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THE
SPOILED CHILD.

A NARRATIVE OF FACTS

BY W. C. BROWNLEE, D. D.



THE valley that is bounded by L—— and S——y hills, in the county of ——, and state of N—— ——, is remarkable for its beauty and fertility. The sluggish stream of the P—— winds slowly in its serpentine course through the midst of it, and waters a succession of well-cultivated farms. The inhabitants used to be among the most church-going and happy people in that district of the country, until, by the influence of General —— and a club of his friends, the spirit of infidelity, and with it dissipation and corrupt morals, crept in among them.

John C——l was one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the valley. Every thing was neat and well-arranged in his mansion, and the outbuildings, and every nook and corner of the fences, and the whole farm, displayed the hand of the tasteful and diligent cultivator. He was one of those men who retained the rural simplicity of the first settlers of our country. He had received the usual substantial English education of his day ; his mind was one of a high order ; his judgment was discriminating ; his memory retained, with unusual tenacity, what he had read. In his whole deportment there was just such a dignity and air of pleasantness as one might expect to find in a Christian who had long walked with God ; who had daily studied his Bible ; who had a warm and benevolent heart ; who had, next to the pastor, been the leading man in the parish ; who had been in the magistracy, was honored in his county, and had always been accustomed to be consulted in matters of delicacy and public interest. The exterior was worthy of such a mind : he was a tall, venerable man, the patriarch of the valley.

His house was five miles from the village church ; and yet no man was more punctual in his attendance. It was never recollected, even by an enemy, that he was in any instance late. The secret of it was this : he rose as early on a Sabbath morning as on days of business ; and it was a part of his religion not to give any offence, or disturb others, during the worship of God, by coming in late. Besides, he loved God's sanctuary ; his heart was early there ; and it was natural that he should wish to join in the first ascriptions of praise to God. No ordinary storm would prevent him from being, summer and winter, in his place. If it rained, he put on a greatcoat ; for he always rode on horseback ; and if it stormed severely, he would put on *two*. And when he reached the church, usually among the foremost, he would gravely observe that it seemed greatly to be desired that the rain should cease, that those who dwelt close

by might venture into the house of God ; adding, that if, like himself, they had five long miles to come, they would probably prize in a higher degree the privilege of the sanctuary.

The domestic arrangements of his family seemed also, in all respects, befitting his Christian character and profession. And his wife, endowed with singular prudence and the other Christian graces, seemed a true help-meet. Every morning and evening the whole family was assembled around the domestic altar, and the worship of the Most High performed with great reverence. In the busiest seasons he would frequently say to his laborers, “ My friends, we always find time to take our daily food ; let us also take time to worship the Lord our God, and remember, *prayers and provender never hinder a journey.*”

Here were all the elements of happiness, usefulness, and honor, apparently combined. Surely, his neighbors would say, Mr. C——l must be a happy man ; rich in this world’s goods, and rich in the grace of God ; honored in the church ; esteemed and respected by all in the social and political circles ; possessed of a fine constitution, and enjoying uninterrupted health : what is there to disturb his mind or mar his peace ?

But it had been long observed by the pastor that there was some secret worm at the root of his joys ; and it became, at length, manifest to all his intimate friends. The grace of God will, indeed, carry a Christian through any afflictions ; it will give buoyancy to his mind and spirits, in the darkest and most distressing hours. Our heavenly Father’s face shining upon us, will disperse the heaviest clouds. An humble and believing view of the Redeemer pleading for us at the very moment when we are like to be overwhelmed by the waves of sorrow, will send a foretaste of heaven’s joy into our wounded souls ; and when the Holy Comforter seals upon our hearts the consolations of his grace, we can praise him, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

But of all the sorrows which befall a Christian, that which comes nearest to his heart, paralyzing his mind and drinking up his joys, is the outbreaking of wickedness in his children.

Mr. C——l had a son; he was his eldest child and his only son. On this child he had doated; he had made an idol of him. This is the besetting sin of Christian parents, especially those who are, by natural temperament, unusually kind-hearted and affectionate. It is indeed a strong and overpowering temptation. We doat on our offspring; they become *spoiled* children; and such is the ordering of divine Providence, we, who have sinfully indulged them, and “spared the rod” when we ought to have employed it to drive away folly from the young heart, according to the command of God, learn, to our sorrow, that they are employed, in our old age, as the rod in God’s hand to chastise our criminal indulgence!

It has been unfeelingly asserted, particularly by some who are unfriendly to religion, that “pious parents have generally very wicked children.” But facts do not warrant the assertion. On the contrary, the fact of an eminent Christian, whether minister or layman, having a profane child, always calls forth *marked attention* as something which the public did not expect in such a family; whereas it is never a wonder with any one, that wicked and profane children should proceed out of wicked and profane families. The Christian parent, however, in the hour of sorrow for the waywardness of his children, will make great searchings of heart into the causes of it. The promise of God is full before him, he seeks not to pervert or modify its import: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” He bemoans his delinquencies in many, yea, in innumerable instances, which the eyes of the world have never perceived, but which his own delicate conscience promptly discovers. Such was the fact with the father whose character we have

been describing. No enlightened Christian, perhaps, was ever more ready to admit his delinquencies before God ; or more earnest, by prayer and supplication, to regain the ground he had lost, and subdue what had hitherto baffled his skill.

