

Seeking the Salvation of Children.

A SERMON TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS.
BY REV. T. W. YOUNG.

The gospel writers have recorded twenty-three miracles of healing performed by Jesus, and five of these were done at the solicitation of a mother, or father, or friend for others. These parents were deeply interested in the welfare of their children, and took it upon themselves to go to the Saviour and entreat his favor and help. They obtained the desires of their hearts. These scriptural narratives suggest the personal responsibility of Christian parents in seeking the salvation of their own children.

THE FAMILY DIVINELY APPOINTED.

In the primitive formation of God's people into family and national life, the husband and father was the divinely appointed priest for his household. He gathered his children, his servants and his retainers about him and gave them religious instruction, and offered sacrifices for all. In the New Testament we are distinctly told that the head of the family is still the husband, even as Christ is the head of the church. I am afraid there is a tendency among us to subvert here this ancient order. Husbands willingly shift this responsibility upon the wife. She must make the home life. She must educate and care for the children, and see after their moral and religious training, and fathers fancy they are rid of these duties. But God has not sanctioned any such change. In his plans and appointments the mother and father are to stand together and mutually bear the burdens, responsibilities and duties of home life. They are to increase their happiness by sharing their joys, and lighten their burdens by dividing them in the home.

Whatever men may think of the vagaries of William III., of Germany, he is a good father, and in his home life is a shining example, worthy of imitation of all Christian fathers. When the days' work is over he goes home, and gathers about him his seven children, or his "little gang," as he fondly calls them, and enters heartily into all their fun and frolic, their conversations, and their studies. He is one of them. His home life is happy, and his word and influence outweighs all else in the formation of the life and character of his home. What we need widely, to-day, is that Christian fathers shall leave their frowns, their vexations, and over-strained temper in their stores and offices, and workshops, when they go home for the evening, and seek to shed a happy and wholesome influence upon their children and wives in the circle of the home. It is pathetic to think that in our fair and free land are thousands of fathers who seldom speak to their children, or whose influence in the home is nil. They go to their work so early the children are not awake, and when they come home it is so late their children are asleep. It is true we are compelled to adjust ourselves to the inevitable social and industrial conditions of life, but it is a profound mistake for men and women to become so completely lost in making a living that they forget to live, and have no time nor thought to teach their children to live.

I doubt not that the most of us are Christians because we had mothers and fathers or friends who prayed for us. Sometimes their prayers were long in being answered—but the answer finally came. John Newton tells us that though he became a great sinner, and wandered far off into almost every kind of wrong doing, yet during his darkest days of sinning he could never forget the prayers of his mother, and these were the powers that laid hold upon him, and drew him to Christ. It was through the prayers of a Christian Monica that the world has been blessed for these centuries with the Christian Augustine. A Christian father once told me that for thirty years he had ceaselessly prayed that God would convert his boy, and I saw him a useful man in the church. The father's prayer was answered. Christian parents, do you pray for your boys and girls? Do you let them know that you are praying for them?

BE NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK.

You ought to talk with them and lay upon their young lives the claims of Christ upon them. Here is where Christian parents often fail, not that they are not interested, but because they are so afraid of doing some wrong, they fail altogether in doing what is right and expected. You talk with your children about their school work; you talk with them about their business; you talk with them about their companions in social life; and all this is well, but do you ever quietly and personally talk with them about the claims of Jesus upon them? This is far more important. Too much persistency is no doubt a mistake, but never to speak at all about the claims of Jesus upon them is a far greater mistake. Your children expect that you will talk with them, and what must be their disappointment if you do not! How pathetic to hear them recall, as often happens when they become old, that you never did! I was talking recently with a Christian mother whose children seemed naturally to go right into the church as soon as old enough, and she said, "Why, I never expect anything else. From infancy I taught them that was the great thing to look forward to, that I expected it, and never thought of its being otherwise." Such a pressure upon a young and impressible mind is almost sure to mould the latter after the model of the former.

