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# THE CHRISTIAN TREASURY

## A FAMILY MISCELLANY

### Contents.

	PAGE
THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF DEATH. By PROFESSOR AUSTIN PHELPS, D.D.,	409
THE CHILD OF THE SEA; OR, FOR LOVE OF ME. By KATHLEEN MARY SMITH. Chaps. XIV., XV.,	411, 449
JOHN DISROW'S WORDS. By HOPE LEDYARD,	415
MELANCHTHON. By REV. PROFESSOR PHILIP SCHAFF, D.D., LL.D.,	416, 428
A DAILY PORTION,	419, 420, 431, 432, 443, 444, 455, 456
THE PUNISHMENT OF PARENTAL SINS. By the REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.,	421, 433
POETRY: THERE YET IS ROOM,	423
A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM. By ELLEN BERTHA BRADLEY,	424
CONVERT THE PEOPLE,	425
A WONDERFUL BIBLE,	425
THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY,	425
A PORTION FOR THE AGED: STEPPING-STONES. By REV. P. STRYKER, D.D.—FORGIVENESS. By W. J. M.,	426, 427
FORGIVING AT SUNDOWN. By RUTH POOL,	430
THE EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS. By REV. T. W. CHAMBERS, D.D.,	434
POETRY: COMFORT IN SORROW. By the REV. J. CLARK,	435
THE LATE LONDON MISSION. By the REV. GEO. F. PENTECOST, D.D.,	436, 447
GOD WATCHES OVER THE NETHERLANDS. By C. F. SCHOTTELN-DREIER,	438
CONSTANTINOPLE. By REV. C. L. GOODELL, D.D.,	441
AGGRESSIVENESS,	442
MORE THAN THERE'S BUSINESS FOR. By REV. IRENAEUS PRIME, D.D., Editor of <i>New York Observer</i> ,	445
POETRY: CONFIDENCE IN GOD. By REV. WILLIAM ANDERSON, Tarbolton,	446
HE CAN WAIT,	446
WORK,	448
A MOTHERLESS CHILD. By the REV. JAMES HASTIE, Cornwall, Ontario, Canada,	452
INTELLIGENCE,	453

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## THE PUNISHMENT OF PARENTAL SINS.

BY THE REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.

1 SAM. III. 13.



**E**XPERIENCE is like the stern-light of a ship; it illumines only the path that is already passed over. This familiar adage is true as to our own experience; but if we study carefully the Word of God, we can follow, as it were, in the wake of many other voyagers, and get the benefit of the light they cast upon the waves. Next to its supreme value in revealing God, the Bible is valuable in its perfect revelation of human character. Human nature is presented there in its every aspect. Patriarchs, prophets, kings, warriors, and apostles, lofty people and lowly, great saints and great sinners, have their inward lives as well as their outward history unerringly photographed. Domestic life is portrayed. The virtues and the vices of the household are honestly depicted, both for guidance and for warning. Secret sins are brought to view as vividly as if they had been committed on the house-tops, and he or she must be wilfully blind indeed who cannot profit from the 'stern-lights' which the Scriptures pour upon the pathways to eternity.

By a striking concurrence we have two domestic histories unfolded side by side. One is the story of wise parental training, as illustrated in the case of Elkanah and Hannah, the father and mother of Samuel. The other is the tragic story of Eli, the father of those two 'scapegraces,' Hophni and Phineas. This latter story is a beacon of warning against parental indulgence of sins committed by those who are entrusted to us as the trustees of their spiritual welfare. It depicts the errors and the doom of a father who fell a victim to the sins of his children which became really his own sins by his failure to hinder them at the right time and in the right manner. Among all the Bible narratives, none is more instructive than the short, sad biography of grey-haired Eli.

He was of the house of Ithamar, and acted

as the high priest of Israel, and also its judge for forty years. We know nothing of his early life. He comes on the stage of history when he is a veteran of fourscore; at the time of his death he lacks only two years of a century! The character of Eli is singularly compounded; it is a combination of excellent traits and of most pitiable weaknesses. The iron and the clay are strongly intermingled. If we look on the best side of the man, we discover the following excellences: He loved God's service, and gave himself to the duties of the high priesthood with diligence. A rare magnanimity was shown by him in reference to the youthful Samuel; instead of being meanly jealous of him as one who was to supplant himself, he does all he can to assist Samuel in reaching the high office to which God had called him. This generosity toward a youthful rival is above all praise. Eli also had the courage to listen to truth, even the most painful truth. To the young Samuel he says, 'What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me; God do so unto thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me of all the things that He said unto thee.'

Would that you and I were more willing to listen to the plain truth, although it may be sharp enough to pierce us like a lancet!

