

of the future, and in the lives of the children of the coming generations?

First and foremost, the Church must teach the truth in such a way that the thought and vision of parents will be captivated by it. It is not the place of the Church to usurp the place of the home, but rather assist the home to realize its highest ideals. The primary obligation for the life of the child must ever rest upon the home, and whatever else the Church may do, she cannot afford to neglect her duty to the home. It is for the Church so to influence the home that these homes shall become Christian in very deed and truth; homes where husband and wife have a personal friendship with, and in Jesus Christ; homes where the family altar is maintained, not in mere form, but as a vital part of a vigorous and healthy Christian life; homes where the prevailing atmosphere is decidedly and attractively Christian, and in which children shall come to interpret life as Christian life; homes where the children shall be claimed for God from the first, dedicated to God intelligently in Christian baptism, and retained for, and in, the Kingdom of God. This is primarily the function of the Christian home, and it is the function of the Church to make such homes actual. With such homes and such results the work of the Church, in as far as its work for the child is concerned, becomes supplementary, for it is not a fact that no home, however good, is large enough to develop all the faculties and exercise all the powers of life? Other agencies are needed, and among these the Church should be the most potent and persistent.

But, you may ask, what about the children reared in non-Christian homes, or the children reared in nominal Christian homes where the opportunities of retaining the child have been lost through neglect, or ignorance, or incompetence? This necessarily complicates the problem and increases the work. For, while the Church is not bound to undo the mischief caused by the neglect and failure of homes to be what they should be, she finds her work not only greater, but more difficult, where there is the lack of home, and the absence of true home influence upon the child-life. If the children have been allowed to stray away from the Kingdom, or are brought up in almost total ignorance of the reality of the Kingdom, then the Church must set herself to the task of winning them back to the Kingdom during the years of childhood, and building them up in the truth and life of the Kingdom, being careful always that the religious life expected shall be the religious life of the child and not of the adult. It is the Church's opportunity to take these young lives in her hands and up until the impulsive outgoings of their young hearts are changed into deliberate convictions, and into fixed purposes to serve Christ forever.

It is a significant fact that to-day the thought of the Christian world is turning, as never before, to childhood as one of the key-positions in the whole campaign of Christianity in the world. This is a most hopeful sign. At the same time it means that we must set ourselves as never before to the most serious consideration of the problems it presents. We have our Sunday Schools, our Junior Leagues, our Boys' Brigades, our Mission Bands it may be, and our Methodist Discipline provides for Catechumen classes, although most of us do not know it, or, knowing it, fail to make any use of them. The machinery of the Church would appear to be ample, and no one can deny that much real good is being accomplished by these and kindred organizations. But are the results at all commensurate with the outlay of money, or the

expenditure of mental and nervous energy involved? Is it not true that much of our effort is mis-directed, or rather non-directed? If so, why?

May it not be due in part to our misconceptions concerning the place of the child in the Kingdom of God? If we should have a vision of the truth as Jesus unfolds it, and direct our efforts in harmony therewith.

May not our lack of efficiency be due in greater measure to our ignorance concerning the child? What do we really know about the child, and the unfolding of life in the child? Would it not be worth while to direct more real attention to this kind of study? Would it be worth while to have the subject of Religious Education and its special bearing upon child-life upon the curriculum of studies for ministerial students? Would it be out of place to have a chair in Religious Pedagogy established in connection with our theological colleges, where specialists could instruct the future ministers of the Church in the fundamental principles of child-nature, child development and religious nurture? Teachers in our kindergarten schools, in our public schools, and in our high schools receive such instruction as is calculated not only to inform them about the child, but to teach, but they are trained in the best methods of imparting informa-

tion and the leading out of the intellectual life of the child. How much more important that we who are called to be ministers of the gospel to the young, as well as to those who are older in years, should have similar training that we should be teachers indeed; teachers of the young, and teacher-trainers for those who are to take up this most important work. The teacher of arithmetic and the teacher of religion have to deal with the same child, and the principles of development in the one sphere are not so different from the principles of development in the other that the need for this training cannot be said to exist. In fact, if we are sincere in our contention that the interests of the spiritual life, and the formation of character are the supreme interests of life, is there not greater need for this training on the part of those who seek to engage in that most important work? Indeed, it would seem that the Church, in some such way, might more efficiently realize her mission to the child, and her opportunity in religious education of that child. In any case, the problem must be faced seriously, and an adequate solution sought. When we get the right point of view and are thoroughly awake to the possibilities of the hour, will be in a better way to discover the appropriate methods.

