

WHY IS IT?

A lady member of my church said to me once, "Why is it that my children are not inclined to be religious? I see other children whose whole tendency is to piety—uniting with the church early in life, interested in devotional services, and growing in attachment to the church, while mine are becoming more worldly every day. Why is it?" she asked. "I send them to Sunday school. I take them to church every fair Sabbath, but no impressions of piety are made upon them. I cannot understand it."

I proposed a few questions:

"Do you show any particular religious example daily to your children in the household?"

"I cannot say that I do, but they know that I am a professor."

"You say that you send them to Sabbath school and to church; do you converse with them about the sermon they have heard, or the lesson of the Sunday school? or do you not rather discuss trifles of no religious bearing before them upon their return?"

"I am afraid the former is never done, and the latter often. Still, there can't be much harm in that."

"Do you ever speak to them personally about religious duties?"

"No, I do not like to; it is a very delicate subject."

"Do you ever have family worship? Do your children ever hear your voice raised to heaven for them, and thus know that you take an interest in their religious welfare?"

"No, we never had family worship. My husband and I are both diffident, and never could bring ourselves to pray aloud; but we do pray for them in secret."

"Do you allow them indiscriminate reading—newspapers, magazines, books, whatever they fancy?"

"Yes, we never trouble ourselves about that. They go to the circulating library and suit themselves; reading, you know, is improving to their minds."

"Do you cultivate worldly tastes in them, force them into godless society, indulge and foster the love of fashion, send them to dancing schools, take them to the opera and theatre, and thus nurture a keen relish for irreligious pursuits?"

"Yes; they must have some amusement; their companions all do the same, and we want them to be in the best society."

"Well," I said, "now, look at the matter in the light in which you yourself have put it. You are a professing Christian and want your children to be the same. Yet you do nothing to make them such. You give them no religious counsel. You set them no religious example. You exercise no religious care over them—let them (those you are appointed to lead and mould) go where they please, read what they please, associate with whom they please. You foster their natural pride and vanity by indulging their worldly taste. You impose no restraint, no self-denial. You educate them in the belief that the highest success in life is to move in good society, which means fashionable society, irrespective of its morality. You give them no character training. You use no plastic power to shape them after the Divine pattern, and yet you are