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THE CHILD and THE CHURCH!

Third Lecture of a Series on this Subject Delivered Tuesday, May 11th, in Cower St. Church.

By REV. D. B. HEMMEON, B. A.

We come next to a consideration of the child as an imitator. The imitator of children is master of common knowledge, and its vast importance in all the activities of childhood has been recognized by all students of child nature. The child does nothing but the things necessary to support life without having learned it from the example of others.

"As if his whole vocation were endless imitation." The study of this characteristic of childhood alone is most fascinating and instructive. This effect of environment upon the child shown in an irresistible impulse to imitate was well known to the great students of childhood.

"In answer to the query whether we shall carelessly allow children to hear such tales, Plato, in 'The Republic' asserts in these words: 'We must not. The first thing is to establish a censorship of fiction and let the censors reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell children the authorized ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales, even more fondly than they would the body.' 'Let our artists,' he says in another connection, 'discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell amid fair sights and sounds and receive the good in everything, and beauty . . . shall draw the soul from earliest years.'"

In the midst of a lengthy treatment of education in "The Politics," Aristotle says that all that is mean and low should be banished from their sight, and that since improper language is not allowed in their presence, improper pictures and tales should also be forbidden. In fact, that wise man advised that an offender against these rules be disgraced and beaten.

"If we trace character, good or bad, to its source," says Coe, "we always find it starting in fellowship." From the mischievous or mercenary and selfish gossip of the home and neighborhood, to the revelry of the saloon, the entering wedge of evil in a child's life is fellowship.

"In the child," says Berenini, "only dispositions and tendencies are present. The true office of education lies not in idle talk but in the never-failing presence of good moral customs and habits."

Imitation begins with life itself. In "First Five Hundreds of a Child's Life," by Mrs. W. S. Hall, there is not a case in which the child took the

billity—the same mob-spirit. But it is false in that, in the latter case, the end and motive of the whole meeting in the mind of the leader, is God-like. One meeting—is of God and for His Glory. The other is essentially evil.

Remembering the extreme suggestibility of children, with what care should all meetings for them be conducted. Pledges and vows and promises of any sort may be extracted from such defenceless little ones. Sympathetic and quiet leadership in ways that contain no possibility of future mischief, is the greatest essential in children's services.

But let us sum up. In the light of all that has proved true of the child, how unjust it is to apply adult standards to his conduct, or demand adult achievements from him in any of his activities. I conceive that if it is manifestly unfair to demand from him the same excellence in manners and morals that we demand from his elders, it is far more unjust to expect adult accomplishments from him in mental and spiritual matters. It is hard enough for him to learn right conduct when it is continually before him in the concrete. It is impossible to expect from him an appreciation of abstract doctrinal truth. It is not the Golden Rule hung up on the wall of his room that causes the boy to keep it. It is the Golden Rule in the life of his father and mother, and if he finds it not there, all the text-cards in the world will no more teach him to keep it than a stack of grammars as high as the house, will teach him good English, if bad English is daily used around him. If the child's exemplars are what they ought to be, there will be no need of pledge or decision of any description. If they are not, than a pledge to do contrary to his examples contains an element of mischief and danger. A child's life is not governed by pledges and decisions, which are abstract rules, but by imitation of the conduct of those about him, which is concrete example.

The heart of a child is the place above all others where the kingdom of God cometh not with observation. If we dig up the seed to see how much it has grown, we kill the growth, and so we keep the soil well watered and soft, and leave nature to do the rest. Too much poking about the religious experience of children in the hope of accelerating growth may result in irreparable damage. Keep the surroundings clean and free from bad example, and God will do the rest. There is a tendency, in some workers among children, if I can judge the conditions of the day with any degree of accuracy, to encourage the child to indulge in introspection for the purpose of accelerating religious growth. Introspection is a good thing for adults sometimes, in small quantities. It should never be encouraged in the child because it serves no good purpose and many bad ones. Instances of the flagrant abuse of religious feeling are not rare. They are liable to occur whenever a child receives a strong enough impulse to force him out of the line of normal growth. Such are "The Welsh Fasting Girl," and Bernadette Soubirous, who founded the shrine at Lourdes. Madame Guyon tells us that at the age of three she was entirely controlled by the determination to become a martyr. In a book relating to child conversion, recently sent free to Sunday-School superintendents and pastors, the author claims to have been converted at the age of two and a half years, and says he remembers the occasion! A provincial newspaper of recent date contains a notice of a "boy preacher five years old," who is "assisted by his mother," and addresses large audiences. Such premature religious excitement is very much to be deplored. Little Boy Blue exercised the inalienable rights of childhood in going to sleep when responsibilities involving mature experience were thrust upon him. Let us beware how we endeavour to waken the children to adult experience too soon, lest we bring to them sorrows which their young hearts were never made to bear.

Having examined, in this brief way, some of the more important characteristics of the child, there remains the question, what provision is the church making for the child?

An answer to the question involves an examination of the various agencies in the possession of the church for the training of her children. This examination will be made in

the next issue.

sympathetic and friendly spirit, and with a recognition of the vastness and complexity of the work. Yet, this will not prevent criticism where I think it is needed. . . . nor would it serve much good without suggestions for improved methods where such are available and necessary.

Among the many evidences of the church's vigor and ability to grasp the opportunities of the day, is the greater effort she is making to keep her children within her doors. It may be humbler work to keep your possessions, then, having lost them, to go and, with much clamor and sounding of trumpets, find some of them again, but it is better work, and the possessions will not have depreciated in value.

The church's work for the children falls into four departments. (1) The regular public worship; (2) The Sunday School; (3) The Young People's Organizations, and (4) The Home.

Regular public worship is, of course, not exclusively for the child. This is the only public religious observance that he shares on an equality with his parent. As such it ought never to be neglected, either by parent or child. It is frequently said of late that this part of worship should be changed with a view to bringing it nearer the young child's understanding. But this is not wholly advisable. It is not necessary that a child should understand everything he hears or sees. The atmosphere of awe and reverence in the church has its effect on him. The music speaks to him, and the whole service, unless unduly lengthened, touches the child's nature for good far more than he knows.

In the Sunday-Schools, however, the method of reaching the child is far more direct, and its first effort should be to adapt itself to his character and needs. I think that it is apparent to all who are here that Sunday-School methods have undergone a wonderful change for the better within the past few years. When one remembers the inherent conservatism of human nature and its distaste for rapid innovations, it is a welcome opposition that has been offered to the greater changes introduced.

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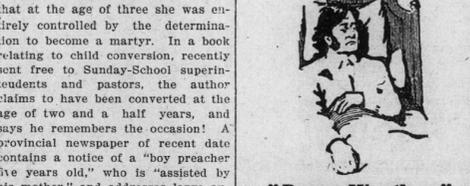
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