

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES.¹

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”—MAL. iv. 6.

“And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”—LUKE i. 17.

THE religious importance of parental obligation may be inferred from many scriptural truths; and, among others, from the place it occupies at the end of the old dispensation and the beginning of the new. Historians tell us that from the prophesying of Malachi to the Christian era was an interval of more than four hundred years. During all these ages the heavens were silent, and the church received oracle neither by “Urim and Thummim,” nor by prophetic voice. Malachi, in his last chapter, prepares the people for this long silence of revelation by two words, of which one is a promise, and the other a precept. The command is (chap. iv. 4) to walk by the law of Moses, God’s servant, and to keep the statutes and judgments given, through him, for all Israel. The promise is, that in due time the Messiah’s forerunner, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, shall usher in the solemn, yet glorious day of Christ, by his preparatory ministry. This was to be, therefore, the next prophet whom the church was entitled to expect. But his work was to be prominently a revival of parental fidelity and domestic piety. “He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

The next recorded message from the skies is that of the Angel Gabriel to Zacharias, given in Luke i. 11–20. The heavenly herald begins just where the earthly prophet had ended, with the promise and work of the forerunner, who was to be Zacharias’ son. “And he shall go before him (the Lord) in the spirit

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and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Vs. 17.) That this work upon fathers and children was to be far more than the removal of domestic alienations; that it was to include this, but also to embrace a great revival of parental and filial piety, an awakening of the parents' hearts to the salvation of their children, and the docile seeking and reception of parental instruction by the children,—this is plain from the whole passage; it is a turning of both to God, and a "turning of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." We are reminded also our Saviour told his people that, oftentimes, his gospel was the occasion, though an innocent one, of family alienations, rather than reconciliations. Luke xii. 51: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay, but rather division."

This revival of domestic piety and parental fidelity to the souls of children, Malachi declares, is necessary to prevent the coming of the Divine Messiah from being a woe, instead of a blessing, to men. This reform alone prevents his coming to "smite the land with a curse," instead of crowning it with mercies; because the wickedness, which would otherwise prevail among men, would outrage the holiness, instead of attracting the compassion, of the incarnate God. According to the angel, the same reform is the appointed means to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." God's way of promoting revival, then, is not to increase the activity of any public and outward means only, but "to turn the hearts of the parents to the children."

This review shows us also that the duty of parental fidelity is equally prominent in both dispensations. The old terminates with it; the new opens with it. This is the connecting link between both; it is the hinge in which they meet and combine with each other. How plain it is that God regards it as of prime practical importance for man's salvation!

It has been already indicated that the fidelity of the parents ought to imply the docility of the children. The duties are mutual. Either branch might be profitably inculcated; but space admonishes that it will be best at this time to confine the discussion, for the rest, to the duty of parents to the souls of their offspring. The attempt will be made to unfold somewhat of the unspeakable importance of this duty, in addition to the scriptural

teachings already examined, by some other facts, and thus to *turn the hearts of these parents to these children.*

I. And, first, the urgency of parental responsibility appears in a solemn, and even an awful manner, from the nature of the parental relation itself. Perhaps we fail to appreciate its momentous nature by reason of its very commonness and of our familiarity with it. Wherever human society is, there the parent is. Every man was once a child; every human existence begins in a parental relation. Our perpetual familiarity with the light of the sun disqualifies to appreciate its glory and beauty as we would, were we to behold it but once before entering on a life of blindness. Thus, we are so accustomed to see the child proceeding from the parent, that we are incompetent to perceive the solemn nature of the relation. Let us seek to gain a juster view by comparing the human race with that order of angels than which man was made a little lower. It is every way probable that to the angels the power of reproduction, bestowed on Adam and Eve in paradise, appeared the most marvellous and splendid part of this new creation of the Almighty. For the bliss and glory of the elect angels there is no multiplication. The only increase within their reach is that arithmetical addition which may arise out of their individual progress in knowledge, love and happiness. The eternal adoption of Gabriel is assured against all the powers of hell and accidents of time. But Gabriel cannot multiply his happiness and transmit it to beloved offspring of his own likeness. Except as he has communion with his fellow-angels who began their career with him, he remains solitary in his blessedness. But the glory of the Divine beneficence towards the human race appears in this, that the parents, without alienating anything of their own immortality, are able to multiply immortalities in ever-widening and progressive numbers. Thus, by the multiplications of the generations of men, the field of the Divine love and benevolence is widened as time flows on, until the subjects of the Divine benefactions and instruments of the Divine glory on earth unspeakably surpass in number the heavenly hosts. It may be beyond our skill, as it is unnecessary to this argument, to distinguish and allot the several parts of the agency which belong to God and to the human instruments in the origin of a new human soul. It is enough for us to know that God, by his mysterious