It was on one of those beautiful days in our autumn, when every thing in the country is smiling under the profusions of the divine beneficence, that Doctor F., the pastor of the village of B——, made a visit to Mr. C——l, who was a ruling elder in his church.

He found him sowing his fields with the winter grain. He would not permit him to desist from his labor, and thereby interrupt the arrangements of the day ; but he walked side by side with him, discoursing on general topics ; and finally, on the state of the church, and the happy prospect of an answer to their prayers, in a revival of religion. For often had that village been blessed with seasons of refreshings from the presence of the Lord, accompanied by a rich ingathering of souls ; and there were now some cheering evidences of another outpouring of the Spirit.

While they were thus engaged, the son of Mr. C——l, a lad about seventeen years of age, approached to mock : he groaned, and made singular grimaces, or laughed aloud, as he walked immediately behind his father ; and at the end of the ridge next to the house, having caught up a young animal, he contrived, by tormenting it, to make it utter one continued yell. This he did in defiance of the solemn rebukes of the pastor, and the entreaties and threats of his too indulgent parent. An end had been thus put to all regular conversation ; and at this last outrage the aged father wept in silence, and sought to conceal his tears as he hurriedly sowed his field.

This ebullition of youthful fury had been caused, it was afterwards discovered, by the father's peremptory refusal of the usual supply of money. Like too many parents, foolishly indulgent, he had yielded to the dominion which his

only son possessed on his heart, and had given liberally and often. This only created an appetite for more. He soon found himself compelled to give liberally, simply to get rid of his importunate duns. And having made the discovery which, as a wise man, he ought to have anticipated as naturally as any common effect from a common cause, that this free indulgence with money had led him into habits of dissipation, and that the present solicitation was made to enable him to take the lead at a "frolic" in the tavern of the adjacent village, he had positively refused him. The young man now left his father's presence with a threat that "he would have money, and just that sum which he needed; if not one way, at least by another, which he (his father) might *conjecture*."

This was too much for a tender parent's heart to endure. He took hold of the pastor's arm and led him to the shade of an aged apple-tree; and placing him beside his wife, who had joined him by this time, he sat down and wept.

"My poor ruined boy!" was all he could now utter in his grief. His wife and the pastor also burst into tears.

"I now see my error," said the afflicted parent, after a short pause, as if awakened from the sleep of long delusion; "my eyes are opened to the calamity that has befallen us. But oh! sir," he added, as he grasped the pastor's hand, "how can I retrace my steps? O my God, have mercy, have mercy on my poor spoiled child! God of my fathers, who didst in thy tender compassion bring me into thy fold, look in mercy on my poor son! Thou, O Lord, didst convert a Manasseh, and didst arrest a persecuting Saul in his wicked course on the way to Damascus to murder thy saints, and didst reclaim the sottish prodigal—O have mercy on my son! Let the riches of thy grace, Father in heaven, triumph, one day, in his return to thee and to his parents' heart! You may well ask me, dear pastor, why I do not correct him. Could I succeed in detaching him from his companions, then, perhaps, I might

do it with some hope ; but until that be done, correction may only drive him to a more desperate resistance ; or, more probably, to a final abandonment of my roof ; and ultimately to the commission of some fearful crime ; and thence—my soul is tortured at the bare possibility of it—to a public and ignominious suffering ! But I have not yet revealed the secret cause of all this mischief. There is a demon in him, which sets at defiance Christian discipline and the rod of correction ; yes, in him, young as he is—I mean THE LUST OF STRONG DRINK ! This, with the influence of vicious companions, has, I am grieved to say, seared, as with a hot iron, the sensibilities of his conscience and of natural affection. O ! I look back on the past, and I see my fatal errors staring me in the face !”

“ Did you not commit a great error,” said the pastor with tenderness, “ in not sustaining the discipline under which his *teacher* sought judiciously and faithfully to bring the daring and turbulent spirit of this youth ? This I once recollect to have witnessed, and ventured to predict the result.”

“ We did, dear pastor, we did,” was the answer, as he cast his eyes on his afflicted wife with more of sorrow than reproof, “ we did ; and here is an exceedingly great evil under the sun, and an error committed by almost every parent. The teacher is one of the most useful officers in the republic ; one of the most necessary and influential office-bearers among us ; one who walks forth over the land, bearing the future destinies of our country and the church, as it were, in his hand. He has the training of the rising generation, the hope of our country and of the church of God ! What an important, what a responsible office ! Yet how often, and how much is it despised ! and it is miserably ill-paid, moreover, and still worse treated ! When the school-master would bring the wayward spirits of our spoiled children under a wholesome discipline, both parents are, in too many instances, in arms against him. And

their ill-timed and foolish pity fails not to sustain the boy in open and daring rebellion against his teacher, and in the repetition of fresh crimes. This parental interference, by paralyzing the arm of salutary discipline, has helped to consummate the ruin of many a hapless youth!"

