

THE BIBLE AND THE CHILDREN.

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God has always claimed the children. In the earliest covenants the children were included. In the covenant with Abraham it was ordained that each male child should be formally sealed for God on the eighth day. In the Mosaic law the children were to be devoted to Him.

When Christ came He showed a special and most affectionate interest in the children. A particular incident beautifully illustrates this tender regard. Certain persons, probably their mothers, came bringing their little children, even infants, to Jesus, to obtain His blessing upon them. His disciples, lacking true sympathy with childhood, failing to appreciate the warmth and the simplicity of their Master's heart, were keeping back these mothers and their children. When Jesus saw this it displeased Him much, and He rebuked His disciples, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. This incident makes it very clear that the heart of Christ was full of love for the children. He was always displeased with those who in any way, direct or indirect, would keep the children away from Him, and every child that comes to Him or is brought to Him now by others is welcomed with affectionate warmth. His heart yearns for every child that is born into this world.

Another incident in the Gospels gives a glimpse of the Divine interest in children. When the disciples asked Jesus who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst, and told them that unless they turned and became as little children they should in no wise enter the heavenly kingdom. Evidently the child spirit is the Christ spirit. It was on the same occasion that He said, "See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of the revealing there is in these words. Childlike ones, including the children, are the special objects of Divine watchfulness and care. The strongest and most favored angels are sent to guard them amid this world's dangers. He who would harm a child lifts his hand against all the power of heaven. The cry of a child anywhere reaches the ear of God, and a child's complaint is sure of instant attention on high. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Hence when one of them goes astray, everything else in the universe is forgotten, as it were, for the time, while all heaven's messengers go into the mountains to seek the one that has wandered away.

When we turn to consider what the Bible teaches concerning the care of the children, we find it all in harmony with this revealing. Divine love always yearns and watches, but Divine love must interpret itself through human hearts, must look through human eyes, must speak through human lips and must perform its gentle ministrations through human hands. Angel-guardianship is assured, out many of God's angels must be human, for there is need oft-times of a form that can be seen, a bosom that can be leaned upon, a voice whose accents can be heard, and a touch that can be felt.

God puts much of His work into human hands. Especially is this true of the care of the children. They are His. It is His will that not one of them shall perish. He would have them brought up as His own, for beautiful and holy life in this world, and for glory hereafter. He would have them guarded against the dangers amid which they must live, so that no evil shall touch them to tarnish their lives. He would have them trained into strength of character, so that they may be worthy of their rank as His own children.

But all this care, teaching and training God puts into human hands. Accordingly from the beginning specific instructions were given as to the manner in which children should be brought up. Thus in the law of Moses, the command to the people was, first, that they should seek the words of God in their own hearts, and then "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy

children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up." Again and again was the spirit of this teaching reiterated and reimpresed. The ideal Jewish family was brought up in most pious fashion. The atmosphere of the home was that of God's will and law. Our modern thought of the importance of the mother in the making of the home seems to have been quite anticipated among the Jews. "From the inexhaustible spring of Jewish love," says a Jewish writer, "rise the saviours of the human race." "The Jewish women also have the sound principle to subordinate all other love to that of the mother."

It is interesting to study the home life of God's chosen people to learn how the Divine commands concerning the training of the children were carried out. It was required that children should begin to learn the law by heart when five years old. No opportunity was lost—at the table, at home or abroad, evening or morning, of instilling reverence of God's law into the minds of the family, and of teaching them its express words throughout "till they knew them by heart." Thus it was provided that Jewish children should be brought up for God, who claimed them as His own. In the earliest years, when character is shaped, their minds were filled with the Word of God. They were trained in all holy duties. They were taught with their first lisplings to pray and recite the precept of the law.

Thus they grew up into devoutness, and godly habits became so fixed, that wherever they might be called in life's vicissitudes, they would continue unalterably faithful to the teachings of their youth. We have examples of this in the young captives who were carried away to Babylon. Among heathen people, with all the influences of the world against them, Daniel and his companions were still true to their God and their religion, unmoved alike by the blandishments of royalty and the fear of wild beasts or of fire.

The Bible is one book; Christianity is but the perfect flower, the ripened fruit of Hebrew law. The new teaching, like the old, lays stress upon the home and upon family training. Jesus sanctified home life. His apostles were hidden when they entered a home to say, "Peace be to this house." In the apostolic days people were brought into the Church by households. In the instruction given to Christians in the Epistles, there were specific words for both parents and children. God claims the children and provides for their instruction and training, so that they shall grow up into beauty and strength.

We realize the Divine thought concerning childhood when we look upon every child that comes to us as one of God's little ones sent to us to be brought up for Him. Upon those who are ordained, whether as parents or teachers, to be the guardians of the children, a holy responsibility rests. It is God's work that they are sent to do, and they must do it in Christ's name, and as He would do it if He were in their place, as indeed they are in His place. The mothers stand very near to God, since into their hands come first the young lives to be guarded, taught and trained. They should seek to be filled with the spirit of Christ, so that God's love may flow through them without hindrance to their children.

Horace Bushnell wrote in his old age, "My mother's loving instinct was from God, and God was in love to me first therefore; which love was deeper than hers, and more protracted. Long years ago she vanished, but God stands by me still, embracing me in my gray hairs as tenderly and carefully as she did in my infancy, and giving to me as my joy and the principal glory of my life, that He lets me know Him, and helps me with real confidence to call Him my Father." This is very beautiful. A true mother's love is only God loving in her, God coming to the child first in her tender affection and yearning. Even the old Jewish rabbis said, "God could not be everywhere and therefore He made mothers." A great preacher has said, "The mother's heart is the child's first school-room." What holy benedictions thus rest upon mothers! A young mother wrote in a letter, "When I took my little boy in my arms the first time, and his little hand clasped tightly