Eli also exhibited a wonderfully beautiful submissiveness to the will of God under a most humiliating trial. When Samuel had told him every whit of the just judgments that were impending over him, he uttered those brave words of resignation—'It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good.' We do not exaggerate when we affirm that, if looked at only on the bright side of his character, Eli would be one of the most admirable men in the Old Testament picture-gallery.

But the attractions of the bright side only deepen the darkness of the dark side. The clay in Eli's composition was exceedingly frail and friable. Excellent as were his convictions of duty, he seems to have been pitifully weak

in working them into practice. There was a lamentable lack of will-power. When warned of his weaknesses and of the calamities that would follow them, he did not grasp hold of duty with a resolute hand and carry it through with promptness and thoroughness. This feeble irresolution and pulpiness of character brought fearful miseries upon himself and wrought fearful mischief to others.

There are too many such people nowadays—men and women of good impulses, but of weak performance. They lack spiritual force and fibre; when the strain comes they snap. When we hear them pray so penitently over their own frailties, we do not deny their sincerity; yet as soon as they are done sorrowing they begin to sin again in the same direction. You cannot build a safe suspension-bridge from New York to Brooklyn if the cables are half iron and half twisted tow.

The one vital point in which High Priest Eli broke down most disgracefully was in the management of his own household. This has given him his unhappy celebrity; his very name is proverbial for parental neglect, and for the penalty which such neglect commonly brings. Eli's closing years were made miserable by the crimes of his own sons; he gave birth to the sinners, although it would be too much to say that he gave birth to their sins. His fault and folly were that he did not give death to them with a resolute hand. By leaving the iniquities of his graceless sons to grow apace he came at last to be strangled by the serpent-monster which sprang into frightful dimensions within the bosom of his own family.

The first description we have of Hophni and Phineas has a terrible terseness—'Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial.' They had a double parentage: naturally, they were the children of the high priest; morally, they were the children of iniquity. 'Belial' is not the name of a heathen idol, as many suppose; it signifies *worthlessness* or *wickedness*, and in the New Testament is used as the personification of evil. Having photographed the characters of Hophni and Phineas in this one vivid line, the sacred narrative goes on to specify their peculiar transgressions. Their first sin was a lawless violation of the sanctity of the temple-services; it was a combination of stealing and of sacrilege. When the people came up to the holy place to offer their sacrifices, these two rapacious young priests seized upon a large part of the offerings which were presented—a larger part than they had any right to—and appropriated it to themselves.

And, as if robbing the altar were not enough, they committed a robbery against God by destroying the devout veneration which was due to Him. 'Wherefore' we are told that 'the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.' A solemn sacrifice was made worse than a farce; from despising the priests the people came to despise the enjoined worship of Jehovah in His tabernacle. No better description could be given of the impiety committed by these godless young priests than by applying to them the scorching words of our Saviour—'It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.'

This was not their only offence. Not content with making the tabernacle of the Most High a den of thieves, they absolutely turned it into a brothel! It appears that many of the women of Israel were wont to assemble at the doors of the tabernacle for some kind of religious service—perhaps a service of prayer, or perhaps the performance of certain womanly offices of work in connection with the tabernacle itself. These unsuspecting women, who came for a devout purpose, were often made the victims of priestly lust. Within the very precincts of God's house female innocence was assailed and female chastity was corrupted! Devotion was prostituted to the foulest indecencies; the road to the altar became a road to hell!

Heavily indeed must the tidings of these crimes of the sons have fallen upon the ears of their unhappy father. 'Now Eli was very old when he heard all that his sons did unto all Israel.' Far toward the sunset of his long life—far too late for him, and for them too—he becomes fully aware of their iniquitous practices. That they were a brace of bad fellows he knew before; this fact appears from other parts of the narrative. The extent of their villainies he had not fully known until now. With a broken heart the poor old man summons before him the profligate sons whom he had begotten and whom he had never attempted to govern. It is a harrowing interview. We look on with a pity that almost makes us forget the wretched errors of the wretched parent when he is telling them in tremulous tones of the shocking reports which reach him. 'Why do ye such things?' he exclaims in a sort of helpless amazement—'Why do ye such things? for I hear your bad report from all this people. Nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress.'

(The Septuagint version reads, 'ye make it so that the Lord's people do not worship.') 'If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?' A human fine may punish a transgression against a fellow-man, but a sin against God demands a penalty from God Himself.

After listening to this solemn and pathetic rebuke from the aged high priest we are ready to wonder how such a man should have been such an unfaithful father. We wonder that one who talked so well should have acted so wrongly. It surprises us that this just abhorrence of what his sons had been doing did not make its appearance in time to restrain them from beginning their abominable practices. At the eleventh hour he rubs open his sleepy eyes to see what he ought to have seen ten hours before. No one who has ever been sorely tried by the reckless wrong-doings of his own children will fail to pity the suffering old man. We all pity him profoundly, but we cannot excuse or palliate him. God's word sweeps away every shadow of excuse. The Lord said unto Samuel, 'I will judge the house of Eli for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.'

