

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE MOTHER'S KNEE.

BY THE REV. JAMES A. M. DILSON, M.A.

The one truly and enduringly sacred spot on earth is the mother's knee. More sweet and tender memories, that moisten the eye, and gladden the heart, and regulate the life, cluster about it than any other spot, however dear and holy. That is the dearest and holiest of them all. It abides forever, like the Church of God, the symbol of preaching and prayer and discipline; the symbol of man's spiritual relations and of his soul's necessities. It is his first house of God, where he is taught divine things, where the revelation of the unseen first steals in upon his heart; it is his first oratory, where he is instructed how to draw near to God, where he learns the prayers that he never forgets, and that never cease to charm him with their beautiful simplicity and loving directness; it is his first school, where he is made subject to another will, that learning to obey he may be fit to rule. Hallowed spot! fountain of untold blessings for the life of man.

Usually it is first of all a place of prayer. There the lisping lips learn to lift the heart to God, and the golden chain is forged that ever after is to bind the being to the Unseen;—a chain that holds even in the greatest stress of weather;—a chain charged with unspeakable good to the soul. John Randolph, of Roanoke, tells us that at one time he might have become a French infidel but for the memory of his mother's hand upon his head as he knelt at her side to repeat after her the Lord's Prayer. Francis Ridley Havergal in her brief autobiographical notes, gives unmistakable evidence of her pious mother's training. When recording what she remembered of her soul-life after she was six years of age, she says: "One sort of habit I got into in a steady way, which was persevered in with more or less fervour according to the particular fit in which I might be. Every Sunday afternoon I went alone into a little front room (at Henwick) over the hall, and there used to read a chapter in the New Testament, and then knelt down and prayed for a few minutes, after which I usually felt soothed and less naughty." Her mother once said to her: "Dear child, you have your own bedroom now, it ought to be a little Bethel." When she was twelve years old her mother taught her this wise and beautiful prayer: "*Prepare me for all that Thou art preparing for me.*" And a few weeks before her own death she referred to this, saying: "The words mamma taught me in 1838 have been a life prayer with me." And so it ever is with all devout and thoughtful ones.

The mother's knee is also the place of instruction, instruction of all kinds that bears upon the practical side of life; instruction in righteousness. Often it is poured into apparently heedless ears, but being heard it is remembered, and acted upon with heroic bravery. The Rev. Newman Hall says: "The very first thing that I can remember is sitting on my mother's knee and learning from her lips that glorious declaration, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' I can still feel her hand on my head, and see her earnest face, and hear the music of her sweet voice. The great truth which was so precious to herself, she desired her children to know, at least in words, from their earliest days." Mr. Hall, in giving his experience of the truth, says, "How dear that text has been to me!" It moulded his life. But a mother's training goes all round the circle of the soul's wants, and touches upon all that the life will need in its world-faring journey.

What careful training the following incident shows. "One day in London, when Thomas Carlyle was within a few months of eighty, he was walking in company with an American stranger who had that day called to see him. They approached a street crossing. When half-way over Carlyle suddenly stopped, and stooping down kicked something out of the mud, at the risk of being run over by one of the many carriages that were rushing past. With his bare hands he brushed the mud off, and placed the white substance in a clean spot on the curb-stone. 'That,' said he, in a tone as sweet and in words as beautiful as his companion had ever heard, 'is only a crust of bread. Yet I was taught by mother never to waste, and above all bread, more precious than gold, the substance that is the same to the body that the mind is to the soul. I am sure the hungry sparrows or a hungry dog will get

nourishment from that bit of bread.' Ah! consider well the fact that lies beneath that. Carlyle about eighty years old, and his mother's early teaching is guiding him and controlling him still! It has not faded out of sight; it is as fresh and as clear in the heart as the day it was spoken, only far more deeply felt and realized. The teaching has passed out of the bare word into a living puissant principle. It has in the deepest sense become life.

The mother's knee is also the place of correction. This is, though the last, not the least important of its functions. It symbolizes discipline. And happy is the man who has the great gift of a mother who knows when to use the rod. Thomas Carlyle's aphorism shall stand much testing, "No able man ever had a fool for a mother." The wisdom of the mother is seen in her discipline; loving, tender, but firm and forceful, it ever is. It is strong and steady. As the quaint Thomas Fuller puts it, "Our wise parent both instructs his children in piety, and with correction blasts the first buds of profaneness in them. *He that will not use the rod on his child, his child shall be used as a rod on him.*" And what does one wiser than Thomas Fuller say on this point? "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him sometimes." "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." That is God's teaching, and many parents are wise enough to act consistently on it; and always with the best results. Boswell tells us that once, when Johnson saw some young ladies, in Lincolnshire, who were remarkably well-behaved, owing to their mother's strict discipline and severe correction, he exclaimed, in one of Shakespeare's lines a little varied,

"Rod, I will honour thee for this thy duty."

Consider it how we may, it is at the mother's knee that the foundation stones of all beautiful, noble, worthy and enduring character are laid, in words and acts of no great importance, apparently, at the time; yet, by the steady enforcement and reiteration of them, they are remembered, regarded, and acted upon, to the enriching of the life with qualities that are every way desirable. The culture that the children need is mostly received here. And, therefore, no attention, no painstaking, no denial of one's own feeling, is too great to attain the end that all should earnestly seek—namely, a lovely Christian character in the children.