I think we have swung just a little too far out in our belief that every one must believe for himself. We have overdone the matter of individualism before God. We have become too painfully and mistakenly literal in our practice. We readily believe, and accept without questioning it, that parents hand down their diseases, their oddities, their tempers, their peculiarities, and a whole nest of evil things, and practically deny that we may transmit to our children the nobler and better sides of our nature. If you cannot transmit to your child your Christian faith, you can transmit to it a soul which may easily be led into a life of faith and trust if you only begin in time, and do it wisely. There is a sense, though indefinable, perhaps, it may at least be felt if not defined in which Christian parents may believe, do believe, and ought to believe for their children. The Christian mother of whom I have just spoken was doing it. Thousands of the best Christian mothers and fathers every day are doing it. They prayerfully and thoughtfully make it their chief concern to reproduce themselves, their Christian faith and all, in the lives of their children, and they succeed. The Apostle Paul was no doubt thinking of this very fact when he speaks of calling to remembrance the unfeigned faith in Timothy which, he says, dwelt first of all in his grandmother Lois, and in his mother Eunice, and declares that from infancy Timothy had known the scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation.

There can be no doubt that a mind concentrated, focused, and expectant in one thing brought ceaselessly to bear upon the young minds and hearts, will, other things being equal, accomplish the desired purpose. I believe there is such a thing as mental gravitation, and spiritual gravitation, just as truly as there are laws of gravitation in the material universe.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE.

Christian parents often excuse themselves from talking with their children about religion, or from attempting to influence their minds and hearts in religious life, by saying: "I want my children to think such things out for themselves. I do not want to influence them, but leave them to choose for themselves." If this be a sound principle then why do you send them to school? Why do you teach your girls to cook, or to sew? Why teach your boy a trade? Why not leave them to choose for themselves? The supreme folly of such a policy is apparent in the everyday affairs of life, and in spiritual things it has neither scripture nor common sense to sanction it. Religious freedom and individual choice are well and good for those old enough to use them, but for children parents must choose wisely, and hold them to a life of right thinking and right doing. It is neither wise nor safe for parents to leave their children uninfluenced in religious thought and conduct during the impressible and formative period of their lives. They cannot leave them so. While parents are neglecting their duty, others are influencing and teaching the boys and girls, and often leading them astray.

It is neither wise nor safe for Christian parents to leave their children to grow up in a Christian home, and go out into the world, until they become bruised and scarred by sin, filled with evil thoughts and godless desires, and then seek to reform them. Formation is ten thousand times better than reformation.

The question is often asked how old ought children to be before they become Christians? We do wrong in fixing, or even in thinking of, an age limit. It is never a question of years, but of teaching and privilege. Some children at eight or ten accept Christ more intelligently than some grown people at thirty or forty. We are told that Adam Clarke, the commentator, was converted at four years of age; the evangelist, Alfred Cookman, at ten; the hymnologist, Isaac Watts, at nine; Robert Hall, the great preacher, at twelve; Jonathan Edwards, at seven, and William Penn at nine. The idea that children should reach a certain age, and then be suddenly changed has no sanction in the scriptures. Christian parents should do as Christian Eunice did with Timothy, teach them the way of life from infancy, and as the apostle commands, bring up their children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Instead of having a day, or a time, from which we date our conversion, when a crisis was passed and a great change took place, it is infinitely better that from the cradle the children be taught to love and trust the Saviour, and grow up choosing to do the things that please him, and have no recollection that it was ever otherwise.

The Sunday School was never intended to relieve parents of the duty of home teaching. It was intended simply to help, and support the home. Christian parents should send their children to the Sunday School and keep them in it. Instead, how often do we see that thoughtless parents suffer their children to drift away from the school. Their boys, before they lay aside their knickerbockers, drop out of the Sunday School and spend the sacred day in roaming around the streets, or scouring the country round on a bicycle, and then Christian mothers and fathers wonder why their boys are not Christians. It is possible in every community to select the boys and girls who have been sent and kept in the Sunday School by their parents. As a rule these are the young people in the churches, bearing witness for Christ,

and leading in good works. Parents sometimes apparently do their duty here, but fail in realizing their aim. If I am doomed to failure I would rather fail doing my duty than be a failure in never attempting it. If I am to be disappointed, I would rather be disappointed with the consciousness that I did my duty in the right direction, than to be a disappointment in not trying it at all.

