

Our Contributors.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE QUESTION.

BY KNOXONIAN.

Once upon a time a Roman Catholic priest was riding home from church, after conducting his first service in his new parish. Passing a group of his parishioners on the road, he said: "My friends, I have no doubt you are asking one another what do you think of the new priest. There is a more important question than that, — what does the new priest think of you."

That priest was a sensible man. He saw that there are two sides on every question and that is a good deal more than some people see who imagine they are much better than Roman Catholic priests are. One fundamental point of difference between a sensible man and a fool is that a sensible man always waits to hear both sides of a question before he says anything; while a fool always blurts out his opinion as soon as he hears one side.

It is always easy to load up a fool. Just go to him and tell him one side of a story and that is all he wants to hear. It never dawns on his imbecile intellect that the story has another side. It never occurs to him that if somebody who knows the other side were present he could put a different face on the thing in five minutes. He never says to himself, "Now, that is one side; but there is another side and I shall form no opinion until I hear both sides, and perhaps I shall not bother forming an opinion even then. The thing is not worth thinking about."

One reason why some people never wait to hear both sides of a question is because their minds are not large enough to contain both sides. Their upper story has only room and that room is so small that it has accommodation for only one idea at a time. There is no earthly use in giving a man an idea if he has no place to put it. Before you spend precious time in trying to give a man the other side it might be well to stop and ask if he has mental accommodation for two sides of any kind of a question.

There is no kind of a man we admire more than an able, learned and conspicuously fair judge. One of the delights of our youth was to sit in court and watch the late Chief Justice Richards do business. How evenly he could hold the scales. How admirably he could explode a fallacious argument by a little touch of common sense. His dry humour and transparent way of putting things made him a charming man to listen to; and the charm was all the greater because he always looked so heavy that you never expected him to say anything bright. The old chief knew there were two sides on every question, and it was no small part of a boy's education to watch him balancing the points and gradually getting at the truth.

Did you ever see Sir Oliver Mowat with a deputation around him urging legislation of some kind or asking for a pull at the surplus? The veteran Premier is all attention and politeness. His manner is that of a perfect gentleman but there is a certain something which seems to say, "That may be all so, gentlemen, but might it not be urged in reply, etc., etc."

Did you ever watch Dr. Reid in the General Assembly when some member is waxing eloquent on one side of a question. The veteran Doctor often looks as if he would like to say, "That may be so but there is another view that might be taken of that matter."

It may well be doubted if any man ever became permanently influential and useful in either church or state, without the faculty of looking at both sides of a question. No matter what a man's other qualifications may be if he does not form the habit of looking all round questions he soon loses his hold. The impulsiveness that snatches up one side and the littleness that can see only one side are alike fatal to lasting influence.

Moral for young people — cultivate the habit of examining questions on all sides.

PARENTAL DUTIES AND FAMILY RELIGION.*

BY REV. WM. FORREST, MARKDALE.

A short address on this the fourth question of the General Assembly's report on the state of religion for last year, may not be out of place before this association.

Embodied in this report we find the following significant words; "The state of religion in the home is not satisfactory." "Parents do not sufficiently realize their duties." "Religion does not bulk so largely in domestic life, as it did under earlier and happier conditions." "Family religion does not receive the attention which its importance demands." At a gathering of ministers, one of them, the report says, put the question: With all the machinery which is now at work in the Sabbath schools and different societies, do the young people know their bible as well as the old? The unanimous answer was "No."