works of creation and providence, does empower human parents for this amazing result—the origination, out of nothing, of a new being—and that a rational, immortal spirit How solemn, how high, this prerogative! It raises man nearer the almighty Creator, in his supreme prerogative as Master of all things, than anything else that is done by creatures on earth or in heaven. Angels are not thus endued. The responsibility of this relation is not fully seen by merely regarding the infant as a beautiful animal, organized, in miniature, after the kind of the parents. It is the mysterious propagation of a rational soul that fills the reflecting mind with awe. The parent looks upon the tender face which answers to his caress with an infantile smile; he should see beneath that smile an immortal spark which he has kindled, but can never quench. It must grow, for weal or for woe; it cannot be arrested. Just now it was not. The parents have mysteriously brought it from darkness and nothing. There is no power beneath God's throne that can remand it back to nothing, should existence prove a curse. Yes; the parents have lighted there an everlasting lamp, which must burn on when the sun shall have been turned into darkness and the moon into blood, either with the glory of heaven or the lurid flame of despair.

The command to the first pair to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth was given as a blessing of paradise, and while man was unfallen. To understand it, we must remember that covenant which was made with Adam as the representative of the race. God gave him an easy law to keep, with the implied promise that, by keeping this command, he should "enter into life." Had Adam stood his probation successfully, he would have been lifted from his mutable position into a permanent adoption of life, making both his holiness and his happiness indefectible. And we have every reason for believing that he would have raised all his posterity to that state along with himself. He stood as their representative. When he transgressed, "they sinned in him, and fell with him." It is hard to believe that God would have broken that representative union when about to result in the glorification of the race which he had established, and which he inexorably maintains when it issues in universal ruin and condemnation. Neither his goodness nor equity would prompt such unequal dealing. Had Adam been confirmed in glory, the law

would doubtless have held by which "he begat Seth in his own likeness after his image." All his posterity would have been holy and happy. Cain would have lived a saint, innocent of his brother's blood, and Abel would never have felt the murderer's blow. As the successive generations of men extended, parentage would have extended and multiplied immortal happiness until earth surpassed heaven. Such is the magnificence of that plan which the Creator proposed to execute through man's parental relation.

But the amazing plan was marred. The malice of Satan saw in this feature also his opportunity to execute a mischief as much more gigantic than the seduction of his brother-angels, as the aggregate of the whole series of human generations is greater than the number of the devils. It was, indeed, the infinite refinement of malice which he taught one of his heathen servants to cherish, when he inspired the Roman despot to wish that all the people of Rome had but one neck, that he might decapitate all at one stroke. Thus Satan saw that humanity had then but one head. By poisoning this, he would taint all the vast future body with spiritual death. Thus he vainly hoped he would usurp that very power, the power of parentage, which God had bestowed to be the instrument of multiplying blessedness, and he would turn it into an inlet of spreading and boundless sin and misery. By poisoning the spring-head, he would at once poison the whole stream in all its widening course, until it disembogued its innumerable drops—each drop in the flood a lost soul—into the ocean of eternity. Thus it is that we owe to this malignant perversion of God's plan of benevolence, that every parent now transmits to the child he loves, along with the gift of existence, the deadly disease of sin.

