

DOCTRINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

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(Continued from last week.)

These are not days for dilettanteism in any department of life, least of all in religion. We need strong men and strong women in the church, men and women with principles, with positive beliefs, with energy and force of character, with convictions upon all great moral questions, with force in living and acting, whose judgments and opinions will help to shape public sentiment, whose influence will be always on the right side, and will count for something, and whose words on any subject will command attention and respect, and inspire to worthy action.

"A time like this demands

Great hearts, strong minds, true faith, and willing hands,

Men whom the lust of office does not kill;

Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;

Men who possess opinions and a will;

Men who have honor; men who will not lie."

In the bringing up of such men we need the strong meat of the Word of God, and not mere dainty bits picked out here and there from favorite chapters. Milk is for babes, but milk will not build up the tissue and brawn and brain necessary for vigorous manhood. Those who have anything to do with the teaching of young people in Sunday schools, Junior and other Christian Endeavor Societies, and in homes, would do well to give serious thought to this subject. Perhaps the tendency is too much toward things that do not give strength.

There are certain great truths which lie at the foundation of all Christian teaching. These are, for example, the doctrines concerning God, concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ, concerning the mission and ministry of the Holy Spirit, concerning man's nature and need and destiny, concerning the way of salvation—what it is to be a Christian, concerning the fellowship of believers in the family of God. It is of the greatest importance that every young person should have clear and correct knowledge on these and other great doctrines. False or even merely superficial thoughts about the person of Christ, for example, will never produce heroic devotion to Christ. Shallow conceptions of sin will never yield great faith, or true, whole-hearted consecration. If we do not realize something of our helpless condition without Christ, of what Christ has done for us in His redemption work, and of the privileges to which He brings us, our following of Christ will be only listless and sentimental without force and persistence, and will never reach anything heroic.

These are hints only of the importance and necessity of doctrines in the training of young Christians in the upbuilding of their life and character. It should begin in the home. It may be well to have a revival of catechism-teaching. Suppose the children do not now understand the statements of truth in the answers, if the words are put into their memory they will stay there and will shape their thoughts for all life. In the Sunday school, too, teachers may with profit spend a portion of every lesson period in setting forth some doctrine which lies in the passage, or is suggested by it.

Then in Christian Endeavor meetings, there is room for like teaching for great truths. Perhaps the tendency here is too much to mere fragments of things, or to easy, near-at-hand lessons. Let those who give us the topics put in a goodly share of doctrines which will direct the thoughts of the young people to the great fundamental truths of Christianity. Let devotional committees and those who guide the meetings see to it that some strong meat is served at every service. Let pastors get into their sermons the great vital and essential things of the Word of God, so that their young people shall grow up into strong, vigorous, and stable Christians, who shall be able to stand amid life's storms, to achieve much, and attain lofty heights and influence, and to do a valiant part in advancing Christ's Kingdom.

ON A SOUND FOOTING.

A total cash income of well over two millions, a reserve fund of over one million, a net surplus of over three hundred thousand dollars, and a 10 per cent. dividend indicate a strong company, and a closer inspection of the 46th annual report of the Western Assurance Company, which appears in full in another column, shows that in its case this impression is justified. The total cash income foots up to \$2,330,727.95, and the balance over expenditure, or profits, amounts to \$119,708.43. Of this sum \$100,000 went to make the two half-yearly dividends of 10 per cent per annum; \$5,752.33 was written off for depreciation in securities, and the balance was added to the reserve fund, which now amounts to \$1,086,908.21. The total security to policy-holders is \$3,086,908.21. The net surplus has been increased by nearly \$38,000, and is now \$316,252.34. The year has been free from serious individual losses, and the company has come well through the general depression. A depreciation of \$5,752.28 may be looked upon as very moderate when it is on assets of upwards of two and a quarter millions. The year's business may be summed up as having been somewhat smaller in volume than during the previous year, but conducted on a satisfactory basis, and yielding a good profit.

THE BIBLE CLASS.