"This has been a fatal error," said the almost heart-broken wife; "but this is not all: frivolous excuses, I remember to my sorrow, would be sustained by us, for neglecting his evening tasks; the slightest indisposition, and (I am mortified to think how easily we were deceived) that, too, very often pretended, and our excessive anxiety about *the 'dear child's' health*, would be reason enough for allowing him to absent himself whole days from school. And then, from our foolish fondness, he would gain permission from us to rove about from house to house, and, what was worse, to absent himself whole nights from his parental roof. It is thus that a young mind acquires, at too early an age, a taste for company; its inexperience lays it open to cruel temptations, while it is too young to derive, without a parent's or a teacher's guidance, any real benefit from it. This early taste, or I should rather say, this passion for company, together with a plentiful supply of money from indulgent parents, has laid the foundation of utter ruin to many thousands and tens of thousands of youth. And I know it to my sorrow, dear pastor, that in the young and inexperienced mind, where we are not busy in sowing the good seed of God's word, the evil one is very busy and successful in sowing tares."

"How easy it is to see errors," said the father, "when the bandage of our delusions is thus torn from our eyes. Ah! sir, experience is the mother of wisdom. One of our principal errors was that of allowing our child to *associate with vicious boys*, until they had so entwined themselves around his heart, that no influence or authority of ours could detach him from the snare. And often, I remember it with the bitterness of remorse, when I should have wooed

him over with kindness, I have, in my wrath, reproached the character of his associates to his face. The consequence was just such as every wise student of human nature must have observed. His galled spirit clung closer and closer to them, as they were persecuted by me for his sake. There is a witchery in a young profligate's companions, which parents have never duly conceived. It is the result of that depravity which pervades the human heart, and which makes us averse to all that is good, and swift to learn and to practise what is evil. One hour's influence of profligate company on a young mind may not be effaced by days and months, and even years of parental labor and prayer."

"And, my friends," said the pastor, "there was a defect in your efforts to win over his *love for the house of God*. I have always lent my countenance to the practice of our good old fathers, which is still kept up in our church, of bringing the children into the house of God on the holy day of rest. God, by the mouth of his servant Joel, commanded the children, and even the babes at the breast, as well as the elders and the people, to be assembled before him in the solemn convocation. And our Redeemer, in the days of his humiliation, charged parents and the disciples 'not to forbid little children when coming unto him;' 'for of such,' said he, 'is the kingdom of heaven.' We must train them up, in infancy, by our prayers, privately, and in the house of God; and in riper years, by parental and pastoral instruction. And thus, by the grace of God, we can beget a respect and a love for the courts and the ordinances of God, in the young and tender mind."

"Yes, dear pastor," cried the father, "here, in the weakness of our hearts, did we commit another great error. The slightest excuses were often sustained; and 'the dear child' must be spared the journey, and the pain of going to church, and of sitting so long, and being confined so long in church! And there was another error, as serious on

our part, by which the mischief was consummated. When we were urgent to overcome his aversion to the church, which we invariably found to be strengthened by every fresh indulgence and permission to stay at home, he would then, to get rid of our importunity and command, beg permission to go to the church in the next village, which happened to be nearer. And in order to induce him to go *somewhere* to the house of God, we thus left him, or rather abandoned him to himself. That which we ought to have anticipated and feared, did take place. His vicious companions took the charge of him; and they led him, not into the house of God, but into the village taverns! Whole Sabbaths had he thus spent before we made the appalling discovery!"

"And then," said the pastor, "did not your too fond and compliant hearts place *funds too profusely* at his disposal, even from the first?"

"Ah! sir," cried the father, "that was my next error, which, perhaps, gave pungency and fatality to the rest. I gave him money, first, because 'I loved the dear child;' then I gave him money, because I saw other parents giving liberally to their children; and then I gave him money, because my pride said, 'My only son shall not be behind his comrades in any thing;' and, finally, I confess that latterly I gave many sums purely out of self-defence, or an indolent aversion to resistance, simply to get rid of his importunate duns! And now I can say, from experience, that these ill-timed donations to children fail not to beget new wants, and new appetites, and new desires. This evil is like the dropsy in the natural body, it increases by its own means of indulgence. The more water the dropsical man drinks, the more thirsty he becomes, and the more inveterate is his disease rendered by every fresh draught. That parent who lavishes 'pocket-money' on his child, before he has acquired sound principles and prudence to control his passions, and a spirit of enlightened charity and good

taste to make a wise use of it, exerts his influence directly to initiate him into habits of gambling, intemperance, gluttony, and their attendant revolting vices. He furnishes the means of gratification; he lays the train, and puts into the hands of his child the lighted torch and the match ready to be applied! All this, alas! to my sorrow, have I done. And when, at length, I did awaken to the frightful consequences, now too evident in the confirmed habits of vice in my poor ruined boy, I found myself adding another error to the former, and thereby helping on the mischief. When I was dunned with incessant clamors to supply the appetite which my folly helped to create, I have replied fiercely, adding reproach and insult to refusal, instead of making the effort with paternal kindness and love to reclaim him. What was the result? Just what you have witnessed, and what might have been anticipated in one whose conscience is seared, and who is prepared for the most debased and debasing conduct; just that which is practised by unprincipled and ruined sons and apprentices every day. He actually abstracted property, article after article, weekly; he even drove off, in my absence, the sheep and young cattle, to pay his *debts of honor*; namely, his tavern and gambling debts! And O! sir, I am well aware, that within an hour he has been repeating this robbery on his father!"