These statements are not only startling, but they are full of warning and instruction to parents and ministers of the Gospel as well. A tree may grow up tall and stately, full branched, with spreading twig and leaf, and yet from root to lowest limb, its well rounded trunk may be but an empty shell. And how much better ere long will that religion be, which has grown up and branched out in church, Sunday school, and other religious and benevolent organizations, but from which the piety of the home has gone, or is going to decay? All the signs of yet unimpaired life may appear in the rosy cheek, the speaking eye and active limbs; but how long will these signs continue, when the tide of life is drying up at the fountain, and the pulsations of the heart are beating slowly to a close. So in the same way it is possible to have churches, Sabbath schools, and other kinds of religious machinery in apparently sound working order yet if the piety of the home be decreasing, then we shall soon have "the form of godliness without the power," and failure instead of success, like the early churches, will be the inevitable result at last. As the heart is the centre and source of life and movement in the physical frame, so is the home the foundation and seat of life to the social relations of human existence. A sound foundation is the condition of a stable superstructure; a clear fountain is the condition of the stream that must flow from it in transparent purity.

These reflections conduct us back to the time when God not only created man, but also the home and family, by making him male and female in his own image. As time passes the family expands into the tribe, the tribe into the nation, and the nation increasing fills the world with its teeming social and individual life. When the life of childhood enters into the home then come to the parents obligations and responsibilities of the most important and far-reaching kind. It may be worthy to remark here, that the infidelity of the present day, in seeking to overturn Christianity and establish its own dark empire over men, is directing its most decisive efforts to overthrow the family institution, and erase the very idea of home from the human mind altogether. This is a cardinal principle in the communistic, socialistic and other sceptical systems of the present age. The votaries of the creed are wise in their generation, because if they can make themselves master of the family institution or suppress it altogether, the hardest part of this task in overturning the Christian faith is accomplished already. Let us not be ashamed to take a leaf of warning out of their book, and what they seek to destroy, let us seek to preserve as one of our best heir-looms given to us from above. The mere preservation of the family institution, consisting of parents and children in one home, is not all however for which we need to strive. We must have the ideal christian home ever before our minds, and resolve never to rest content till that ideal is realized. Such homes as we read of in the Holy Scriptures—like that of Abraham of whom God said, Gen. 18. 19. "I

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know him that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." Or like that of Joshua as described in his parting counsels to the Elders of Israel, chap. 4. 215. "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." What a bright example of the ideal home and of successful religious training, and what beautiful and suggestive glimpses are furnished to us into the youthful life of the child Jesus in these words from Luke's Gospel 2. 51. 52., "And he went down with them and was subject to them. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

In these questions we have examples, not only of the best kind of household training and discipline; but also of most desirable and successful results. Everything needful to make true religious homes is described in these words; "They shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." "We will serve the Lord." "And increasing in favor with God and man." Here surely we have the words of unerring wisdom fulfilled, Prov. 22. 6., "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." What abundant encouragement this promise gives to Christian parents to carry out the practical exhortation of the Apostle, Eph. 6. 4, "And ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In these two passages taken together we have not only the method of the true spiritual home-training described, but we have the assurance of ultimate success also given. It is one thing however to know, and another thing to do. A wide gap often opens up between the theory and the performance, and hence failure results.

According to the report, one danger on which religious home training is suffering a kind of shipwreck in the present time, is the principle of delegation. It is not that Christian fathers and mothers are shutting their eyes altogether to their duties; but they are entrusting too much of their own work to others. We may without any serious risk commission men to represent us in parliament, or in the place of business; but when parental responsibilities are transferred to others, either in whole or in part, no wonder the work falls, and the promise of God remains unfulfilled. The Sabbath school is doing a good work of its kind, but one hour of religious instruction each week, can at the very best do nothing more than supplement what should be the earnest, prayerful and persevering task of the parents at home.

It is certain that no Sabbath school teacher, no minister of the gospel can, or ought to supply the place of the parent to the child as a teacher of religion, especially in the earlier and more impressive season of life.

In other times more than in the present, I am afraid the regret of the report is true, that the things of the past were better than the things that are now. Then the catechism with the proof-texts was the unfailing companion of the child. The bible was a text book frequently read and explained both in the home and public school. Greater attention was paid to the kind of literature introduced into the domestic circle, and especially on the Sabbath day. The way in which the sacred day was observed in other times, was itself an important factor in the religious education of the young. In my own recollections of the past, the beauty, the sacred repose, the lessons taught on the holy day of rest remain green and fragrant still, and will as long as memory retains its power.