These, then, are the two facts which give so unspeakable a solemnity to the parent's relation to his children. He has conferred on them, unasked, the endowment of an endless, responsible existence. He has also been the instrument—if the unwilling, yet the sole instrument—of conveying to this new existence the taint of original sin and guilt. Can the human mind conceive a motive more tender, more dreadful, more urgent, prompting a parent to seek, for the beloved souls he has poisoned, the aid of the great Physician? And if this parent professes to have felt his blessed skill in his own soul, to be rejoic-

ing in the Divine cure, and is yet callous to the ruin he has transmitted to his own child, he is a monster, with a heart harder than a wild beast's. There are hereditary diseases of the body. Their indications pierce the parent's heart like barbed arrows, even when suspected in the beloved child. To see, beneath the hectic glow of the cheek, else so beautiful, the fatal sign of the worm at the root of life; to remember that it was from your own blood the sufferer drew the poison—this awakens the pity and love of the father to all its depths. There is an authentic illustration in the last days of the first Napoleon. As his life was consumed upon the gloomy rock of St. Helena by that fearful malady, cancer of the stomach, one of the few alleviations allowed him by his jailors was the presence of a skilful Italian physician, Dr. Antomarchi. The French officers near him relate that, when death was recognized as certain, the emperor laid his dying commands on his compatriot to return to Italy, visit his only son, watch over his health, and endeavor by every resource of his art to ward off the dire inheritance of his father's disease. Thus spoke the parent's heart in this man so ruthless and hard, who had reared his throne upon a pyramid of human skulls, and ground the nations of Europe under the chariot-wheels of his ambition! How could it speak otherwise, cruel though that heart was to others? How can you, O Christian! fail to bring your child to the great Physician of souls, to be healed of the deadly contagion you have conveyed into him?

Let us pause here to make an application of this question. All worldly parents do thus fail, as to the spiritual disease they have conveyed. Here they are callous to that pity which, in the dying emperor, melted the heart of the scourge of the nations. They see the children they love grow up and pass through their career with the disease of sin derived through them festering in their veins, and they do nothing and feel little for their piteous case. Yet, these parents do unquestionably love their children! For their temporal relief and safety they make great and disinterested sacrifices. Whence this strange inconsistency? What should we think if we saw a generous, loving woman, when her child came to her with its little petulant grief for the prick of a thorn, embracing, consoling and binding up the sufferer with eager and tremulous sympathy, and then afterward, when the same child fled to her with a smarting wound which the mother

recognized too well as the sting of a viper, if we saw her coldly thrust it away? But such is the neglect of all godless parents for the bite of the "old dragon" in the souls of their offspring, while they are eager and sincere in their zeal for the trivial advantages of this world. How can it be explained? Must it not be because this parent's carnal mind is enmity against God—because he is dead in trespasses and sins? Let the generous, the decent, the affectionate but ungodly parent, who makes his possession of these shining social virtues the pretext for denying his own total depravity toward God, ask himself for any other solution of his own amazing inconsistency. Unless he can find one more true and reasonable than the Bible solution, he is bound to accept it and to humble his pride of virtue before God, as a lost sinner.

II. The responsibility of parents is argued, again, from the unique and extensive character of their authority over their offspring. For, just so surely as God, who gave this authority, is a righteous and equitable ruler, is he certain to apply to parents that just rule of law, that men will be held accountable according to the extent of the powers intrusted to them. The steward to whom a thousand talents are committed must be held accountable for a thousand talents; he to whom ten, must account for ten. If this equitable principle must rule where the trust is nothing but dead money, how much more where power over rational, responsible fellow-creatures is intrusted to fellow-creatures! If the steward in this case were not held to account according to the degree of the power he had perverted to the injury of his fellow-creature's destiny, and of God's rights in him, this would be a glaring injustice to the victims of his abuse, and to the Divine Master whose power he had wrested. Be assured, then, parent, that you must be held responsible according to the extent of the power committed to your hands.

