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CHILDREN

OF

The Covenant.

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A WORD TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS.





·“FAVOUR IS DECEITFUL, AND BEAUTY IS VAIN ; BUT  
A WOMAN THAT FEARETH THE LORD, SHE SHALL BE  
PRAISED.”—*Prov.* xxxi. 30.



## A WORD TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS.

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O thoughtful Christian parent, who realizes the responsibility that rests upon him, or feels the proper interest in the well being and happiness of his children, can read the preceding narratives, with the well authenticated facts upon which they are based, without asking himself the question: "How may I secure for my own household the same rich grace which was bestowed upon these dear children; so that, if it should please God to call my little ones away from me by death, the same abundant consolation may be afforded me in the evidence of their peaceful and triumphant victory over death?" Closely in the wake of this question, of such vital interest, follow others, calculated to awaken

feelings of sadness: Why is it that in so few households the same early manifestations of the Spirit's presence and power are witnessed? Why are so few of the children of the Church savingly converted in early childhood? Why do so few seem to be deeply impressed with the importance of religious things? Why is it that, while here and there one is found whose first opening years are consecrated to God, the vast majority of our youth grow up thoughtless and unconcerned upon the subject of religion, running riot in every form of worldliness and dissipation, and dying (if they die in youth,) without leaving behind them any assured evidence of meetness for the kingdom of Heaven?

It seems to me that the heart of many an anxious parent, into whose hands this little volume will fall, must earnestly re-echo the question: Why is this? Why is it that these dear children received such an early baptism of the Holy Spirit, and were scarcely conscious of the time when their hearts were not under the power of His grace, while my children have

never had any such experiences, and seem altogether indifferent to religious things?

In answering this question, it is necessary, first of all, to recognize the infinite sovereignty of the grace of God. The gifts of His Holy Spirit are bestowed "according to the counsel of His own will." "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." In so far as these remarkable examples of early piety are to be traced to the extraordinary influences of His Holy Spirit,—and it certainly is to these influences alone that we can trace them as their source,—we can only say, as did our blessed Lord: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." There are, perhaps, no parents who would be further from ascribing any merit or praise to themselves in connection with these wonderful experiences, than the parents of Hart, and Sallie, and Mary Kerr. On the other hand, deeply conscious of much unworthiness, and many failures in duty, none would be more ready to lay down all the praise at the foot of the throne of God's sovereign grace, saying,

“not unto us, O, Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth’s sake.” “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

When God is pleased thus, of His sovereign mercy and goodness, to pour out His grace upon a household, to put honour upon His covenant, and to make bright and illustrious examples of the power of His truth and Spirit over the heart of the smallest child, He has put an honour, not upon that household alone, but upon His whole Church. The fragrant memories which the Holy Spirit leaves behind Him, when He has done His work, and taken the sainted ones away, are the legacy of the whole Church of God; and every parent may rejoice in these rich tokens of the covenanted mercy and grace of God.

But while the grace of God is in the highest sense sovereign; while in the domain of grace, as in the domain of nature, God sits upon a throne of absolute and unquestioned authority, doing “according to His will, in the army



of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" and while He is free to dispense His Spirit, or to withhold Him at His will, yet it is none the less true, that in grace, as in nature, God works ordinarily by means. There are certain channels through which He is pleased to communicate His Holy Spirit. There are certain means, the use of which He is pleased to own and bless. While these means have no efficacy in themselves; while they are entirely dependent for their virtue upon His sovereign grace communicated in them, and while He is free to work above them and without them; yet, ordinarily, they are the instruments by and through which He exerts His power upon the soul. God's grace, therefore, is sovereign; but it is by no means arbitrary. It has respect to a wisely ordered and perfectly adjusted plan, which includes all the means that are necessary to secure the salvation of every human soul; and if families are found in which children are irreligious, thoughtless, or profane, it is not because of any unwillingness

on the part of God to pour out His Spirit, but because of some defect in the use of the means of grace.

It is to this point that I would call most earnestly the attention of Christian parents. Inasmuch as God's covenant with His children embraces not only believers, but their children also; inasmuch as the means through which He communicates His grace, are means which may be made available for children, as well as for persons of mature years; and inasmuch as we know, from the experience of the past, that His Spirit does often times most wonderfully operate upon the minds and hearts of those who are yet in early childhood, we have a right both *to pray for* and *to expect* the early conversion of our children; and if they are not converted in childhood, or opening youth, the fault lies at our own door.