"It is a desperate case!" said the pastor, after a long pause of sorrowful silence. "But all that you have been alluding to, my dear friend, are only the branches of the evil you deplore. If you go farther back than to his boyhood at school, perhaps you may discover the *root*. And, my dear madam," continued he, in the most tender and respectful manner, "I allude to *a mother's earliest influence* over the young heart, to show how much depends on a mother's care; not by any means to insinuate that you, like Eve, were first in the transgression. But did you not miss, in his early infancy, or at least in the earliest part of

his boyhood, the grand opportunity of establishing your parental authority in the heart of your dear boy?"

"I fear I did," said she, with great emotion; "and often have I bewailed it. Ah! sir, I am assured that a child is capable of receiving instruction, ay, and of being spoiled, as it regards religious matters, sooner than most mothers have any just conception of. I did, indeed, long for the grace of God to sanctify his soul—and earnestly, if I know my own heart, did I pray for this. But, on review, it is a question involving serious doubt with me, whether I did labor aright, or use the means of God's grace in a skilful and judicious manner, to convey the truth into his young heart, and establish there a sense of God's authority, and thence of my own as a parent. I did not make, I fear, a scriptural effort to melt down his heart, by causing the knowledge, and thence the fear of the great God, Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Judge, to distil, as it were, drop by drop, on his mind and heart; and by teaching him to pray to God as soon as reason dawned, and as soon as he could lisp a word. The first word I should have taught him, the first sentence I should have made him breathe out, should have been, 'THOU, GOD, SEEST ME!' And then, again, I fear I did not take sufficient care to soothe his spirit when ruffled, and subdue by reason and kindness his little fits of violence and brawlings, and woo him over by love and firmness. I have known a mother do this by singing softly a melting hymn on the ear of her little child; and by teaching it also to sing a sweet and plaintive hymn, as well as to pray with infant lisp, to the great God who always sees us! Awe and submission to God, I am fully persuaded, is the only true basis of genuine and unaffected submission and reverence to parents. It must be so, if it be a moral virtue, and not mere instinct. And there are no genuine morals without a principle of religion. Hence, the pagan is described as 'without natural affection:' the parent sacrifices his child, and the child his parent; and we have

painful evidence, that a profligate child is likewise without natural affection! O! it was here I failed. I see my error. I should never have given up. I should have daily renewed my efforts. I should have labored and wrestled in prayer; until, by the grace of God, I saw the fruits of my exertions showing themselves in filial reverence and submission, based on the fear and the love of God."

She paused, and wiped her flowing tears. "These are not tears of sorrow and despair, dear pastor," she added, after she had composed herself, "neither are these the conjectures of a theorist. I saw my error with my boy; God, I trust, was my guide in training that dear child, my daughter, who is advancing to us: she is not only a sweet child to comfort us in our sorrows—I have reason to believe that God has changed her heart; and I know not that she has ever needed a reproof from her dear father these three years past. But I am interrupting you; you were about to say something"——

At this moment the daughter came up, a beautiful girl of fourteen or fifteen years, who cast a look of tender anxiety on her parents; and, saluting the kind pastor, with the frank and blushing simplicity of innocence, as she presented her hand to receive his cordial welcome, she sat down by her mother's side. The pastor went on.

"I have learned, from painful experience," said he, "that many parents, and even some of them the most pious, are apt to prove defective in *two* grand points: in their domestic discipline, and the early training of their children."

They are defective in the *matter* employed to train them, and in the *manner* of applying the proper matter. Some parents I have found defective in both of these; some in the former, others in the latter."

"Have the goodness to explain yourself more fully," said the father. The pastor went on.

"To understand how a parent may be defective in the

matter which he is to employ in the training of his children, you need only to recollect that vital godliness, as Mrs. C——l has just now hinted, is the only true basis of all genuine morality ; and therefore of all pure moral order, such as is pleasing in the eyes of God, in families, as well as in the community. I do not deny that there may be morals, even lovely morals, and virtuous deportment in a person destitute of true religion. And I also admit that these are good and valuable in their place, and so far as they go. Our blessed Saviour looked on the young man spoken of in the Gospel, who had, in the exterior, kept the commandments, ‘and loved him,’ though his heart was as yet a stranger to vital piety. We instinctively love such a character, while we are disgusted with vice and profligacy. But all those lovely and beautiful traits are, nevertheless, radically defective : they can no more be compared with the virtues and morality of the Gospel, I mean ‘the beauties of holiness,’ than the apples said to grow on the margin of the Dead Sea, with these golden apples of a skilful hand’s engrafting, which you see richly clustering on that magnificent tree before us. The former were fair, very fair, to human view ; but they were light and deceptive : the interior was filled up with black dust, emblematical of the depraved and unconverted heart of the mere moralist. But the latter, these rich apples on that grafted tree, are solid, sound to the core, and delicious. ‘Neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision,’ that is to say, no exterior virtues, or accomplishments, or mere profession, ‘availeth any thing’ before God at his bar, for our personal justification and acceptance—no, nothing but our Redeemer’s righteousness ; and for morals, *nothing but ‘a new creature.’*