SANCTIFY THE IMAGINATION.

The favourite food of the imagination is a work of romance. . . . Now what is a work of romance? It is a fictitious narrative composed by abstraction; a process of the author's mind, from what really occurs.

Human life, if it be considered in its ordinary course, is a dull and plodding routine of occupations and amusements, whose uniformity is the rule, while the passages of interest constitute the exception. But there is in all, even in its humblest forms, an under-song of poetry, which makes itself heard to those who listen for it, as it were from a distance, just as the sound of chiming bells, which the ear detects as untrue when close beneath the bell turret, is mellowed into harmony, if it comes to us across wooded copse and sheets of water and green pasture land.

Now the province of romance is to abstract from human life this its poetical element, to seize its salient points of character and incident, to omit and abridge all the mechanical and routine passages intervening between the salient points, and to weave these points into an artificial plot. The result is a representation of life which, if not untrue in the sense of unnatural, is at least such as never was, and never will be realized. And accordingly, our feeling in turning again to our daily pursuits, after the perusal of such works, is one of disappointment. It is as if we woke from a beautiful and pleasant dream, to grapple once more with the mechanical routine of our ordinary occupations.

Such is the species of gratification . . . the imaginative faculty seeks for itself. But what is the gratification which God provides for it in His Word?

In the Book of Revelation He opens to us the sublimities of a higher sphere of existence—a sphere where sin and sorrow are unknown—a sphere of whose glories and blessedness our conceptions will always fall short, exalt them how we may. One takes up the Book, and there reads of an Awful Form sealed on the throne which has been prepared from everlasting; . . . of twenty-four elders clothed in white raiment,

who cast down their golden crowns before the firmamental sea of crystal, above which the throne is set: of a great multitude of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, . . . who stand before the throne with palms . . . in their hands; of jubilant harpers . . . a new heaven and a new earth . . .

And what is the central figure around which all this blessedness and this glory is grouped? It is the figure of Him who once trod upon this earth, veiling the glories of His Godhead beneath the form of a servant, and under a shroud of flesh and blood.

But He is no longer the Man of Sorrows and unacquainted with grief. He is no longer compassed about with the infirmities which flesh is heir to; no longer pillows his shelterless head upon the rugged mountain steep, nor sits in languor and exhaustion upon Jacob's well. He hath put off his work-day apparel, and hath arrayed Himself in His robes of royalty. And a glimpse of Him in His array is afforded to us by the inspired seer in Patmos. . . . Here we have truth, pure truth, outstripping fiction, even when fiction is invested in her most glowing colours and soars upon her sublimest wing. . . . Can we doubt that the glories of the spiritual world, when made to pass before the eyes of a mind which is disciplined by the Spirit of God, will have the blessed effect of purifying the imaginative faculty; yea, of strengthening its wing and rendering it competent to higher flights.—Goulburn.

BROTHER BROWN AND HIS GIFTS.

It was on that day of "hard, pitiless begging"—they called it missionary day.

Brother B. was there. Brother Brown had spoken of his conversion in the early morning. The tears, great crystal drops, had coursed down his furrowed cheeks as he recounted his experience for "nigh to forty years," how the Lord had dealt with him graciously, and given him very many blessings, "for which," he said, "I trust I am truly thankful."

And then, wiping away the tears with his red silk handkerchief, he remarked that all he had in this world he owed to religion, that he was trying "in his poor weak way" to serve the Lord, and he hoped he would finally meet his dear brothers and sisters in heaven.

"God bless you, brother Brown," said the good leader.

"He's an old skinflint," said crazy Bill, who sat in a back seat, in a hoarse whisper as he shook his head behind a broad-shouldered sinner in the direction of brother Brown.

Most of the congregation heard him, but happily brother Brown was a little deaf on that side, and so he was spared the annoyance of knowing that anything unusual had occurred.

Brother Brown had prayed loudly that the Lord would send salvation to a church which, he told the Lord, was in a dead condition; that he would break the sinner's heart and revive his brethren who were growing so cold he hadn't heard them speak in meeting for six months—and then, said he, in great earnestness, shaking the whole church with his knees pounding upon the floor and frightening the children who were just coming in, with his thunderous tones, "O Lord, give our ministers more religion!—real, old-fashioned religion."

Now the public service had begun, and brother Brown was in his own pew. He never missed the preaching, though it wasn't what used to be, he often said with a sigh.

The preacher had got to his "secondly," and brother Brown, who had been nodding, was now asleep.

He dreamed; and the shadows that came and went on his wrinkled face told plainly that no ordinary visions were fitting through his brain.

He was suddenly in the vestibule of Heaven—he could hear the music distinctly—and when he first appeared, the door being slightly ajar, he obtained a glimpse of its glories.

He was going right in, but he heard a stern voice near by, which said, "Stop, mortal, only the just can enter here."

At first he was indignant, but his tongue seemed tied and a strange spell came over him; his heart and pulse were almost still.

"On what is your hope based?" said the apparition before him.

"I was a Christian down in the world for forty years," said brother Brown.

"That avails you nothing!" was the solemn answer. "Have you no other plea?"