This may appear very startling to some. There is a great deal of skepticism in the Church in reference to this subject of the conversion of little children. President Edwards speaks of it in his day:

“It has, heretofore, been looked upon as a very strange thing when any have seemed to be savingly wrought upon and remarkably changed in their childhood; but now, (referring to the revival in the church of Northampton, Mass., of which he was pastor,) I suppose near thirty were, to appearance, so wrought upon, between ten and fourteen years of age, and two between nine and ten, and one about four years of age.”

This last instance of conversion appeared so remarkable at the time, that President Edwards wrote a full history of it, which is found in a little work in many of our Sabbath school libraries, with the title, *Phæbe Bartlett*. The same practical skepticism remains, to a considerable extent, to the present day. Parents do not expect the early conversion of their children; do not hope for it, or labour for it, or pray for it. They would be astonished and incredulous if such a thing should take place!

And yet is there any reason why our children should not be converted in childhood? Did not our blessed Lord, on more than one occasion, say: “Except ye be converted, and become

as *little children*, ye shall not enter into the the kingdom of heaven." "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein," &c. Is there anything in the plan of salvation which the child cannot apprehend as truly as the grown man? Is not faith in Jesus Christ the simplest, most child-like exercise of the human mind and heart? If those children who die in infancy, are regenerated by the Holy Spirit before they pass that mysterious bourne, beyond which there is no remission of sins, and no work of grace, may not the same Almighty Agent, who transformed their natures, that they might be new creatures in Christ Jesus, transform also the natures of those who are to remain in this world of sin?

On the other hand, have we not the very highest encouragement to hope for the conversion of children? Are not their hearts in early childhood more easily impressed with truth, and more free from the deadening, corrupting influence of the world? Are they not more docile, more confiding, more distrustful of self,

and more willing to lean upon another for strength? Practically, do they not receive religious impressions with more earnestness, exhibit deeper emotion under the influence of religious truth, melt down with more tenderness at the story of the Cross, and reach forth toward the thought of a future heaven with more intensity and vividness of conception than persons of mature age? And if the whole matter of salvation hinges upon the simple exercise of a childlike faith in Jesus, why may not every child believe and be saved? And if conversion to God in childhood is possible, why may we not expect it, and ask it? If these dear children are God's chosen ones; if He has designed in the councils of eternity to call them into His kingdom, why should He not call them at the third hour, as well as at the sixth, or ninth, or eleventh? Why should any portion of their precious lives be spent in the service of Satan? Why should the dew and freshness of their youth be exhausted before they are transplanted into the garden of the Lord?

When we consider how open to all tender

impressions childhood is ; when we reflect upon the fact that it is the glory of the gospel, that, while its truths are hid from the wise and prudent, they are revealed unto babes ; when we think of the tender and intense love of Jesus to little children, as expressed by taking them in his arms and blessing them, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;" and when we think of the infinite power and grace of the Holy Spirit ; is it not wonderful that more of the children of believing parents are not converted in childhood ? Is it not strange that there are so many pious parents in the Church weeping over ungodly sons, and worldly minded, pleasure-seeking daughters, in whose hearts no saving impressions of divine truth seem to rest ?

Be assured, brethren, that there is a fault somewhere. God has said, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee ;" and God is not "a man that he should lie, or the son of man that He should repent." Let us proceed to inquire earnestly where this difficulty lies,



which withholds the converting grace of God from the hearts of our children. And when the writer of these lines thinks of the dear little ones whom God has given to him, he would join in the prayer, which he trusts will ascend from many a parent's heart: Lord give unto thy servant light that he may see clearly the path of duty ; forgive wherein he has erred ; and replenish him with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, that, like Abraham of old, he may command his household after him, in paths of holiness and truth.

I. The first difficulty to which I would call attention, is found in the manifest failure of many Christian parents to apprehend the reality of the covenant which God has made with believing parents and their children, and the consequent failure to take hold of this covenant by faith, and appropriate to themselves the precious promises which it contains. Now, a covenant is a sworn agreement or compact between two parties, in which certain conditions or stipulations are affixed, upon compliance with which by one party the other brings himself under