But it must be remembered, now, that your trust is not corruptible things, as silver and gold, but immortal souls, capable of knowing and glorifying their Maker; or, very much as you shall determine, of blaspheming him, and experiencing his almighty justice forever.

Let the extent of the parent's legitimate or unavoidable power over his children be pondered. As he is industrious and discreet, or indolent and prodigal, he decides for his children

whether they shall begin their adult existence with a competency or as paupers. As he is virtuous or vicious, he decides for them whether they shall bear an honored name, or be branded with the mark of infamy at their outset in society. As he is pure and courteous, or coarse and sensual, he assigns to his children a social grade creditable and elevated, giving them a passport to good society, or he condemns them to the association of the vulgar and low. His neglect of their early mental culture determines whether they shall reach adult life stupid boors or educated and intelligent men. Yea, more than this, character itself, at the outset of manhood, is mainly determined by the parents, and that chiefly by their example; so that they have the power of deciding with probable effect whether their children shall begin their careers with base or with virtuous principles and habits. According to the ordinance of providence, and the unavoidable tolerance of the civil law, the parent is irresponsible to any earthly authority in the use and abuse of these sweeping powers. There is no hand beneath the skies that can beneficially interfere with authority between this parental autocracy and its victims. It is true, that when the civil law assigns to the son or daughter his majority, he may then throw off the malignant *incubus*, if he pleases, and begin for himself the arduous task of reversing the evil work of the neglectful parent. He may, if he pleases, then begin the hard task of earning a personal good name in the place of his inherited infamy, and of acquiring knowledge in lieu of ignorance, culture in lieu of boorishness, and competency instead of destitution. He may—if he pleases! But what prospect is there that he will choose this hard task, with a character debauched and enfeebled by the parental curse? And if, contrary to all probability, he prove to have the nerve of steel requisite for such a revolution, how cruel is the load which the parental tyranny has assigned him to carry in this life-and-death struggle! There is no power allowed to any creature under heaven over another responsible creature so wide as this providential power of the parent. Men speak of the Czar as “the Autocrat of the Russias.” They describe with a shudder that imperial power over the property, the liberty, the life of the subject, unrestrained by constitution, law, jury, or appeal. But the power of a Czar over a subject is trifling compared with this parental power over children.

That may dispose of the body and goods; this disposes of mind and soul. How helpless is the little child to resist the destiny which the domestic autocrat is thus preparing for him! Whither shall he carry his appeal against his own father? And how dead must that parent's soul be to all magnanimity who can consider, with unrelenting selfishness, this mute appeal of a child's helpless dependence!

But the whole of this power is not yet described. All men who understand liberty believe that spiritual freedom, the prerogative of the immortal mind to think for itself, in obedience to the law of conscience laid upon it by its Maker, to judge its own duty, to select its own moral and religious opinions, and to serve its God according to its own understanding of his will—that this is the corner-stone of all other liberty, and the most precious of all. We proudly erect ourselves and declare this to be the crowning prerogative of our manhood. This liberty, we exclaim, is, next to the throne of God, the most sacred thing in the universe; and he who presumes to intrude his fallible will between the creature's soul and the immediate authority of its only Lord and Judge is guilty of a profane usurpation of the authority of Almighty God. Well, the parent has power almost to invade this sacred liberty of the soul. It is made both his privilege and his duty to impose the principles and the creed which he has sincerely adopted as the truth for himself upon the spirit of his child. Some men, it is known, vainly prate of a supposed obligation to leave the minds of their children independent and "unbiased" until they are mature enough to judge and choose for themselves. But a moment's thought shows that this is as unlawful as impossible. No man can avoid impressing his own practical principles on his child. If he refrains from words, he does it inevitably by his example. The only way to prevent the "dictation," as it has been stigmatized, is to banish the child absolutely from the parent's society and protection, and thus to be recreant to every duty of the parent. Again, if he could avoid every impress upon the soul of his child, others would not refrain. One thing is certain, this young and plastic soul will take impress from some whither, if not from the appointed and heaven-ordained hand of his parent, then from some other irresponsible hand, of man or evil angel. One might as well speak of immersing an open vessel in the ocean and hav-