The verdict against the suffering old man was that he did nothing effectual in the way of hindrance of his sons' iniquities; there was no wholesome and powerful restraint. It is not by main force that the wayward son is to be kept back from sin—not by hurling terrific threats in his face, or by bombarding him with irritating censure and taunts. Restraint is the application of truth in love. It reasons as well as rebukes. It appeals to conscience, and sets God before the tempted youth. It employs *authority*, but authority unminged with passion and resentment. When it says, 'My son, you shalt *not*,' it means what it says; and if punishment is needful to enforce that word '*not*,' then it punishes. But with its righteous displeasure it mingles its hearty and spontaneous approval of every right step a son can take. My dear fellow-parents, to 'restrain' our children is not merely to pull them back from evil; it is to draw them toward the right.

Eli's misgovernment of his children had two cardinal faults. One error was that he rebuked his sons *too late*. This was the fatal blunder of the father who should begin to dissuade his son from the wine-bottle when the young man had already become an inebriate. Eli's reproofs and admonitions did

not commence soon enough. He did not attempt, we may be assured, to 'bend the twig;' but he laid vain hold with palsied hands of the deep-rooted and full-grown tree. It was not until God's house had been desecrated with debaucheries, and the public morals corrupted, and the name of priest had become a by-word and a stench, that he lifted up his impotent protest. 'Why do ye these things?' was a question that suggested the other question, 'Why didst not thou do thy duty *before*?' No attempt was made to use the reins until the furious steeds were dashing the vehicle to fragments.

The other error of the weak-backed Eli was that, having postponed his correction of his dissolute sons until they became hardened in vice, his words of rebuke were as weak as water. As quaint old Matthew Henry remarks, 'There was no edge to his reproofs.' He was not only too late; he was too lenient. Instead of a righteous condemnation of their crimes, accompanied with just punishment and their removal from the office which they desecrated, the half-hearted pontiff contents himself with a tame and pitiful regret for their infamous deeds. Instead of 'hearkening to the voice of their father' when he did speak at all, they seemed to have laughed in his face. His culpable indulgence had left no respect even for his grey hairs or his tears; they had come to despise the parent who had never secured their respect nor made them feel his authority.

(To be continued.)

### There Yet is Room.

No father's house is full,  
E'en though there seems no resting-place for  
more;  
Forgiving arms and doors do open wide  
If one repentant child implore  
Outside.

No mother's heart is full,  
Unless it be with longing, burning, wild  
Heart-throbbings that no cheerful face can  
hide—  
The wish to clasp her sinning child  
Outside.

God's flock is never full;  
Fear not to enter boldly at His door;  
None ever were refused who there applied:  
He hath abiding-place for more  
Inside.

Home Journal.



## THE PUNISHMENT OF PARENTAL SINS.

BY THE REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.

(Continued from page 423.)



ELI'S wretched failure was the failure of millions of fathers since his day: when his children were young he would not restrain them, and when they grew older he could not. With a few timid words he vainly strove to subdue the stalwart transgressors whom he had allowed to wax strong and stubborn in their sins, which had become so rank as to 'smell to heaven.' It was a mournful proof of the old man's utter and pitiable loss of all power of restraint that the reckless sons would not even 'hearken to the voice of their father.' The all-righteous God took them into His own hands, and, foreseeing their obdurate impenitence, He was preparing for them a terrible retribution.

Before we reach the catastrophe of this most instructive story let me emphasise a few truths in regard to paternal influence. If Hannah is a model for mothers, Eli is a beacon for fathers. Many things have been spoken or written—yet not one syllable too many—about the happy and holy influence of a godly mother. But there yet remains a solid philosophy in the ancient adage, 'Like father, like family.' Not more surely do I impress my shadow on the ground at a clear noonday than do I as a father impress my moral shadow upon my own home and household. The father is, by God's decree, the head of the house for good or for evil. He ordains the home-law; he fixes the precedents; he largely creates the moral atmosphere of the home; and the 'odour of the house' remains in the habits of the children if they should migrate to the ends of the earth. 'His father was a Catholic,' or 'His father was a Protestant,' is the sufficient reason that determines the religious position of half the people on this continent. The law of heredity decides the denominational and the political status very generally. 'He is a chip of the old block,' said some one when he heard the

younger Pitt's first speech. 'Nay,' replied Burke; 'he is the old block himself.' But if in your houses the 'old block' is worm-eaten, what shall become of the chips?