“And this, my dear friends, opens up the true secret why the philosopher and moralist, who trust in human virtue alone, with all its defects, have *never* succeeded in this matter. There is nothing in philosophy, there is nothing in the most eloquent declamation on virtue, nothing in the

most persuasive words of man's wisdom, that can ever convey the life, or spirit, or principle of vital religion into the human heart, after having conquered all the opposition from the devil, the world, and the flesh. Hence these never did, and they never can convert a man; they never have made, they never can make a true Christian. They may appear to be limpid streams; but they are the streams of Damascus; not the divinely-appointed and health-giving waters of the River of the God of Israel. The life of the Spirit of God is not in them. 'If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature.' 'I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might LIVE unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Hence, it is only when we are risen with Christ, that we 'seek those things which are above,' and do 'mortify our members,' and bring forth the fruits of holiness in 'good works, which God hath ordained that we should walk in them.'

"It is easy to see, then, that where 'the life of Christ' is wanting, no fruits of holiness *can* be produced; this 'life of Christ' wanting, the very basis of *pure* morality is wanting.

"But the Spirit of God is the only author of this life. For this is the testimony of God: 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus,' 'by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' Eph. 2: 10; Titus 3: 5. And in the production of the 'new creation,' the Holy Ghost employs, not the moral declamation, and the enticing words of the philosophy of this world; not the persuasions of 'science falsely so called:' these may be useful and ornamental in their place; they may be as choice pearls; but what are pearls to a hungry and thirsting soul? what are pearls to the famished Arab in the dry and barren wilderness? It is the voice of God only that raises

the dead ; it is the precious truth of the Gospel alone, which the Holy Ghost employs to convince and convert sinners ; it is the bread and the water of life alone, that can bring back the fainting spirit of man, and can sustain the life of God in the soul. The words of our Lord are explicit on this point. We are ‘born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. And this is the word which, by the Gospel, is preached unto you.’ And, under a deep sense of our responsibility, and in the faithful and diligent use of all the means and ordinances appointed of God, we ‘purify our souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren,’ and ‘building up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, we keep ourselves in the love of God,’ and ‘grow in grace,’ till we come ‘unto the perfect man ; to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’

“And I need not tell you, my friend, how fruitless would be your labor in planting, in this beautiful orchard of yours, a tree ‘twice dead,’ which had been, long ago, ‘plucked up by the roots ;’ or, how fruitless would be your utmost diligence and painstaking in plowing and sowing these fine fields of yours, if you throw in the *wrong seed*. He who resorts to human means, and human wisdom only, in the training of his family, and adopts the world’s cold and lifeless morality, instead of the living and powerful word of God’s Gospel, is actually sowing tares instead of wheat. He may toil late and early ; but he will, at the last, be mortified to find that the crop will be tares, and nothing but tares ! This, my dear friend, is the dangerous result of erring in the *matter* of training.”

“Ah ! dear pastor,” exclaimed Mr. C——l, “it may be that I have erred in the skilful use of all this ; but not, as I trust, in the *matter* itself. What you have kindly recited are the truths which my soul loves. We have erred, I think, less in the *matter*, than in the *manner* of applying

them. Will you, dear pastor, have the goodness briefly to notice the usual failures here."

"Touching this matter," said the pastor, "it is not only our duty, but a pleasure to copy the *manner* of our divine Master in all points practicable. Now, it must have struck you that our Lord exhibited the most perfect kindness, tenderness, and benevolence, in the whole manner of his instruction. Let us, then, put kindness, tenderness, and benevolence foremost, in the list of the graces of parental government. Let our whole souls flow forth in kindest emotions. O! let us ever think of the unutterable value of the souls of children entrusted to our care; let us lose no opportunity, let us spare no pains to pluck them as brands from the burning. Let us never cease to woo over their souls to Christ, by our entreaties, by our tears, by our prayers, by our love, by our example. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, let us use the most touching persuasions which the yearning of parental love can suggest.

"But, alas! how often do parents err in this point! The error sometimes arises from an irritable temper; passion overwhelms reason and reflection; we do not stop to recollect how much our own dear parents bore with our waywardness and follies; we forget how much, and how long our heavenly Father has borne with us; we forget how inconsistent is this hasty spirit with the character of Christian parents, who must be 'apt to teach,' and therefore patient and long-suffering. The error sometimes proceeds from a failing leaning to virtue's side. A Christian has warm and strong feelings of piety; these hurry him on; and he does not exercise calm reflection, so as to make the proper and necessary allowances for youth's thoughtlessness and follies. But did our Father in heaven bear with us? Did our Master forgive us ten thousand *talents*, and shall we not bear with our children, and forgive them a hundred *pence*? Shall we, who profess to be the children of the light, not remember that we must subdue the young heart by the discipline

of truth, applied with labor and prayer, not by force or the spirit of persecution!