ing it remain empty as of having a youthful soul to grow up in society "unbiased," until it is qualified to elect its own creed most wisely. The only alternative left the parent is either to bias the child's soul himself for God and the truth, or to see it fatally biased by other influences against both. The Scriptures here are positive. The parent is commanded to "train up the child in the way he should go." Which is that way? He must "bring up the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Which is that nurture? Popery, Presbyterianism, Rationalism, or Infidelity? At the time the training is to begin, the child is wholly unqualified to judge; the parent must judge for him.

Now, it is fully admitted that neither divine nor human law gives a parent the right to force the tender mind of the child by persecutions or corporeal pains or penalties; or to abuse it, by sophistries or falsehoods, into the adoption of his opinions. But this power the providential law does confer: the parent may and ought to avail himself of all the influences of opportunity and example, of filial reverence and affection, of his superior age, knowledge, and sagacity, to reinforce the power of truth over the child's mind, and, in this good sense, to prejudice him in favor of the parental creed. And how potent is this influence! Does it not almost commit the spiritual liberty of the young soul to a human hand? How mighty the power of opportunity which the parent is thus authorized to employ to propagate his creed on another soul; while as yet the pupil is ignorant of the process wrought upon him, and incapable of resisting it! There is no power beneath the skies, authorized by God, that is so far-reaching, so near the prerogatives of God himself; and for that reason there is none so solemnly responsible. When God has clothed you, O parent! with such powers, with results so beneficent and glorious, and has thus made you so nearly a God to your own children, do you suppose that you can neglect or pervert them without being held to a dire account? It were better for that man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea. Here appears a new argument to prove man's responsibility for his moral and religious opinions. The code which he heartily believes is, to him, his authoritative creed. It is to this the privilege of parental inculcation must practically apply. ↘

Hence, he who has perverted his own reason and conscience to mistake a lie for the truth, makes himself responsible, not only for his own destruction, but for the probable destruction of the children God has submitted to his guidance. Take heed, then, parents, how you hear and how you believe, not only for your own sakes, but for your children's sakes.

III. But would it not be an injustice toward the children's souls for God to commit so sweeping, so imperial a power over them to any creature's hand without suitable checks and guards? He has not forgotten to provide them. One is found in the strict responsibility to which he holds the domestic ruler—strict and fearful in proportion to the width of the trust. Another is found in the affection which nature binds up with the parental relation. God—blessed be his name!—has not surrendered the young immortal, undefended, into the parent's hands, but has sought to fence him in against abuse, by the strongest and purest social affection which survives the fall. Parental, and especially maternal, affection is the most disinterested principle which remains in the ruined nature of man. God has kept alive this remnant of the estate of paradise, like the one entirely fresh oasis in the desert of depravity. He preserves it, apparently, that there may be a spot whence can flow forth the water of life for dying humanity. It is the only adequate type on earth of divine love. God honors it by making it the imperfect image from which he would have us comprehend his own infinite benevolence and pity. He instructs us to address him as "Our Father which art in heaven." He declares, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." When he would exalt the love of redemption to its most transcendent height, he can find nothing on earth which comes so near it as a mother's love, although this also comes short of it: "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" The depravity of human nature is most strongly asserted in the Scripture, and it cannot be depreciated by the just observer of mankind. Yet, it should probably be conceded that the love of even selfish, avaricious men for their children is usually sincere and profound. Many moralists suppose themselves constrained, by the doctrine of total depravity, to deny this. They seek to represent the professed zeal of such men for the wealth and social advancement of their children as but a pretext for their own covetousness, pride and lust of power. This