obligation to discharge certain offices, or to confer certain benefits in return. The stipulations agreed to by the first party constitute what are called the *conditions* of the covenant. The corresponding benefits constitute the *promises* of the covenant. In the original covenant between God and Abraham, which lies at the basis of the visible church, that which Abraham covenanted to do, and which constituted the *condition* of the covenant, was summarily expressed in the words: "Walk thou before me, and be thou perfect." It implied that Abraham, as the head of a believing household, was to consecrate himself, with all that was his, to the service of God. He was not only publicly to confess, for himself, the true God; publicly to recognize and accept the redemption which God had provided through the sacrifice of atoning blood, and through the regeneration of the Holy Ghost; and publicly to consecrate himself to the true worship and service of God; but he was publicly to confess this Jehovah as the God of his children also; the God whom they were to be taught to fear,



to love, and to obey. He was publicly to accept this salvation through the blood of a divine Victim, as the salvation of his children. To the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, their earliest thoughts were to be directed, that they might believe on Him that justifieth the ungodly, and have their faith counted to them for righteousness. He was, moreover, to consecrate his children to the service of God, as truly as he consecrated himself—to feel that, by the condition of this covenant, they were in a peculiar sense the Lord's, in a sense as high and holy as that in which the believer, by the act of self-consecration, gives himself up to the service of God. The condition of the covenant, (as that covenant lay at the foundation of the visible church,) embraced, in a word, just what every believing parent is expected and required to do—to consecrate his children to God—to throw them in faith upon the arms of God's covenant mercy, and in daily faith and daily prayer, by the help of divine grace, to rear them as the true servants of God, and the heirs of the promises in Christ. Now, such

being the *condition* of the covenant, let us inquire what was its promise: "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." You perceive that there is no difference in the language between what is promised to Abraham personally and what is promised to him in reference to his children. There is no condition annexed to the one promise that is not also annexed to the other. If the words, "I will be a God to thee," imply that all spiritual blessings necessary to salvation should be bestowed upon Abraham, the following words imply the same fulness of spiritual blessing for his children. If the first words imply that Abraham's faith in God, and confession of Him before men shall be blessed of God to the securing of all needed grace in this life, and glory in the life to come, the succeeding words surely teach, that in some way connected with that act of faith and consecration stand those covenanted blessings which are to descend upon his children through him, and thus constitute them the "heirs of the promises." Under this Old Testament covenant, therefore, the believing parent covenanted

not only for himself, but also for his children. He not only entered into solemn engagement to train them for the service and glory of God; but his faith was taught to connect with this solemn engagement the precious truth of God's acceptance of his children into covenant relationship with Himself, and to draw from it all the encouragement and comfort which such a thought was fitted to afford. This is the truth which was implied, when, in respect to the faith of Abraham, the rite of circumcision was administered both to himself and to Isaac his son. It was a proclamation of the truth, that the same faith which brought him into connection with the covenant of God, brought Isaac also within the pale of its blessings, and that the same salvation which came to him came also to his house. This same truth of God's covenant was held forth through all the old economy. When the proselyte was admitted, upon public profession of his faith, to the number of the visible church of God, he received, not only in his own person, but in the person of his children, the seal of the covenant in circum-

cision. The same precious truth appears, when the apostles, as they receive believing parents into the church, in every recorded instance, receive their children with them, administering to all alike the same precious seal in baptism. There can be no truth more apparent to an unprejudiced mind, than that this same covenant which God originally declared to be an "everlasting covenant," still exists in all its binding force, and that the believing parent, who takes hold of this covenant, and pleads it with God, and trains up his children under a sense of its preciousness, and in a faithful discharge of its obligations, may as really hope for and expect the salvation of his children, as Abraham confidently relied upon the promise of God, which was made to him, and afterwards confirmed to Isaac his son.

The ordinance of baptism is the public and official seal which God puts upon the covenant between His people and Himself. Every believing parent, who receives upon the person of his child the sacramental water, in that very act solemnly ratifies this covenant between

Abraham and God. He takes upon Himself the same obligations which Abraham took. He professes Himself an heir of the same blessings with faithful Abraham; and if this covenanting with God be not on His part a mere form, an idle and unmeaning ceremony, it is a solemn agreement with God for the life—the eternal life of his child. It is the assumption of vows, upon the performance of which hinges, in great measure, the everlasting salvation of the little one. It is as though, in that solemn hour, God were reaching down to the parent the title-bond of his child to an inheritance in heaven. If he has faith to take hold of the heavenly indenture, and grace to comply with its conditions, the immortal soul of his child may, through eternity, live to bless God for the solemn transactions of that covenant hour. If he has not faith to look through the ordinance to those great spiritual truths, which it is designed to signify and seal, the solemnities of baptism, however august and imposing they may be, are but an idle mockery. They are but vain and unmeaning ceremonies, that can

impart no strength to the parent, and secure no blessings to the child. They are, indeed, as Jude so significantly expresses it, "clouds without water,—trees whose fruit is withered away."