“And permit me also to add here, that we who are parents are often a good deal defective in another valuable quality, or virtue, if you will allow me to call it so—I mean, *cheerfulness*. To the absence of this, and the influence of moroseness, may we not, in a great measure, ascribe the aversion so manifest in many young people, of the higher and middling ranks, to the topic of religious conversation? In all our allusions and conversations on the matter of religion, we should carefully study to make it what it is in sober reality, the most lovely and the most charming thing in the world!

“Much wisdom and spiritual skill are required in making a cheerful and exhilarating improvement of the *Sabbath evening*. In recalling to memory and reviewing the duties and exercises of the day, we should studiously endeavor to make our fireside and Sabbath evening conversations the most delightful and most captivating possible to the young mind. There are some parents and masters of families so stern, so awful, so morose in their manner, that their exhibitions of the lovely Gospel of Christ are really revolting to young persons. They seem to mistake sternness for solemnity, moroseness for zeal, and a spirit to find fault with and chide every one, for a spirit of piety and purity. They seem as if they took a pleasure in picturing out religion, not as an angel in robes of glory, but as a dark and lowering demon, come to rob us of our joys! This cannot fail to excite disgust. To this cause, and also, in an equal, if not superior degree, to another cause—I mean the total absence of all religious conversation at a parent’s fireside—, do I ascribe the prevailing dislike for religious conversation among young people.

“But, my dear friends, while I recommend cheerfulness, I would implore every Christian parent to be on his guard against the want of a proper and becoming gravity. An

ill-timed *levity* has, in many instances, produced lasting and most injurious consequences. Gravity and cheerfulness are perfectly consistent, and even congenial; it is the former which prevents the latter from degenerating into utter levity. Never, on a Sabbath evening, and never on a religious subject, should becoming gravity permit the introduction of wit and levity; far less, 'foolish talking or jesting, which are not convenient.' It was one of that learned and truly godly man, President Edwards' recorded rules of life, 'never to say a thing on the Lord's day which would excite mirth or a laugh.' This should be strictly observed by every Christian parent and master of a family. We may be perfectly cheerful without mirth and laughter. Let every thing be in its proper place, and always seasonable.

"There is another defect in the manner, which I cannot omit: the want of a due *equanimity of temper*. This is usually betrayed by impatience and irritation. It is of essential importance, not only to be on our guard against these, but to have the mind cured of them, as an exceeding great evil. A parent should never use the rod until he is convinced, on cool recollection, that it is his imperative duty to have recourse to it: he should never correct a child until he has convinced him of his error and crime; he should never correct a child in a passion: to do so is to indulge a spirit of revenge, not to exercise salutary parental discipline. His whole manner should indicate to the child that he administers the correction with the utmost reluctance, and from a painful sense of duty. An estimable friend of mine had an untoward son: he had committed a crime against the laws of the household: he took him into the family circle, spent some time in explaining to him the nature and the evil of that crime, and laying the rod down, he said, 'It is my duty, my child, to correct you; but I will do it in the fear of God. Let us first pray.' The whole family circle threw themselves on their knees, while

he poured out, with deep emotions, and many tears, a prayer for his stubborn and rebellious child. The culprit alone remained standing ; but the prayer and tears of his father melted his refractory heart, and he kneeled down also. The correction was administered with evident distress ; but it was light, for the child bowed instantly in submission and penitential confessions. And to my knowledge it was the last he ever needed. He is still alive ; and a more dutiful and excellent son you will not readily find.

“ There is another defect, which is originated by a parent’s constitutional indolence and aversion to the trouble and pain of discipline. This dangerous failing has made many a parent criminally yield to his own ease or natural feelings.

“ And finally, my friends, a painful defect shows itself in the *want of a proper unity between the parents*. One parent *scolds* when he ought to administer solemn but affectionate rebukes ; while the other parent takes the child’s part, and makes an apology for it. One of the parents corrects in wrath ; the other interferes, and pities the ‘ poor child,’ and insists that it shall not be corrected. The child thus creates an insurrection in the family, and contrives to escape in the unseemly brawl. The result is, that he laughs at the weakness of both parents, and soon begins to set parental authority at defiance.”

While the pastor was uttering the last three specimens of parental delinquency in the *manner* of conducting family discipline, the elder and his wife, having turned their eyes mutually on each other with more of sorrow than reproach, began to testify their unaffected grief. They were both bathed in tears. It had occurred to them that this was the main origin and source of the evil which they were now bitterly deploring.

Towards evening the pastor, previous to his departure, took some pains to find out the youth ; and bringing him in, placed him by his father’s side, and addressed another of

his pastoral admonitions to him. There was a dignity in the pastor's manner which seldom failed to command the awe and attention of this young man, when in his common moods. It is true, he had insulted him in the field, but it was in a gust of passion, which was now, for a season at least, soothed into a calm. But the pastor knew not the depth of that youth's depravity. He was silent, but unsubdued.

The pastor commenced his address to him in a tone of unaffected tenderness, while he sought to conceal the tears which coursed down his cheeks; but it had no effect on him. He rose by degrees into the most touching pathos, as he addressed himself to the youth's conscience. Then he spread out before his mind the terrors of the law and the majesty of the Almighty; and told him of the coming hour of death, of judgment, and an eternal retribution.