is a short-sighted analysis. It is true that nothing in fallen man is untainted by sin, and that these selfish desires mix more or less with the disinterested affection. But the desire for the children's secular good is usually real. We see it urging the hardest natures to self-sacrificing devotion. The griping man of the world, who can grind the faces of the poor without a pang of pity, is yet generous to his own offspring, and for them he cheerfully foregoes delights and lives laborious days. When they die he mourns more ingenuously than for any other loss. He feels that a part of himself has died; that they are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. But there is no need to attempt the impossible task of exaggerating our conception of a parent's, and especially of a mother's, love. There is not one of our readers who is not the child of that love, and his own experience has taught him better than words or images its blessed strength.

But what does the Maker of our frames mean by planting and preserving this master affection in human hearts? It tells us, in accents as sweet as they are potent, the duty which parents owe to children, and children to their parents. It is God's teaching in the inmost heart, instructing us that the fulfilment of this affection is the highest, holiest, most urgent of all the earthly duties man owes. Parental love is the main bond of human society among creatures otherwise selfish and unjust as fallen men are. Without it society would doubtless degenerate into anarchy and men into savages. Can any reasonable mind believe, then, that God will overlook this master affection in his plans for the sanctification of a fallen world, or that God's true grace can be prevalent in any parent's heart, and not energize and direct this love?

IV. These considerations prepare us to expect that the parent's influence will be more effectual for good and evil than any or all others that surround the young soul. Hence is drawn another argument for the parent's awful responsibility. Pastoral experience teaches us that, as parents perform or neglect their duties, the children usually end in grace or impiety. The impressions for good or for evil made in the families of Christian countries are usually found too deep to be effectually changed after adult years are reached. The parent has the first and all-important opportunity. Those who come after him—the teacher, the pastor—have but the remnant. The forming hand of the parent

is armed with a venerable authority, all others with but a small portion of the delegated power. His words and example are weighted by filial love. He has perpetual familiarity and opportunity; his children are with him at his board; they sleep in their little couch at his feet; they follow him as he comes in and as he goes out. Even when his lips are silent, his example speaks perpetually to them.

But, above all, the parents have the forming of their plastic years. When they are moulding the child, his character is in the gristle, yielding to the softest pressure. By the time he has come to the hands of the pastor the gristle has been hardened into rigid bone, which may be broken by violence, but cannot be bent. Every way the parent has the advantage over the pastor; so that the latter has small prospect of reversing the parent's work when it has been for evil. If men are brought from sin to Christ after they reach adult years, examination usually reveals the fact that the remaining influence of parental piety, cleaving to the heart during its apparent indifference, has far the larger part in the result.

It may be objected that the success of the evangelist among adult pagans, and even the obligation of preaching the gospel among them, refute this view. For all these pagans had godless parents, and grew up utterly unblessed by domestic piety. If, now, the rule above claimed, as to the controlling importance of the home religious influence, were correct, all these pagan adults would be hopeless, and the duty of preaching the gospel to them unreasonable, because necessarily futile. But we know that we are commanded to preach the gospel to them, and many of them are savingly enlightened by this means of grace. To this objection there are three answers: First, it is true that the godless home influence of their childhood has left the souls of adult pagans exceedingly hard and obdurate, so that the evangelist does, in far the largest part, labor with them in vain. Second, neither they nor their parents have enjoyed any gospel offers, so that, with all their sins and hardness, they are not yet loaded with the sin of vexing the Holy Ghost. But the neglectful and inconsistent parent tacitly encouraged his child to commit this sin repeatedly, and to raise up this fearful and peculiar barrier around his stubborn heart. Third, the pagan child, with all his grossness and vice, has not yet had his soul poisoned

by the lesson of parental hypocrisy, the most deadly of all means for fatally searing the conscience and petrifying the heart.