And yet how many parents utterly fail to appreciate the true spiritual import of the sacrament in which they are engaged. With how many is the ordinance of baptism simply an impressive form, by which the child publicly receives the name which is called upon it. With how many more is it regarded simply as a pleasant occasion of public thanksgiving to God for the advent of a new member to the domestic circle. With how many more is it simply a ritual, through which the Church requires its members to go, and with which they comply, simply upon the authority of the Church, without ever once inquiring as to the deep significance of the Sacrament and its vital relation to the covenant of God. Reader, are you found in the number of any one of the classes enumerated above? And can you wonder if God does not bless you in the conversion and salvation of your child, when, so far from



complying with the conditions of the covenant which He has ordained, you have never yet realized the existence of such a covenant, have never yet taken hold of the great and precious truth which it contains, and never yet claimed for your children the precious promise, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee."

Be assured, brethren, that just here is the source of much of the failure on the part of Christian parents, to secure for their children the inestimable blessing of early conversion to God.

At the present day, there are many who neglect altogether the precious ordinance of baptism. There are many who attend upon it with no true conception of its real significance and solemn import; who are far more concerned that the child may appear in elegant attire, and conduct itself with due decorum during the administration of the ordinance, than that it shall be brought into saving relation to the grace of God, and be made an heir of His heavenly kingdom.

And yet, when Christian parents thus, by their unbelief, render of no effect the promise of God; when they thus utterly fail to appropriate to themselves the priceless blessings of the covenant, they wonder that their children are irreligious and profane. We may rest assured that so long as the people of God fail to put due honour upon His covenant, and trust in His grace, the Church of Christ will not see that ingathering of its children for which it is authorized to pray and to hope. We, who are the children of the Covenanters, have need to take up God's covenant out of the dust, to put honour upon it, to plead it with Him, to rely upon His faithfulness, and to hope in His mercy. The parent who fails thus to appropriate to himself the provisions of the covenant, does a wrong to his child, that he can never undo, and discards a birthright for him, more precious than the title to princely estates, or imperial honours, or the highest distinctions of rank and fortune among men.

II. A second difficulty, in the way of the early conversion of our children to God, is



found in the failure, on the part of Christian parents, to begin the work of religious education at the proper season. There is a false idea in the minds of many parents as to the time when the religious instruction of their children should commence. They teach them in early childhood a few prayers, and verses of hymns, and the answers to a few questions in the Catechism. They read to them occasionally select portions of Scripture, and entertain them with stories, drawn from the word of God, and adapted to their infant minds; but they do not think of sitting down and explaining to their children the great method of salvation through Jesus Christ; of directing their minds to their need of this salvation, and of urging them to believe, at once, with all their hearts, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and consecrate themselves to His service. They do not speak to them of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, of His willingness to cleanse and renew the hearts of all who seek Him, and especially of those who are the objects of Christ's covenant love. All this they think

will be well enough when the child reaches the age of discretion, but at present it lies beyond the range of its faculties, and is a matter with which it has nothing to do.

No mistake could be greater. The child is capable of thinking upon the subject of religion, as soon as it is capable of thinking upon any subject. The consciousness of its own sinfulness is awakened along with the earliest consciousnesses of its moral nature. There is, even in early childhood, a felt necessity which the blessed tidings of the gospel alone are able to meet. Precious time, therefore, is lost by the parent who permits these early impressions to pass away, these early experiences to lose their freshness and their poignancy, without pointing the soul to Him who is the Fountain of Life.

But there is another consideration to which the attention of every thoughtful parent should be directed. The mind of the child is by no means, as so many parents seem to imagine, a *tabula rasa*—a blank page—upon which, at their leisure, they may write the precious truths of

salvation. The heart is not an open and unoccupied field, in which they may sow, at such season as may suit them, the golden grain. It is a field already sown. The soil is strewn thick with the seeds of sin. A depraved nature is there, ready to yield its harvest of briers and thorns, to choke the good seed of the kingdom. While the parent is quietly waiting for the time to sow, these seeds of depravity have already sprung up, and pre-occupied the ground. How often do we hear parents say of a child: "Oh, it is too young to be conversed with upon the subject of religion," when Satan has already poisoned its mind and heart with his evil suggestions, and brought it into a state of conscious enmity against God.