“My poor boy!” cried the pastor, with the utmost tenderness, “I will not fail to tell thee thy duties, whether thou wilt hear, or whether thou wilt forbear. It is the command of God to cherish in thy soul the principle of *filial affection*. ‘Hearken to thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.’ And remember, my child, that the basis of this affection and veneration which you owe your parents, is a holy veneration of God. And O, were there a principle of piety towards God in your heart, you would not thus break the hearts of your parents. In proportion as a child has the fear of God before his eyes, he is dutiful and affectionate. And in proportion as the fear of God is banished from the mind, the child is unnatural, stubborn, and rebellious. The drunkard and the gambler exhibit a mournful evidence of this: they would shuffle the implements of their folly and crime at a father's death-bed; they would make their last stake on a mother's coffin!

“In addition to filial affection, I charge you to render a

corresponding reverence and honor: carry it in all your looks; be courteous, gentle, and kind; shun petulance and the distressing spirit of contradiction, even when you may be confident that you are in the right. Never utter a disrespectful word of them to others: he who can do this, *even when they are in error*, lessens the dignity of his family, and detracts from his own honor. Like the pious sons of Noah, always throw a veil over their frailties and failings; and always be ready to defend them from the tongue of slander. And in a particular manner show the substantial evidence of your filial reverence and honor, by a dignified deportment before *all men*, in your intercourse with the world. I would not ask a higher compliment from a child of mine than this, I mean as it regards temporal honors.

“In addition to this, my child, God enjoins it on you to render to your parents a prompt *filial obedience* in all things. Always lend a willing ear to them in all their instructions. Yield up your heart to their injunctions promptly. Humble yourself under their admonitions and reproofs. Bow down with filial submission under their corrections, whether expressed in words, or in a temporary exile from their presence, or by the rod of correction. *Consult with them frankly*, and make them your counsellors and guides; especially in matters of such importance as your establishment in life, the choice of your employment and business, the choice of your company and companions, and in a special manner, your early attachments and choice of a companion, and in all your spiritual concerns.

“And, finally, fail not to give them endearing evidences of your *filial gratitude*. This includes in it, love for the benefits received, and a high value put on them, on account of their proceeding from persons beloved and dear: it includes *affection* to the persons of the donors, joy at the reception of favors, and a prompt disposition to render back what it can in return for them.

“And now, young man, these duties are enjoined by the awful authority of God speaking to you in his holy word, and by the mouth of your honored parents; and enforced by the captivating example of our Lord Jesus Christ towards his mother in early life, and as, in a most touching manner, while expiring on the cross, he recommended her, in his last moments, to the beloved disciple, with whom she should find reverence, affection, and a home! John 19: 25, 26. Moreover, God has enforced this duty by a promise of long life and prosperity; and when this duty is rendered by faith and love to God’s authority, it receives its eternal reward in the heavens. On the contrary, hear the denunciations of Heaven against the rebellious and wicked child: ‘Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother: and all the people shall say, Amen.’ Deut. 27: 16. ‘The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.’ Prov. 30: 17. Ah! young man, look on these weeping parents, and say, can you dare pursue the course which will bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave?”

Having finished his admonitions he kneeled down with the afflicted parents, and uttered a fervent prayer for them, while he did not forget in his holy wrestlings their poor prodigal son; for he felt that he had received his ministry of the Lord, and watched for souls as one who knew he was soon to be called to give his last account—even for those who might be lost, as well as for those who should be saved!

* * * * *

The writer of this Tract succeeded that venerable minister in the pastoral charge of the church of B——; and when he came into the charge, the pastor, and Mr. C., and his wife also, had all departed this life. They all died in

great peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Mr. C. died first, and shortly after him his wife, after closing their often-renewed and solemn entreaties and admonitions to their only son, to return to the Lord God of his fathers, and avoid the miseries of the second death; and enforcing these admonitions with many tears, and by all the solemnities of their trial and experience of a dying bed! The pastor had accepted the invitation to take on him the presidency of a college, and died in a few months after entering on his official duties.

John C——, the son, was the husband of an amiable lady, and the father of several beautiful children, when I first visited his mansion. He had been, for a season, reformed, to appearance at least; and had sustained a tolerably decent character for about a year after he had been married to his excellent wife. But now he had added the crime of a boasted and obstinate infidelity to the most disgusting habits of intemperance. And having once returned to them, his latter end was worse than the beginning. He was now a miserable and degraded man, lost to all self-respect, and reckless of character and public opinion; his wife, once the most beautiful and happy woman in the valley, was now a broken-hearted and haggard being; and his own children, to complete his misery and degradation, fled at his approach, and hid themselves from his presence. His fine estate was now involved in debt, and every thing around him indicated the condition of one fast sinking into ruin. His person, formerly athletic and handsome, exhibited a revolting spectacle. He had been visited with several attacks of the *delirium tremens*, or the drunkard's brain-fever, and yet he would daily drink incredible quantities of the poisonous liquid which was drowning him in perdition!

