment of God, to which all other parental duties are secondary and comparatively unimportant. Education in the Christian faith and Christian virtue is the one great end to be attained.

But how different is this from the common current of thought and action! When we speak of a good education, the ideas first suggested are those of science and art, of literature and languages and accomplishments. If we speak of the Christian graces, the more excellent way of Faith, Hope, and

Charity, we are understood to have introduced an entirely different subject. Such things scarcely belong to the popular idea of a good education. The attainment of knowledge, the cultivation of taste, refinement of manners, and the like, become, even with parents, the prominent, if not the ultimate, thought in the education of their children. And for the attainment of these, what terrible risks do they incur, and to how many fatal dangers is the youthful character exposed! For the sake of an "accomplishment," perhaps, the influence of immoral and vulgar teachers is allowed. The perils of the boarding-school are paid for, in pursuit of a fashionable education. Protestants place their children in convents and Jesuit colleges, with the reasonable probability that their religious faith will be undermined or perverted, because of some supposed advantages in learning the modern languages, or in gaining superficial accomplishments. Boys and girls are sent hundreds of miles away from home, at an age when the need of

parental guidance is the greatest, and are kept for years under the influence of temptations which mature virtue could scarcely resist, and at the same time are liberally supplied with money, as if to facilitate their ruin. Is it not a perverted idea of education which leads to such mistakes as these? It is the placing knowledge above virtue, manners above morals, intellectual attainments above religion. Why can we not perceive, that the highest intellectual culture is no compensation for the loss of virtue; that those who fail in the attainment of Christian faith, and are betrayed into departure from Christian principles, are miserably educated, either as men or women, let their intellectual attainments be what they may. Looking to this life only, the right education of character is a thousand times more important than the attainment of knowledge; for the uneducated man, with good common sense and sound principles, is worth more, even for the common purposes of worldly life, and is more worthy

of respect, and by simple manliness of character will accomplish more, than the most finished scholar, who has gained his education at the expense of his principles. But when we remember, that the use of this present life is to prepare us, by the service of God, for a life of eternal service in heaven, we discern, almost with trembling, the greatness of our folly, in placing the intellectual above the moral and religious education of the young. Let parents see to this, with serious and prayerful thought, or they may be doing to their children the greatest harm, when they are seeking to do them good. Let everything be made to give way to that one great work to be accomplished, — to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I know that it would be a revolution in the common plans of educating the young, but such a revolution is needed. I would not lower the standard of intellectual education, but would only place that first which ought to stand first, — Christian virtue and Christian truth.

Let me also again say, although in repetition, that, in this view, the most important part of all education is done by parents themselves. Whether they know it or not, they are doing it. It cannot be delegated to others, any more than the relation of parent and child can be changed. The great majority of religious men and women, however different the influences under which they may have been educated, trace back the sources of their religious life to a pious mother or father. It is the want of that early influence which fills the world with scepticism and guilt. Sometimes, indeed, those whose early training has been good, and who have received from their parents an education which ought to have resulted in a Christian life, make shipwreck of their faith, and go astray in the paths of iniquity. But there is always great hope of their return, if those early principles of right were deeply implanted. Very often it proves with them only a temporary wandering, and the prayers of the mother's heart are at length

answered. But if they have grown up to worldliness and irreligion and consequent wrong-doing, as their natural progress, under the influence of an irreligious home, the hope of their redemption must be, and it is proved by observation to be, very small. Their early habits of sin and worldliness become their nature, which refuses to be changed.

How great, then, is the responsibility of parents! How effectually do they stand between their children and God, to separate them from him by the repulsion of an irreligious character, or to bring them near to him by the gentle influence of obedience and faith! It is a responsibility of which we may well think with awe. We must answer before God, not only for ourselves, but for the children whom God giveth to us. We are their providential guardians, and God will require them at our hands. We may, indeed, fail in our efforts, and circumstances beyond our control may defeat our best endeavors. But, up to the point of doing the best we can, both by pre-

cept and example, we are undoubtedly responsible for the result. An almost commanding influence belongs to us, and we are bound to use it well, both by the love which we bear to our children, and by the allegiance that we owe to God. We may shrink from admitting the fact, or try to lose sight of it, but the providential arrangement under which we are appointed to live and work cannot be changed.

One thing, however, may be said, to encourage us under the feeling of insufficiency, and to make that which may seem a burden of responsibility supportable. A distinct recognition of our duty, and a humble, prayerful desire to do it, almost insures its faithful performance. Carelessness is generally the cause of failure, and not incompetency. If we feel the responsibility imposed upon us by the parental relation as we ought, our mistakes will correct themselves, and the spirit in which we try to perform our duty will save our children from the worst effect, both of our errors and our faults. Children

see very quickly, and are better judges of our real character than we suppose. They learn more from what we are, than from what we say, and can discern, underneath our mistakes of management, the religious and loving spirit in which we are trying to work. Or, on the other hand, they will discern the selfish and worldly temper of the parent, where it exists, however carefully it may be covered over by the usual proprieties of life. It is the spirit, therefore, in which we work, more than our skill in working, that insures success. The conscientious endeavor seldom fails. We may be able to give no rule for domestic government, and may have no theory of discipline, and yet, as each case of difficulty occurs, a sincere purpose will find its own way of action. Speaking from my own experience, indeed, I am afraid of theories of domestic education, and would rather leave the details of government to the conscientious parent, than impose upon him the best system that can be devised. General principles may be urged, but individual com