There can be no doubt that this is the reason of the failure in many households. Before the parent becomes deeply and earnestly enlisted in the cultivation of the spiritual nature of the child, its religious sensibilities have been deadened by contact with the world; its affections have been drawn away by the allurements of sense; its heart has been brought under the

dominion of the world, the flesh and the devil, and the parent finds a strong tide of worldliness to be stemmed, and a positive and habitual aversion to religious things to be overcome.

III. But a third difficulty, and one far more subversive of the great end of the family relation, is found in the failure of Christian parents to cultivate perfect freedom of communication, and intimacy of relationship, with their children. Many parents never seem to win the confidence of their children at all. They never come into confidential relations with them. The most intimate thoughts of the child's mind, the most sacredly cherished emotions of its heart, are never communicated to the parent. Between father, or mother, and child, there is an unnatural barrier of reserve—a wall of mutual separation. The few communications as to its inner life, which the natural yearnings of the child lead it to make, are treated with indifference, or, perhaps, made the occasion of severe rebuke.

At all events, they do not meet with the proper encouragement, and its timid nature recoils

upon itself. Henceforth, these deep experiences are concealed from parental view. As the nature unfolds, and the confiding spirit of early childhood begins to give place to the reserve and coyness of youth, there comes a studied habit of concealment. The parent sees only the outer life of the child. Its inner nature is a hidden mystery. And there are now long constituted and strengthened barriers to intimate and confidential intercourse, which can never be overcome, however much the parent may strive to secure the end.

And yet, how miserably has that parent failed to secure the true end of the family relationship, whose child respects him, fears him, obeys him, and, it may be, loves him, with a kind of distant, reverential affection; but whose bosom has never become the repository of the joys and sorrows of his child; whose heart never beats in conscious accord with the deep and yearning sympathies of its nature; to whom the most tender and sacred experiences of its young life are all a sealed book! How can such a parent exert over his child the in-

fluence which God designed him to exert? How can such a house, (for *home* it does not deserve to be called,) witness anything else than the growth into manhood and womanhood, of children who are virtually orphans in the world, and who, like waifs of the sea, are liable to be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine"—the easy sport of circumstances, the strong anchorage in the family circle being totally wanting?

How easy it is in early childhood to gain this intimacy and confidence to which I have referred. The little child naturally seeks to confide everything to its parent. Let but the slightest encouragement be given; let the little one only feel that there is a loving heart ready to sympathize with it; to rejoice with it; to solve patiently its difficulties; to bear forgivingly with its wrongs, and to lead it kindly by the hand through all the perplexities of its path; and how naturally, how unreservedly does it cast itself upon the bosom that seeks its confidence, and pour out there the very deepest



and most sacred thoughts and feelings of its heart.

And who shall say what advantage such a parent will have, in the training of his child! He is like the physician who has had the full diagnosis of the disease he is to treat. He is like the lawyer to whom the client has fully unburdened his case. He knows how to direct the mind and mould the character of his child; and at the same time, as the result of this loving intimacy, he acquires an influence over it—the influence of mind over mind, and of heart over heart,—the blessed results of which it is impossible to estimate.

But it is especially in reference to the subject of religion—that most important of all subjects,—that this want of intimacy between parents and children is lamentably great. In many households, where there is loving intimacy and mutual confidential communication upon every other subject, the subject of religion is entirely ignored, or if introduced at all, is reserved for stated and formal occasions, in which it assumes the form of catechetical in-

struction, but is not admitted to the tender and confidential communings by the hearthstone.

Many parents talk intimately with their children upon every subject but this. On this they feel a reluctance to speak—a reluctance which grows more and more daily, until at length it would be easier for the parent to speak to any one else upon the subject of religion than to speak to his own child.

The writer of these lines once had a mother to call at his study, in deep anxiety of mind, saying to him, that she believed her daughter, then about fifteen years of age, to be deeply concerned upon the subject of religion, and wished him to visit her, and converse with her in reference to it. He immediately asked if the mother had conversed with her daughter upon the subject, and was told that she had not. "Then," said the Pastor, "you had best speak with her first, and find out the true state of her mind, so that I may be able to approach her without embarrassing her too much." The next morning the mother called again to say



that she had found it impossible to hold the conversation with her daughter. It had been so long since she had before attempted to introduce the subject, that though she had now made repeated efforts, it seemed as if her words clung to her lips, and she could not utter them. She again besought the pastor to visit her daughter, but he still declined, urging her to go home, and break down the unnatural wall of separation.