I have met with men in the humblest walks of life, especially in the mother land, who were as deeply read in theology, and who understood what they read as well I will venture to say, as many of our theological graduates, and yet their chief training was received in the home circle, matured afterwards by their own independent researches into the pages of our older theological masters; whilst the simple piety that adorned their lives, was under God, the fruit of their early teaching, ripened by the stalwart fare gathered from volumes which are now strangers in the domestic circle altogether.

When we are counting up our statistical and financial gains at the close of each ecclesiastical year, the increase of church membership, the multiplication of religious associations, and contributions to the various missionary and benevolent schemes of the church; if we neglect the religious life of the home, we are falling into the dangerous mistake of the athlete who has developed the muscular portions of his external physical system at the expense of the organic life within, so that on a certain fatal day the relaxed organism of the heart collapses altogether and death ensues.

Does not the advice of the prophet to King Hezekiah meet us with timely warning here? "Set thine house in order." Or that of a still greater than Isaiah to the back-slidden church, "Repent and do the first works." Get the family circle reorganized with its altar of daily sacrifice and service to God, and let the stream of true religious life be turned into it with increased volume and power. Let us remember and imitate faithfully the examples of Abraham, Joshua, and the holy family of Nazareth. And first of all to the fathers and mothers of the present day do these words of warning, in concert with these other inspiring examples, speak with most earnest and impressive power. To them the sacred record proclaims that in all successful home training there are not only things to be done, but also things to be shunned, Eph. 6. 4 "And ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath." The angry passion glaring in the eye, or breaking forth in the gesture, speech, or deed will beget its own likeness in the soul of the child; and will thus neutralize to a large extent the whole course of domestic education, however carefully and earnestly carried on.

Too often also the selfish elements in the child's nature are fostered with hot-house rapidity, by the unwise parent's fond and baneful weakness; so that no instruction however careful and complete, will ever be able to eradicate the evil growth from the moral nature of the youth thus corrupted and debased. In this respect the words of the wise man are too frequently true Prov. 13. 24. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chaseth him betimes." Another stumbling block in the way of successful child training, is unjust partialities. Praise and blame, and even rewards and punishments are distributed not according to merit or demerit; but as the unreasonable whim or caprice of the partial father or mother may dictate; and thus the dark passions of envy and jealousy are engendered in the one depreciated, whilst those of pride and vanity are quickened into hateful life in the bosom of the one unduly favored.

The question has been asked, "Why is it that so many children trained in religious homes have gone hopelessly astray in the after stages of life? If errors such as we have been describing have characterized the whole, or even a part, of that early training, we do not need to seek far for a solution to the query so often propounded. Turning away from the prohibited side of this subject of home training, we present a few remarks on the positive side enjoined by the sacred writer in the words Eph. 6. 4, "but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Does anyone ask when is this process of religious education to begin? There should be no doubt about the reply here, we have it in the words of Paul to Timothy, 2. Tim. 3. 15. "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Says a greater than Paul, Luke 18. 16. "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of God."

From the time of the earliest intelligence the child is surrounded by educational influences whether good or evil. In early life especially, example is its most potent instructor. It is a creature of imitation, and is all the while copying the models set before it. It finds them just at home in the words, looks and actions of the inmates of that home. Matured into larger life, the street, the play-ground, the social circle, the classroom in which its work and sports are carried on are all educating the youthful mind either into good or evil. How needful then to lose no time in predisposing the receptive soul of childhood in the right direction; and there is only one right, and that is the way towards God to love him, believe in him, and do his will. What a work this is? demanding a consecration, a wisdom, and a sanctified genius far beyond that of the artist or sculptor whose works of art have won for him what the world calls imperishable fame. This one work to produce a life-like copy of some living or dead production of nature, but the wise Christian parent is working to have his child's spiritual being transformed into a living likeness of his Creator, the son of God, who