PETER OPENING THE DOOR TO THE GENTILES.

(Acts x. 23b—xi. 18.—For March 14th.)

BY REV. PHILIP A. NORDELL, D. D.

For the space of nearly two thousand years the mercies promised to the world through Abraham had been restricted to the narrow line of his descendants. The laws and regulations which were originally designed to separate them from other nations as the chosen custodians of a divine revelation had grown into a wall so hard and high as to render even friendly intercourse impossible between them and the rest of mankind. But the time had now come when this wall should be broken down, when the covenant mercies of God should go forth to all the inhabitants of the earth.

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS A TURNING-POINT IN HISTORY.

The Apostles themselves had no conception of the nature of the treasure which their Master had committed to their charge. They were devout Jews with all the narrowness and exclusiveness of their people. Hitherto Christianity had not extended beyond the confines of those who might be called the descendants of Abraham. In Jerusalem and Judea only Jews, with possibly a few Jewish proselytes, had accepted the Gospel. The turning of the Samaritans to Christ was a step forward, indeed, and yet not wholly beyond the covenant with Abraham. For the Samaritans, however much they were hated by the Jews, were essentially of the same stock. When the Northern kingdom was overthrown only the leading people of the ten tribes were carried captives into Assyria. The great bulk of the population remained where their ancestors had lived since the conquest under Joshua. Like the Jews they had the law of Moses, and they practiced the law of circumcision. But when Peter preached to Cornelius the door was opened to the Gentiles. For Cornelius and his company were not, as many have supposed, proselytes to Judaism. The whole significance of the narrative lies in the fact that they were Gentiles pure and simple. And yet the personal character of this Roman centurion stood so high in the estimation of the Jews that if a Gentile must be admitted directly into the Church, no better example could have been chosen to lessen the shock to Jewish prejudices. It is interesting to see how, when the time was ripe for Christianity to break through the bonds of Judaism, God had prepared the way and the instruments for this momentous event. Little did those who were gathered in the centurion's house imagine that they were actors in an event fraught with incalculable importance for mankind to all coming ages.

PETER'S GREAT DISCOVERY.

Peter's prejudices against the Gentiles, which under the liberating influence of the Gospel had undergone a process of unconscious disintegration, broke down completely before the vision at Joppa and its interpretation as revealed in the message from Cornelius. He learned that God is no respecter of persons; that God in judging of men's fitness for His favor looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart; that prayer rising from a sincere heart and alms scattered by a loving hand were just as acceptable when proceeding from a Gentile as from a Jew. Things that are good in themselves, and that are done with a right motive, have precisely the same value in God's sight, whoever does them. This was an astounding discovery for one to make who all his life had been taught by the most eminent men of his nation that the great feat of God's bounty was for the Jews, while the crumbs were only for the Gentile dogs. It was the dawning of a great truth on the Apostle's mind. God's favor was henceforth to be not a matter of national distinction, of descent from Abraham, of ceremonial law, of circumcision, but of desire for salvation and of simple faith in Christ. Any man, woman, or child, rich or poor, cultured or ignorant, free-born or slave, white or black, who longs for spiritual light and truth and righteousness is "accepted of God." Human distinctions of birth, rank, class, or caste have absolutely no value in God's sight. If an emperor on his throne enters the kingdom of God, and a beggar in the street is excluded, it is not because the one is an emperor and the other a beggar, but because the emperor comes as a beggar, and the beggar in the exercise of his sovereign free will rejects the grace of God. This "acceptance" of which Peter spoke did not of course imply that men in every nation who live according to the light they have are saved on the ground of their own merit and without reference to the work of Christ. Peter simply meant that persons like Cornelius were pleasing in God's sight because they sought for truth, and responded to it as fast as it was revealed to them. The moment Cornelius heard of Christ he opened his heart with joy to receive Him as the Redeemer of his soul. God justified Cornelius through Christ before Cornelius heard of Him.

*An Exposition of Lesson 11 in *The Bible Study Union Sunday School Lessons* on "The Three Great Apostles."