In the evening the struggle was again renewed. The mother, after deep and earnest prayer, sought the chamber of her daughter, where she found her alone; but the same difficulty appeared in the way. She essayed again and again to speak, but in vain; and at length, overcome by the violence of emotion, she pressed her daughter's hand in hers, and burst into a flood of tears.

How easy it is to trace the source of this embarrassment back through long years, to the early childhood of the daughter, and to neglected opportunities afforded, at that early period, for the cultivation of confidential inti-

macy upon the subject of religion. There was a time when, without the least hesitation, or embarrassment, this mother could have spoken to her child upon this, or any other subject. But she had permitted the wall of separation to grow up, and now she was realizing the bitter fruit of her neglect.

It must be so in every family, where this wall of partition is suffered to spring up; where the subject of religion is excluded from the conversations by the fireside, and at the table; where the parent, for fear of awakening unpleasant thoughts in the mind of his child, fails to deal faithfully with it in convincing it of its lost and helpless estate, of its imminent peril, and of its need of Christ, the only Deliverer from guilt and sin. When you consider to what extent the minds and hearts of our children are thus left to their own spontaneous workings, surrounded as they are by temptations, and depraved as they are by the taint of sin, is it any wonder that the children of pious parents are not converted to God in childhood?

Reader, are you conscious of the existence of this wall of separation in your own house? Does your conscience condemn you for not having any intimate acquaintance with the spiritual condition of your children? Do you feel that their religious experiences, if they have them, are all to you a sealed book? Do you feel a strange shrinking from conversation with them upon this all important subject? Go home, like this mother of whom I have spoken, kneel before God and ask of Him the grace that you need. Let not another evening draw to a close until the strange spell is removed, though you can only, in the intensity of your struggle, press silently the hand of your child, and burst into tears. Some of you have those about your knees who are still in tender childhood, whose hearts yearn for intimate communion with you. Take them home to your bosoms, in loving and confidential intercourse. Speak to them freely. Encourage them to keep back nothing from you. Let them see that you are worthy of their confidence; that you appreciate it; that you will cherish it as a sacred thing, and keep

it inviolate. Let your bosom be the willing receptacle of all that is joyous, or sad, in their daily experience. Above all, let religion be the subject of frequent and intimate conversation. In your daily walks; by the evening fireside; and in the bed chamber, as the little form is composing itself for sleep, let words of tenderest religious counsel be imparted; inquiries after religious truth be awakened and answered; let your child feel and know all the deep, yearning anxieties of your soul for its early conversion to God. Do this, and the Holy Spirit will bless, as He has so often blessed, words of tender, confidential admonition to the awakening of a new life in the soul of your child; and while the endearments of the domestic circle will be enhanced a thousand fold by the loving confidence which such intercourse will beget, you may be the honoured instrument, in the hands of God, of conveying that living Word, by which the soul of your child shall be for ever saved.

IV. There are other difficulties to which I would like to call the attention of parents; but

within the limits of this article it will only be proper to notice one other, and that is a failure on the part of the parent to make everything in connection with his child subservient, as far as possible, to the advancement of its religious interests. The true parent must feel, if he gives any serious consideration to the matter, that the one great end to be attained for his child, is the salvation of its priceless and undying soul. He must, therefore, feel that the one object which he is to seek, is to fit his child, not to shine in the halls of society, or to excel in the marts of trade, but to attain to eminence in the kingdom of God. Now, let this thought be carried out to its practical results, and how different would be the course of many Christian parents from that which they now pursue. Let us consider this course, in reference to two things.

*First.* Let us consider the choice of companionships for the child. How many parents are there in the land, who are governed in the selection of the society in which their children are to move, by the tendency of that society

to promote their spiritual welfare? How many are there, who, when their children are invited to a place of amusement, or to a social gathering, stop to ask themselves the question, "What influence will this probably have upon their religious character? Will their associates be religious, or irreligious? Will the amusements be such as are baleful to piety and to interest in religious things? How will attendance upon such places affect their interest in the Sabbath school, and in the prayer meeting, and in the ordinances of God's house, upon which they are dependent as the means of salvation?"

