

## FAMILY RELIGION.

Rev. S. D. McConnell, D.D.

The most enthusiastic Sunday-school worker will admit, I think, that if the children in every household were taught at home "those things that a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health," the whole Sunday-school might well be abandoned. It has been often charged against the Sunday-school that it operated to lift the responsibility off the parents for the religious training of their children. No doubt, in some cases, it does so; but then, in other cases, it does the very opposite; and whether it is good or bad, upon the whole it has secured a place for itself in religious economy which nothing at present in sight can fill. But, for this very reason, I think it is well to call attention to the quite unequalled importance of family religion.

Among Anglo-Saxon folk the family has always been the basis of everything. It is the unit of the State, and has always, since the race became Christian, been clearly recognized in the economy of religion. Among Latin races this is not so. There the individuals and the State are the only personalities considered. With them "households" do not count in politics, and "family prayers" have not been an institution in religion. The Latin Church-like the Latin State, deals with individuals alone and does not encourage family religion.

It is within the memory of many still living when family worship and grace before meal was the custom in nearly every Christian household. It is not so now. Why? And can the custom be restored? I am fully persuaded that if the Church should set herself deliberately and determinedly to restore this old Anglican custom she could do so, and that in doing so she would do more good than can be done by her along any other line.

It is difficult to estimate the power for good which regular family worship a household is. In the first place it guarantees the integrity of its head. A man is not likely to go from reading prayers to his office and cheat. He may do so, of course but the sense of incongruity alone will largely restrain him. It connects the family together as nothing else can. A husband and wife who kneel every morning with their children about them are never found in the divorce court. The custom unobtrusively maintains discipline in the household; for the constant recognition of God brings with it the sense of order. Where God's blessing is asked upon the spread table there is not likely to be either gluttony or wine-bibbing.

Why has the custom so largely passed away? Various causes have tended to it. One of the chief has been the non-liturgical custom of religious worship in America. Many a son who was accustomed to family prayers in his father's house does not gather his own children for prayers because he does not feel himself to be as "gifted" as his father was. If he had been accustomed to some

simple form he could and would have used it. Another thing which has operated to the same end has been the wonderful breaking up of family life in America. Sons and daughters live and work away from home; families and individuals live in boarding-houses and hotels. But this is passing away, and as the country becomes old, family life becomes more stable. I may venture to say also that Church life has been a hindrance. Where individuals are exhorted to too frequent services, where they get the impression that their whole religious life is to be a Church life, they gradually lose the idea of family piety.

How can it be cured?

First, by every priest making a special point that every head of a family whom he presents for confirmation shall then and there promise that he will at once set up and maintain family worship. Second, that when he marries a Christian man he will try to secure a promise that he and his bride shall say their prayers together and aloud every morning. Third, by diligently putting into the hands of heads of families some plain, simple form of grace and family prayer. There is no lack of such manuals. Many of them are excellent. Give the newly confirmed man one. It will produce far better results both for him and for the Church than will a "Communicant's Manual" or a "Companion to the Altar." Let Bible-class teachers urge this duty upon their students, and make the way easy for them to perform it by putting a form in each one's hands, and secure from him or her a promise that he or she will use it, not "some time," but to-morrow morning while the family, having finished their morning meal, are still sitting around the breakfast-table. *American Church S.S. Magazine.*

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