mon sense must be left to apply them. The one great and indispensable requisite for exerting a right religious influence on our children, is the possession of a right religious character ourselves. To obtain this is the beginning, and almost the end, of our work, in the religious education of the young. Parents who are conscious to themselves of a worldly and irreligious character may well shrink from the responsibility which they have assumed. If not for their own sake, yet for the sake of their children, they should cultivate in themselves a higher life, with prayer and supplication, as the only means of performing the most sacred and important duty of their lives. To young parents, especially, this truth needs to be plainly presented. They enter upon a new world, both of care and enjoyment, while they watch the unfolding of the infant's mind. They ask advice concerning its management, and fondly hope to keep it, in its growing years, from temptation and guilt. They feel ready to make almost any sacrifice of money and of

comfort, to secure this result. But there is only one way, humanly speaking, to secure it, — which is, by themselves learning to live a religious life. In proportion as they attain this excellence, the difficulties of their task will disappear. Let them begin their married life by consecrating themselves to God, and their home will become, almost of its own accord, a nursery of goodness and truth. But unless they care enough about religion to do this, they should prepare themselves to be disappointed in their children. They have no right to expect that those who are led, will go in advance of their leaders. They have no right to require of their children a higher standard of virtue and religion than that according to which they themselves live.

One general rule for the guidance of the young in the religious life, I would venture to give; partly because of its importance, and partly because of its frequent neglect. *They must be taught obedience.* Few commands of Scripture are more earnestly en-

joined than this, — “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” “Honor thy father and thy mother,” is one of the leading commandments of the Bible. It lies, I believe, at the root of the religious life. It is, I had almost said, the only foundation on which the religious character of the young can be established. Our word *piety*, by its derivation, means filial reverence, and the ideas are so closely associated that we can hardly separate them from each other. It is an easy transition from filial respect to religious awe. Children who have been early taught the lesson of obedience to their parents, can easily learn the higher lesson of obedience to God. It is, in both cases, the respectful and reverential submission to authority, under the sense of duty. By the early and judicious exercise of such authority, children are taught those lessons of self-denial and self-control, of reverence and trust, which are so good a preparation for their willing self-consecration to God. They may be thus saved, in part at least, from

the waywardness and presumptuous self-conceit which betray so many young persons into thinking that they can be guides to themselves, without the restraining power of religious faith.

I do not advocate sternness or severity in domestic discipline. In a well-governed family, no iron rule is needed, and punishment, of whatever kind, is a rare occurrence. But it is almost the parent's first duty, in the moral education of his children, to instil the idea and enforce the duty of obedience. With gentleness, but promptly and with decision, a right beginning should be thus made, and the principle of parental control established. At first it is, of course, an unreasoning or instinctive submission, on the part of the child, to the stronger will of the parent, and cannot be called a moral act. But gradually, as the infant mind is developed, a higher principle is introduced, and the instinctive habit of obedience becomes a willing and affectionate performance of duty. The child who has received

such training from a religious parent soon learns to feel that the great source of all authority is in the Divine law, and, by an almost natural progress, his filial obedience is changed to the service of God. The recognition of authority, and the habit of respectful, deferential obedience to those who have a right to exercise authority, are indispensable elements in the religious character.

I apprehend, that a great deal of the neglect of religion among the young is explained by the neglect of their parents to teach them this early lesson of obedience. It may seem to be a small matter, at first, which parental indulgence overlooks or excuses, in the indolent expectation that time will make it right. But those children are saved from a world of trouble, whose parents have the practical good sense to direct them, from the very first, in the right way. What can we expect from the young who are allowed to rebel against parental authority, and refuse obedience to the pa-

rental command, but wilfulness, and passionate self-indulgence, and rebellion against God himself? The parent is appointed by God to think for his children and direct them, and in doing so it is his bounden duty to require their obedience until they can think maturely for themselves; and if he neglects to do this, either through indolence or any other motive, it is at the serious peril, both temporal and spiritual, of the child. But I fear that it is one of the great defects in our modern theories of domestic education, that the views of discipline are held so loosely, that the child governs the parent, instead of the parent's governing the child. The idea of authority is almost discarded, and children are left, both in religion and morals, to choose for themselves.

In conclusion, let me take pains to express, with greater plainness, one thought which has been continually present to my own mind, and without which all that I have said is untrue. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.

Except the Lord keep the city," — and the family, — "the watchman waketh but in vain." Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but it is God who giveth the increase. We must labor, in this work of religious education, with a religious spirit. It must be done by human agency, but it is, nevertheless, a divine work. "No one cometh to me," said the Saviour, "except the Father draw him"; and it is true, I believe, of the child, not less than of the man. It is not a mechanical work, by machinery, in which we are engaged, but a spiritual work, for those in whom God himself worketh, both to will and to do. We must be workers together with him, and a part of our agency must be prayer. There is no element of success, in the religious education of our children, more important than this habitual feeling of absolute reliance upon God. He does not work wisely who works presumptuously, and if we think to *command* success, a wrong spirit enters into the work, so that we invite disappointment. In all moral and re-

ligious enterprises, and especially in our care of the young, everything depends on the spirit with which we act. But if, together with the judicious use of means, we labor to accomplish a Christian end, with a prayerful and Christian spirit, in the service of God, our labor will not be in vain.

THE END.

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