The parent will readily enough ask whether or not the society will be reputable; whether the acquaintances to be formed are of the same social position; whether the character of the children will suffer in the eyes of the world by going; and, if these questions are not satisfactorily answered, nothing will induce him to give his consent. But the questions, Will God approve of their going to such a place? Will they come away with as much reverence for



Him, with as earnest thoughts of their responsibility to Him, and with as faithful endeavours to love and serve Him, as they had when they went? These do not once enter their minds, or if they do, they are thrust aside by considerations of the elegance, the fashionableness, and the selectness of the party to which their children are invited. In how many cases is everything made to bend, not to the religious welfare of the child, but to its position in a fashionable, worldly-minded, and sinful society. You meet, for instance, an officer or member of one of our Churches, and say to him, "I am surprised to hear that you are sending your children to a dancing school. And what is his reply? "I know the rules of the Church forbid dancing, and I am as much opposed to it as any one can be, for I believe it is alike injurious to the physical, moral and spiritual interests of its votaries. I wish most heartily that it could be abolished altogether as a popular amusement; but then it is *the* amusement of young people now-a-days, and you must either exclude your children from society altogether, or teach

them to dance." You perceive, at once, that the prominent idea in the parent's mind is the fitting of his child for society. Rather than forego the advantages of a worldly, fashionable society, which asserts its supremacy over reason, health, religion, and everything else, a Christian father will encourage his child in that which he believes to be "alike injurious to the physical, moral and religious interests of its votaries." Can there be any wonder that the child, thus thrown into the midst of irreligious companionships and associations; taught from its earliest childhood that its first duty is to prepare itself to move well in society; that if society is worldly it must be worldly; if society is extravagant, it must be extravagant; if society dissipates, it must dissipate; that it must seek first the good opinion of society, and then, in subordination to that, the kingdom of God: can there be any wonder, I say, that the child is not converted to God? On the other hand, would it not be a very great wonder if, under such circumstances, the child should have any serious impressions at all?



It is very easy to anticipate the reply that many will make to this. They will meet us with the old trite saying, "Young people will be young people; they must have some kind of amusement, and you cannot apply the same rules to them that you do to grown people." This is all true enough; but in this very fact that "young people will be young people," is found the very strongest argument against the kind of amusements for which this class of persons would plead. Young people not only *must* have amusement—they *will* have it. Their nature is joyous; its activities are spontaneous. They will have sport of some kind. If you deny them amusement in one form, they will seek it in another. If you refuse them that which is unwholesome, they will turn to that which is wholesome. If, for instance, you refuse them the privilege of turning night into day, and of spending the hours that ought to be devoted to sleep in the feverish excitement of the dance, and the heated air of a ball room, then these sickly votaries of pleasure, who also turn day into night, by lying in bed,

with aching brows and enervated limbs, until high noon, would, after the refreshing sleep of the night, be up with the early dawn, to enjoy the bright sunshine, and the pure air, to find amusement in the carol of birds, and the fragrance of flowers, and the thousand sources of innoœnt enjoyment, with which God has surrounded us in life. It is but a pitiable plea, therefore, to say that your children must have amusement. It is a libel upon their innocent, joyous natures, to say that the theatre and the ball-room are necessary to their recreation. You may so habituate them to these places of unnatural and inordinate excitement, that they will lose all relish for purer and less stimulating pleasures. But keep them away from these, and before you lies a broad field of innocent sports and diversions, from which you may select at will, with the assurance that, together with amusement and recreation, your child may secure health, energy, vigour and purity.

But the parent is, perhaps, ready to say further, "Others send their children to these places of amusement, and mine must go, or be

debarred from society." And who are these others? Christian parents like yourself; excusing themselves on the ground that you, and others like you, allow your children these indulgences. Thus, while you are striving to shift your responsibility on them, they are seeking to rest theirs on you. You are mutually upholding one another in a course which is inconsistent with your covenant vows, in direct violation of the rules of the Church, and in the highest degree destructive of the spiritual interests of your children.

The other instance, in which the inconsistency of Christian parents appears, is in the selection of teachers and institutions of learning for their children. There is a false theory of education in vogue at the present day. It is comparatively new in the world, but its influence is as pernicious as its doctrines are novel. According to this theory, it does not come within the province of the teacher of secular learning, either to inculcate religious truth, or to exert a religious influence over his pupils. Secular education, and religious education, are

to be regarded as altogether dissociated from one another. The former is the work of the schoolroom; the latter is the work of the church. It is therefore no more the duty of the educator to inculcate religious truth, than of the pastor to teach mathematics. It is a question of no more consideration with the advocates of this theory, whether a teacher is religious or not, than it is whether a minister is a good mathematician or not. The question is not what religion a teacher is of, or indeed whether he is of any religion. Does he know the particular branches which he proposes to teach? Is he capable of imparting the requisite instruction in them? Will he devote himself faithfully to the work of inculcating them? Answer these questions satisfactorily, and no further inquiries are necessary. It matters not whether he is a Romanist, a Jew, a Mohammedan, or an infidel. The question in reference to his religion is nothing. The language of this theory is: "I do not send my children to school to learn morality or religion. Morality I propose to teach them at home. Religion

I expect them to learn in the Sabbath school, and at church. I send them to school to learn the languages, mathematics, natural sciences, &c. Commend me to the man who can best teach them these. I will see that their religious interests are provided for elsewhere."