What children need, all children, without a single exception, is parental authority, not unkind, unsympathetic, but authority, lovingly, sympathetically, but always firmly exercised. The secret of the whole issue of child life is bound up in that often quoted and oftener misunderstood saying of Solomon: "Train up a child in the way in which he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." This is no sanction for a rigorous monotony of discipline under the notion that it is the right way. It is a command to study the child's temperament, and the way which befits him. With his disposition and temperament intelligently in hand, keep him exercised, practiced in the way he should go, and when he is old enough to choose for himself, he will not choose to depart, but to continue in it.—The Standard.

Like-Precious Faith.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"Them that have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."—II. Peter i. 1.

Peter seems to have had a liking for that word "precious." It is not a very descriptive one; it does not give much light as to the quality of the things to which it is applied; but it is a suggestion of one-idea value. It is interesting to notice the objects to which, in his two letters—for I take this to be his letter—he applies it. He speaks of the trial of faith as being "precious." He speaks (with a slight modification of the word employed) of Jesus Christ as being "to them that believe, precious." He speaks of the "precious" blood of Christ. These instances are in the first epistle. In this second epistle we have the words of my text, and a moment after, "exceeding great and precious promises." Now look at Peter's list of valuables: "Christ, Christ's blood, God's promises, our Faith, and the discipline to which that faith is subjected." These are things that the old man had found out to be of worth.

But then there is another word in my text that must be noted, "like precious." It brings into view two classes, to one of which Peter himself belongs—"us" and "they." Who are these two classes? It may be that he is thinking of the immense difference between the intelligent and developed faith of himself and the other apostles, and the rudimentary and infantile faith of the recent believers to whom he may be speaking. And, if so, that would be beautiful, but I rather take it that he is tacitly contrasting in his own mind the difference between the Gentile converts as a whole, and the members of the Jewish community who had become believers in Jesus Christ, and that he is repeating the lesson that he had learned on the housetop at Joppa, and had had further confirmed to him by the experience of Caesarea, and that he is really saying exactly what he said when he defended himself before the Council in Jerusalem: "Seeing that God had given unto them the like gift that he did unto us, who was I, that I should withstand God?" And so he looks out over all the Christian community, and ignores "the middle wall of partition," and says "Them that have obtained like precious faith with us." I wish this morning very simply to try to draw out the thoughts that lie in these words, and cluster round that well-worn and threadbare theological expression and Christian verity of "faith" or "trust."

I.—And the first thing that I would desire to point you to is, what we learn here as to

THE OBJECT OF FAITH.

Now, those of you who are using the Revised Version will notice that there is a very slight, but important, alteration there, from the rendering in the old translation. We read in the latter: "Like precious faith with us through the righteousness . . ." and that is a meaning that might be defended. But the Revised Version says, and says more accurately as far as the words go, and more truly as far as Christian thought go, "them that have obtained like precious faith with us in the righteousness." Now, I daresay, it will occur to us all that that is a departure from the usual form in which faith is presented to us in the New Testament, because there, thank God! we are clearly taught that the one thing which faith grapples is not a thing but a Person. Christian faith is only human trust turned in a definite direction. Just as our trust lays hold on one another, so the object of faith is, in the deepest analysis, no doctrine, no proposition, not even a Divine fact, not even a Divine promise, but the Doer of the fact, and the Promiser of the promise, and the Person, Jesus Christ. When you say "I trust so-and-so's word!" what you mean is "I trust him, and so I put credence in his word." And Christianity would have been delivered from mountains of misconception, and many a poor soul would have felt that a blaze of light had come in upon it, if this had been clearly proclaimed, and firmly apprehended by preachers