

The Family Circle

WHEN I WAS A BOY.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.

READERS of the RECORD have often enjoyed Dr. Cuyler's admirable articles, and will be glad to read from his own pen the following interesting sketch of his early life, taken from the *Golden Rule*:

I have been requested to furnish some reminiscences of my boyhood; but I have nothing in the least degree "sensational" to relate. Yet every childhood, however humble, may have in it some lesson for others. I was born on the tenth of January, 1822, in the beautiful little village of Aurora, on the banks of Cayuga Lake in New York, a few rods from the spot where Wells College now stands.

My father died when I was only four and a half years old; he was a young lawyer of striking appearance and captivating eloquence, and the only distinct recollection that I have of him is that he once punished me for using a profane word that some rough boys had taught me. That wholesome bit of discipline kept me from ever breaking the third commandment again.

After his early death, at the age of twenty-eight, I passed entirely under the care of one of the best mothers that God ever gave to an only son. She was more to me than school or college, or pastor, or church, or all combined. God bless good mothers! the salvation of society and the progress of Christ's kingdom depend upon the influence of mothers more than upon any other human agency.

As I was the only child, my widowed mother gave up her house, and took me to the pleasant, comfortable home of her parents, on the banks of the lake, a few miles south of Aurora. How thankful I have always been that the next seven or eight years of my happy childhood were spent on the beautiful farm of my grandfather! I had the free, pure air of the country, and the simple pleasure of a farmhouse; my grandfather was a cultured gentleman with a good library for grown people, and at his fireside was plenty of profitable conversation.

I worked on the farm out of school hours, drove the cows to pasture, rode the horse at the horse-rake in the hay-field, and carried in the stacks of fire-wood on winter afternoons. My intimate associates were the house-dog, and chickens, and the kittens. They were all most innocent companions; and my only enemy was a pugnacious old ram, "Julius Cæsar." Whenever, on my way to school, I crossed the field in which he and his flock were pasturing, he used to pitch into me, and upset me and my dinner-basket, as his illustrious namesake used to overthrow the tribes of the Gauls.

The school that I attended was just such a one as my friend Whittier has pictured in his sweet little poem entitled "In School-days." I learned very little beyond the "three R's," and the rudiments of grammar and geography; and, when I was eleven years old, I was sent away to good old Dominie Mandeville's in the town of Caroline, and he was my private tutor for the next two years.

My Sabbaths in my grandfather's house were like the good old Puritan Sabbaths, - serene and sacred, with neither work nor play. Our country church was three miles away, and in the winter our family often fought our way through mud or snow, and sometimes across fields to avoid the huge snow-drifts. I was the only child in our family, and the first Sunday school that I ever

attended had only one scholar, and my good mother was the superintendent. She gave me several verses of the Bible to commit carefully to memory, and these she explained to me; and I learned several questions and answers in the Westminster Catechism.

I was expected to study for myself, and not to sit still and be crammed by a teacher after the fashion in the Sunday schools of these days, where the scholars swallow down what the teacher brings to them, as young robins open their mouths and swallow the worms that the old bird brings to the nest. In my wise mother's home school I committed to memory whole chapters of the blessed Book, and was well grounded in doctrine by that catechism that has always been my sheet-anchor of orthodoxy.

The books that I had to feast on in the long winter evenings were "Robinson Crusoe," "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Walks of Usefulness," and the few volumes in my grandfather's library that were within the comprehension of a child eight or nine years old. I also had many a good cry over "Paul and Virginia," and many a laugh over the story of "John Gilpin."

The temperance reformation was then in its early stages, and the first public meetings that I ever attended were held in our neighboring district schoolhouse, for the purpose of arousing public sentiment against the evils of intoxicating drinks. In those days every farmer had hard cider at his own table, and furnished whiskey or rum to his workmen. Drunkenness was fearfully prevalent, and the drinking customs prevailed in every circle of society. My grandfather was one of the first large agriculturists who banished strong drink from his farm, and his example was widely followed.

I signed a total-abstinence pledge when I was about ten years old; but I got a taste of "prohibition" a year or two before, that made a profound impression on me. One day I discovered some "cherry-bounce" in a wine-glass on my grandfather's sideboard, and I ventured to swallow the tempting liquor. When my vigilant mother learned what I had done, she administered Solomon's regimen of the rod in a way that made me "bounce" most merrily. Dr. Horace Bushnell says that his father never "whipped me but once, and then he flogged me." It was a genuine flogging that my mother gave me that day, and I have been a teetotaler ever since. Let me add just here that the first public address I ever delivered was at a great temperance gathering in the city hall of Glasgow, Scotland, a dozen years afterwards.

"Do you approve of corporal punishment?" some of my readers may ask. To this I reply, "Yes, when it is richly deserved, and administered by the right person, and in the right spirit. My loving mother whipped me very seldom, and then did it after a calm talk with me as to the nature of the wrong that I had done; and I do not doubt that the rod gave her more pain than it did to her boy. Her discipline was very thorough and very conscientious, and it ensured obedience. She never bribed me to good conduct with sugar-plums; and yet she loved to commend me when I had won her approval, for she held that an ounce of honest praise is often worth more than many pounds of punishment.

During my infancy that godly mother had dedicated me to the Lord, as truly as Hannah ever dedicated her son Samuel. When my paternal grandfather, who was a lawyer, offered to bequeath his law library to me, my mother declined the offer, and said to him, "I expect my little boy will yet be a minister." This was her constant aim and perpetual prayer, and God graciously