This pagan child may have for his father a gross, sensual barbarian, and for his mother a superstitious, silly, lying babbler. He may have been carried, while an infant, to the idol temple, and made to bow his head, and cast his little handful of rice before the horrid image of Siva or Kali. This tuition is bad enough. But he has not yet experienced the spiritual curse, to which every pretended Christian home is subjected, of detecting his own father and mother—whom he is to revere, if he reveres anything—in practising cheats upon their God, in promising sacredly what they have no purpose of performing, and in giving the practical lie, by their actions all the week, to the holiest professions they make on the Lord's day. That accursed lesson the heathen youth has not yet learned from those whom he loves best and imitates most. Therein he is in a state far more accessible to truth and more hopeful than the neglected child of nominal Christians. The missionary, preaching to such heathen grown up, has a more hopeful charge than the pastor at home vainly stretching out his hands all the day long to the souls seared and hardened by the commanding influences of ungodly homes over the youthful heart.

To this correspond the experience of pastors. When they have a hardened adult or aged sinner bow apparently to the force of a preached gospel from their mouths, they are apt to find, if they inquire faithfully, that this hardened subject had not always been hard; that his youth had been spent, in part, at least, under the blessed influence of home piety; and that the seeds of good then sown, long buried beneath the clods, have at last borne their fruit. But for those early planted seeds, the later sowing of the pulpit would also have fallen upon the trodden roadway and been caught up by Satan. Pastors know that there are few cases of conversion among grown-up men who have been the children of hypocritical or nominal Christian homes. They are taught that the exploits of their spiritual weapons are puny and poor, compared with those of godly, sincere parents. The confession is not grateful to self-love, for it is natural to desire success, and it is sweet to boast in our efficiency; but candor compels this avowal. An authentic instance

now rises from the early recollections of the writer. A church was rejoicing with its new pastor in an ingathering of souls, and among the converts was one whose appearance was so surprising that it filled them with wondering gratitude. The subject was a man of the world, who had lived past middle life, far from Christ and good. He was a man of inherited wealth and social position, generous and profuse, profane when irritated, a sportsman and keeper of thoroughbred horses, a frequenter of all scenes of gayety and worldly amusements which were not low. This man now suddenly manifested a solemn interest in divine things, was constant in God's house and was found, before long, sitting like a contrite child at the feet of Jesus. And let it be added here, that his after-life nobly attested the genuineness of the change: he lived a pure Christian and devoted philanthropist, and died in the faith. There was naturally in the new pastor's heart a curiosity to know how so surprising and gratifying a revolution was wrought, and, perhaps, a trace of elation as he argued with himself that this case must be purely a result of pulpit instrumentalities. So, when the convert came to confer with the session, he was asked what sermons had been the special means of his awakening. It seemed hard for him at first to apprehend the drift of such a question, but at last he answered very simply that his change was not due to any sermons or recent means, but to his mother. To his mother? She had been dead so long that few remembered what manner of mother he had! She had been in her grave more than forty years. The oldest elder present had never seen her—had, in fact, never heard of her. She had died in the bloom of her beauty and maternity, when he was a boy of six years. Thus the wonder grew. But he explained that she was a Christian woman, a fruit of the ingathering of Samuel Davies in the colonial days, and she had begun to instruct her oldest-born in the truth. He stated that now, if he was Christ's, it was the power of those teachings over his infant mind, and especially of the dying scene, which were the true instruments for bringing him back; without which all other instruments would have been futile. When this young mother was about to die, she had gathered her little flock at her bedside, cowering like a cluster of frightened birds before the mighty hunter, Death; had prayed for and blessed them, and, as she laid her dying hand upon his brow, had charged him, her

first-born, to fear his mother's God, and remember her instructions. That hand had been upon his head ever since, through the long years of his worldliness; he had felt its touch in the haunts of business as well as in his hours of solitude; in the hunt, as he was hieing his hounds after the fox; on the race-field, as he cheered his winning horse; and it was this which, at last, had brought him back to God.