I remember as distinctly as if it had been only yesterday, the last visit which I paid him. I was accompanied by an elder of the church, who had for some years filled the place

of his venerable father. He received us kindly ; he was sober, for it was rather early : he sat down on my left side, the elder on the other ; his meek and humble wife, with her three pretty little children, casting anxious and sorrowful looks at their father, placed themselves over against us. A deep and painful silence prevailed for some minutes. Every thing about the chamber, and about the house, on which the eye could rest, exhibited tokens of desolation and wretchedness. This was the inheritance of a SPOILED CHILD—the house of a drunkard and infidel !

“ Will you, sir, bring me your father’s Bible ? ” A smile, not of pleasure, but that of the scorner, played over his face ; nevertheless, he rose and brought it out, covered with dust and cobwebs.

This led me to notice the very different use which the good old man, his father, made of that book, and the use which all good men would make of it. He smiled contemptuously, but said nothing, for his wife cast a beseeching look on him, tempered with her winning sweetness, rendered more touching by her unaffected sorrow.

It was a long visit we paid him ; and we endeavored, by the help of divine grace, to improve our time. We set before him, after reading the nineteenth psalm, a brief outline of the authenticity and divinity of the Holy Scriptures ; and begged respectfully his attention to it. “ Ah ! sir, this points out to you the good old way in which your fathers walked, and found rest and happiness : I appeal to your own experience if you have ever tasted one drop of happiness or peace in your wanderings from these ways.” He turned away from the discussion with a sally of ridicule ; yet in that sarcastic laugh a child might have seen that he felt miserable in his soul. His wit had pierced his own conscience.

We turned to another subject—the nature and the worth of the immortal soul. “ O let the son of your father remember the words of Him whose lips never spoke false-

hood, even Him whose lips, as the Lord God of Hosts liveth, will ere long judge you at his tribunal! O hear his words: 'What is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' O what will you feel—what will you say—what will you do, when you are in the last awful conflict—in the act of leaving this world!—and soon—soon will you be summoned to leave it! As the Lord liveth, and as your soul liveth, there is only a step between you and death! O what will you feel—what will you say—what will you do, when the eternal world in all its fearful realities, in all its overpowering glories and terrors, shall burst on your astonished and disembodied soul! O hear me—return to the Lord God of your father! I beseech you, by Him who loved us, and gave himself for us—by him who died on the cross for us—by the Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech you, return to your God! By the memory of that dear old man your father—by the memory of his tears, and prayers, and vows—by the memory of that dear saint of God, now in heaven, your mother, who bare you, and nursed you in her bosom, and wept and prayed over you—whose last prayer and sigh were breathed from her dying lips for you—O return to your God; and break off your sins by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!"

He burst into tears, and placing his hands on his face, bowed himself down, his face on his knees, and wept aloud.

We all kneeled down and prayed. The miserable man kneeled close by me. My heart was utterly overcome: I poured out my soul in almost incoherent words: I implored the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on him, his wife, and his dear little children. Every one of us wept, the very children sobbed, and I shall never forget the scene. The floor where the prodigal son bowed his head was wet with his streaming tears.

The sun was now setting : we took our leave of him with a cordial embrace. He led us to our horses, and on parting besought us to visit him soon again.

But, alas ! it was our last interview with him. I never saw him more. I was called into a neighboring State on business of the churches, and I was absent two weeks. The first news I learned, as I alighted at my own door, on my return, was the appalling intelligence that POOR JOHN C—— WAS DEAD, AND BURIED !

I learned in brief his last moments from the elder who had accompanied me on my last visit, and who had seen him when dying. Poor C—— was attacked with fits : he raved in his deliriums. At intervals he recovered his senses, and for a season was somewhat composed in his mind, but expressed deep compunctions and sorrow for his evil ways and doings. When he felt himself dying, he became awfully alarmed. He seemed actually frantic. The very bed shook under him ; as if with supernatural strength, he tried to raise himself up ; and shrieked out for some moments, “O Lord Jesus, have mercy on me ! God of my father, have mercy on me ! O Christ, have mercy on me ! O curses, curses on the head of General ——, who seduced me from the ways of my father’s God into his infidel ways ! Curses on my vicious companions, who taught me to break the Sabbath, and to dishonor and disobey my father and mother ; and led me into taverns, instead of the church of my fathers ! O mercy, mercy, Lord, on me, a poor miserable outcast !” Thus he continued wailing, sometimes crying for mercy, and frequently uttering fearful imprecations. In a few hours, during which there was nothing but horror and distraction in the family, his strength, though the strength of a giant, became utterly exhausted ; and his spirit, with an agonizing struggle, took its everlasting flight !

This, as reported to me, was the end of the SPOILED CHILD. In these solemn facts we set up a beacon, to give an awful warning to parents of the fatal rock on which they also may strike. "Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away!" "O let us hear and fear, and do no presumptuous sin!" Let us labor for the conversion of our dear children, like those who feel that they are laboring to "pluck brands from the devouring fire!" We pronounce not on the final destiny of poor John C——; but who of us, I beseech you, would wish our children to follow his course of life, or to die his appalling death?

THE END.

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