I affirm, distinctly, that this is a new theory of education. From the earliest period of civilization to the present time, secular and religious education have gone hand in hand. The teachers to whom have been committed the instruction of youth in secular learning, have been charged also with the duty of cultivating their moral and religious natures. Even in the days of Socrates, it was considered an offence worthy of death, that an instructor of youth should publicly disavow his belief in the false gods whom the nation worshipped. In all the ages, and in every land, religious instruction and secular education have gone hand in hand. It has been reserved for this day, when all the foundations of social order are being overthrown, to discover that there is no important

connection between the education of the intellect and the culture of the heart.

This theory is as detestable as it is new, for it puts asunder what God has joined together. In its aim to secure an education that is free from religious bias, it secures an education that is, in the highest degree, irreligious. In its aim to educate a nation of free-thinkers, it is in fact educating a nation of infidels.

Now, I do not presume that any Christian parent who reads these pages will go to the extent, in the adoption of this theory, that I have indicated above. And yet how many, in the selection of an institution of learning for their children, are governed exclusively by what they call its intellectual advantages. They do not deem it necessary to inquire what is the religious character of the teachers; what the nature and extent of the religious influence they exert over their pupils; what the spirit of consecration to God in which they pursue their high and important vocation; or what their probable influence upon the future religious life of their children. Practically, they act



upon the theory alluded to above, although they may utterly disclaim it in words. When they send their children to Roman Catholic schools and convents, to institutions presided over by ungodly and irreligious men, and to institutions, whatever may be the character of their founders and officers, in which religion is practically ignored, or false doctrine and heresy openly and publicly taught, what can be said but that they have fallen victims, unconsciously it may be, but none the less really and fatally, to this false notion of education. Now, in direct opposition to this theory, I maintain that the education of a Christian child, in all its parts, must bear distinct reference to its relations to God and eternity. It must be educated as an immortal being. It must be impressed at every step with the thought that its chief end is "to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever," and no education is of any real value that does not teach it to know, reverence, love, and obey Him.

A teacher, therefore, who is irreligious, or who does not feel the responsibility of mould-

ing the mind and heart of his pupil in the spirit of the Christian religion, whatever other qualities he may possess, is not fitted to be the educator of a Christian child. The institution of learning, whether it be the normal school of the city, the select institute for young ladies, or the University of the State, that inscribes over its doors the words, "No religious influence whatever exerted over the pupils," deserves to have written also the words, not unlike in sound, though altogether unlike in sense, to those of the ancient sage, "*Let no one who has an immortal soul enter here.*"

When you consider the character of many of the teachers who are employed in educating the youth of our Church, and then reflect upon the immense influence which the teacher exerts over the pupil, can you wonder that the youth themselves are irreligious. We have seen, in the biography of Mary Kerr, the great pains at which her parents were in securing for their children the services of a devotedly pious teacher, and in having all their education conducted under strictly religious influence. Is

not one secret of their early piety to be found in this? And is not the secret of the irreligion of many a child of pious, praying parents, to be found in the baleful influence of an institution of learning where religion is altogether ignored, or where its teachings by the home fire-side are either openly ridiculed, or covertly undermined?

I have thus passed over, as rapidly and as briefly as I could, some of the difficulties that lie in the way of the early conversion of our children to God. Dear Christian brethren, can we not, with the help of the Lord, roll these difficulties out of the way? Can we not, and will we not, suffer the little children to come unto Jesus, and forbid them not? Shall our unfaithfulness stand in the way of the blessings of that covenant-keeping God, who visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children? Will not every parent who reads this little book, and thinks of the priceless value of the immortal souls of his children, before he lays the volume down, weigh carefully the considerations that have been presented, and enter

anew into covenant with God, resolving that, by His grace, every barrier shall be removed, and every encouragement and assistance rendered to the little ones, to deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Jesus.