Here is the parent's responsibility, and here also is the encouragement. Our God is a faithful and a righteous God. He has not laid this heavy and fearful burden upon our shoulders without the promised help to bear it. His covenant still stands, to be a God to his people and their seed. Faithful effort and holy example shall be rewarded; and that word of Holy Writ will ever be found as much a divine promise as it is a deduction of experience, that, if we "train up our children in the way they should go, when they are old they shall not depart from it." By the very reason which makes parental neglect so blighting to the souls of children, parental teaching will prove an efficient help; and that God who, in paradise, pronounced paternity a blessing, before Satan the murderer had infused the curse of original sin into the stream of humanity, has promised through Christ, the woman's seed, still to use this holy relation for its primeval end of raising up sons unto glory.

Two inferences will close this sermon. Seeing the parental relation is what the Scripture describes it, and seeing Satan has perverted it since the fall for the diffusion and multiplication of depravity and eternal death, the education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. It is the one business for which the earth exists. To it all politics, all war, all literature, all money-making, ought to be subordinated; and every parent especially ought to feel, every hour of the day, that, next to making his own calling and election sure, this is the end for which he is kept alive by God—this is his task on earth. On the right training of the generation now arising, turns not only the individual salvation of each member in it, not only the religious hope of the age which is approaching, but the fate of all future generations in a large degree. Train up him who is now a boy for Christ, and you not only sanctify that soul, but you set on foot the best earthly agencies to redeem the whole broadening stream of human beings who shall proceed from him,

down to the time when men cease to marry and give in marriage. Until then, the work of education is never ending.

* The generation which is trained for heaven is the one that dies; the one that is born into its place is born in enmity and under the curse. Thus the task of training is ever renewed, until the final consummation shall make the race equal to the angels.

In the last place: We observe some sincere Christians, whose minds are so swayed by the assertion that personal faith must be the invariable pre-requisite to baptism and admission to the church, that they seem incapable of ever entertaining the thought that the church membership of the children of believers may be reasonable and scriptural. The doctrine seems to them so great an anomaly that they cannot look dispassionately at the evidence for it. But to one who has weighed the truths set forth above, the absence of that doctrine from God's dispensations would seem the strange anomaly. To him who has appreciated the parental relation as God represents it, the failure to include it within the circuit of the visible church, to sanctify its obligations and to seal its hopes with the sacramental badge, would appear the unaccountable thing.

We have seen that the promise of a multiplying offspring was the blessing of paradise; that paternity was the splendid expedient of our Maker for multiplying the human subjects of his blessings and instruments of his glory, and of making holiness and bliss the sure, hereditary possession of the increasing multitudes of men, through the probation and adoption of their first father. We have seen how, when Satan had essayed, with a stupendous, yet impotent malice, to pervert the invention of God to the propagation of sin and death, our merciful father rendered his victory void through the woman's seed, thus causing redemption in the second Adam to spring again out of the family tie. We hear him declare in Malachi ii. 15, long after the fall, that his object in founding the family, in the form of monogamy, was "to seek a godly seed." Thus the supreme end of the family institution is as distinctly religious and spiritual as that of the church itself.

Civic legislators speak of the well-ordered family as the integer of which the prosperous commonwealth is formed. But God assigns the family a far higher and holier aim. The Christian

family is the constituent integer of the church—the kingdom of redemption.

The instrumentalities of the family are chosen and ordained of God as the most efficient of all means of grace—more truly and efficaciously means of saving grace than all the other ordinances of the church. To family piety are given the best promises of the gospel, under the new, as well as under the old dispensation. How, then, should a wise God do otherwise than consecrate the Christian family, and ordain that the believing parents shall sanctify the children? Hence, the very foundation of all parental fidelity to children's souls is to be laid in the conscientious, solemn, and hearty adoption of the very duties and promises which God seals in the covenant of infant baptism. It is pleasing to think that many Christians who refuse the sacrament do, with a happy inconsistency, embrace the duties and seek the blessing. But God gives all his people the truths and promises, along with the edifying seal. Let us hold fast to both.