The Religion of Boys and Girls

Such a subject is full of hard questions. How far are children sinful by nature? Are they born in the Kingdom of God? Do they all need to be converted? Can such conversion take place gradually, unconsciously, imperceptibly? Must there be in all cases a definite experience of deliberate surrender to God—including penitence and faith and pardon? What ought to be the normal religious growth of children in a Christian home? Most of these questions cannot be profitably answered by any brief cut-and-dried formulas.

In this relation we may recall certain wise words written by Dr. R. W. Dale to his church at Carleton Place nearly half a century ago. "An eminent minister sometimes told his people that the Christian church was an institution intended to remove the necessity of adult conversion; and there can be no doubt that if we felt this more deeply, our families would present a very different aspect. Not that we should want to see our children becoming prodigies of infant piety; there is often, I fear, a great deal of parental vanity as well as of parental folly in the eagerness with which extraordinary development of religious experience in little children are watched for. The piety of a child, if genuine, will be a childish piety; it will have its worth and power in habits of obedience, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and truthfulness. The language of agonising remorse for sin, or of such devotion as only a Paul or a John can feel after years of laborious service or trying persecution, ought never to be expected from children, and never encouraged, for it cannot be genuine and natural."

Many experienced Christian teachers declare that children, as a rule, pass through what may be called an "Old Testament" stage of education before they reach the "New Testament" stage. They must be under the law before they are fit to be under grace. For schoolboys, for instance, the religion of simple duty and commandments, and the way for the religion of faith and affection.

Quite recent writers on the psychology of religion—such as Starbuck and William James—have emphasized the place of conversion in the religious life.

They admit that such a conversion may begin with the earliest dawn of conscious choice, and develop with growing intelligence. But they point to the years of adolescence—between childhood and manhood—as the time when a personal religious decision is most commonly reached. There are now awakened in the young a keener self-consciousness; some of the social graces and responsibilities; an instinct of altruism, subordination, sacrifice."

There is one supreme truth of the Gospel which comes home most naturally and most powerfully to the young—the truth of Christ as our King. For the young are still ignorant of the dark and dreadful secrets of remorse, for which only the Eternal Priest can give cleansing and pardon. And the young are not yet burdened with all the mystery of existence which drives us to Christ as our Prophet. But the thought of Christ as our King can unseal those fountains of affection and loyalty and faith and imagination which lie so close beneath the surface in young hearts. The essence of Christianity is passionate, personal allegiance to Christ, the King. And the religion of boys and girls homes simple and normal and natural and instinctive when it expresses itself in humble, ardent devotion to the Lord and Lover of their souls. We talk sometimes about the vanished age of chivalry. But the age of chivalry is born afresh in each youthful experience at the golden season, when life's "April melts in May time." And that is the season when generous young hearts grow brave to take the solemn vow of self-dedication and self-surrender to Jesus Christ—as He reveals Himself in His all beauty and majesty as the King of Love.

Commonly we find that the healthiest, happiest, most fruitful Christians are those who gave themselves to God, with hearts unspooled and virginal, while they had the dew of their youth. Here is the testimony given by Elizabeth Fry during her last illness: "I believe I can truly say that since the age of seventeen I have never waked from sleep, in sickness or in health, by day or night, without my first waking thought being how I might best serve the Lord."—T. H. Darlow, in *British Weekly*.

"The Church is the larger home, the home should be the lesser Church."