The grace of God is not transmitted by inheritance, yet a father's conscientious piety is often reproduced in his children. If his footprints are deeply indented toward God and heaven, he may reasonably hope that His children will tread in them. 'He sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in His commandments,' is the Bible description of the good King Jehoshaphat. If there is a law of Christian nurture by which, with God's help, the godly family becomes a nursery of religion, so there is a law of unchristian nurture, and by this law bad opinions and bad habits are transmitted to the next generation. Whatever 'fires the father kindles, the children gather the wood.' If the father sets a decanter on his table, the boys soon practise at the glass; a large percentage of all our drunkenness is hereditary. If the father goes on a Sabbath drive, the children must have a seat; if he says on the Sabbath, 'I go a-fishing,' the boys reply, 'We go with thee.' If he lounges away the Lord's-day over his *Sunday Herald* or *Tribune*, then Harry and George are apt to study police reports and walking matches far more keenly than their lesson for the Sabbath school; even if they go to Sabbath school, the *home* school pulls downward more strongly than the Sabbath school pulls upward. Pulpit invitations and pulpit warnings, however faithful, are drowned out amid the din of an irregular home. Show me a father who talks nothing but money at his own table, and I will show you a crop of boys whose chief ambition is to be rich; show me one who talks horses and games, and I will promise you a fast-driving troop of young sportsmen. Show me one who fences his home around with God's commandments, and lights it up with domestic comforts and pleasures, and anchors himself to his home, and I will show you the best kind of restraint from

dangerous evening resorts. A happy Christian home is the surest antidote for evil amusements. But if a father hears the clock strike eleven in the theatre or in his club-house, he need not be surprised if his sons hear it strike twelve in the drinking-saloon or the gaming-room or the haunts of the profligate. Even in spite of the strongest restraints, some sons will break through into sin; but if a parent *leads into irreligion*, what but God's omnipotent grace can keep his imitative household from following him to perdition? The history of such a family is commonly written in that frequent line found in the Old Testament: 'He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him.'

But Eli, you may say, was a servant of God. So he was, in his way, but there are two very different types of paternal religion. One parent prays at his family-altar for the conversion of his children, and then does his utmost to secure what he prays for. He surrounds his home with Bible-restraints against sinful temptations. He aims to make both his religion and his home *attractive*. The books he purchases, the journals he takes, the amusements he provides, the company he invites, the whole atmosphere of his home, are made to be a *restraint* against evil by being an attraction towards purity and true religion. The Holy Spirit is not invoked to convert his offspring to Christ while the head of the house is *perverting* them to worldliness or self-seeking or frivolity or secret contempt for all religion.

Yet I fear that certain fathers are guilty of Eli's folly and fatal blunder. They busy themselves with certain words and acts of religious observance; they try to serve God in certain directions; they even pray, formally, for their children's conversion. But their daily example, their conduct, and the whole trend of their influence are not an effective restraint against sin; they do not draw their children toward Jesus Christ and His commandments as the law of life. It is a terrible truth to declare, but I honestly believe that some professed Christians are an absolute hindrance to the conversion of their children. For the warning of such the divine Spirit has spread out at full length the calamitous history of Eli's awful mistake. As on an illuminated transparency we read the fiery inscription of God's punishment of paternal neglect of duty: 'The Lord said, I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I

begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.'

God's righteous threatenings are never mere 'heat-lightning;' they strike! If we look on into the succeeding chapter of this inspired book we discover where and how the thunderbolt fell. With a touching minuteness the sacred historian describes the aged Eli sitting by the wayside near the close of the day. All through that day Israel had been engaged in bloody conflict with the Philistines, and the ark of the covenant had been borne to the battlefield as a palladium of defence. The veteran high priest waits in anxious suspense for the result, 'for his heart trembled for the ark of God.' Presently a loud cry breaks upon his ear. It is a wail for the fall of thirty thousand warriors and the ruin of a lost cause. Aged Eli lifts up his feeble voice and asks, 'What meaneth the noise of this tumult?' The messenger, with rent garments and choked utterance, reveals the awful intelligence. Israel has fled before the Philistines! Hophni and Phineas are slain! All this were enough to crush him, but the worst is to come—'*The ark of God is taken!*' When he made mention of that the old man fell backward to the ground. That word is fatal. They take him up tenderly, but he is speechless. His 'neck was broken' by the fall, but ah! good friends, his *heart* had been broken long before by the monster crimes bred from his own parental neglect.

Being dead, Eli yet speaketh. He speaks to-day, and warns us who are parents that if we commit his sin, our sin will yet find us out. Methinks that from his lips, growing pale in death, we can catch the faltering words, 'A foolish son is a grief to his father and a bitterness to her that bare him. Correct thy sons, and they shall give thee rest; yea, delight unto thy soul. But a child left to himself bringeth his father and mother to shame.'

## THE EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS.

BY REV. T. W. CHAMBERS, D.D.

THE Epistles to the Corinthians stand almost alone in character and aim among the writings of the great Apostle. They are not didactic, like Romans and Galatians—the former a profound discussion of the principles of Anthropology and Soteriology, the latter an indignant protest against opinions and prac-