

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

OUR CHILDREN.

What a change from the atmosphere of our Church Courts, so often charged with noxious vapours, to that of the nursery! And yet what subtle invisible lines of connection run between the two. For every bearded man in yonder Assembly was once a child, with eyes wide open upon the wonderland of life, and from these nurseries shall come the professors, moderators, ministers and elders of the future Church. What a pity the Church sets so little value on them, and oftentimes does little else than sprinkle them with a little cold water, and leave them to shift for themselves till they come in riper years, if they ever come at all, to seek admission into her membership! Our theory is good, our practice bad. Our theory is that the children of believing parents are *de jure* and *de facto* members of the Church. We rugged Calvinists, so often misrepresented and abused, take a larger and more loving view of the relationship of our children to Christ and His Church than perhaps any other denomination. That the Church is made up of believers and their children is a definition of it which most of our co-religionists in this country either repudiate or fail practically to realize. Most of them will admit that regeneration may take place so soon that all memory of it is obliterated, or so imperceptibly that memory of it is impossible. Practically, however, in most evangelical circles, children are looked upon simply as possible subjects of regeneration when they come to riper years. And if the English popular mind were severely logical, which it is not, there should be considerable anxiety as to the fate of those who die in infancy. Happily for English parents the English mind is not severely logical, and they quietly assume that if a child die in infancy it is all safe, whereas if it live it can have no position as a member of Christ's Church till at some period, not exactly determined, it has consciously undergone a saving change. Besides in all sections of English society there is a lingering faith in the saving efficacy of baptism, which helps to quiet apprehensions about the dead children, while it fails apparently to excite any proper anxiety about those who survive. A great deal has been said about the phrase "elect infants" in the tenth chapter of our Confession, and possibly some of our forefathers entertained what seem to us unreasonable fears that some infants might not be of this elect. Such fears, we believe, are a thing of the past. Dr. Anderson, Geo. Gilfillan (in a noble sermon on this subject), and Logan, all of them sons of the U. P. Church, have done noble service in this matter. It seems to be a universal conviction among Presbyterians that all children dying in infancy are safe, and therefore in the number of the elect, being "regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth." As to children who survive, our theory is that they are *members of the Church*.

It would not be proper in a paper of this kind to enter into the reasons for holding this doctrine. Assume that it is the doctrine of the Church, and what follows? This, that in the Church of the future, the ideal Church of which we all have glimpses now and then, there will be no conversions among the children of the Church, or very few. The child is a member of the Church. It is part of his birthright. He becomes a subject of believing prayer from the first moment of his existence. In recognition of that membership baptism is administered, and he is solemnly dedicated to God. The parents, sensible of the influence of matter upon spirit, and attributing no magical virtue to the baptismal water, or to prayer, unless means also are used, attend to the health of his soul as much as to that of his body. Every attention is also paid to his education and to his recreations. As he grows up the father becomes his father confessor, discharging naturally and by divine appointment those duties which the Catholic parent hands over to the priest, and which the Protestant too frequently neglects altogether. Thus many fearful habits are prevented or killed in the bud. In the Church of the future we expect to find parents bestowing some of that attention upon the physical conditions of child life which is now bestowed mainly upon young colts and dogs. Such a child grows up with no soul-consuming dread of God in his heart, no sense of living in a spiritual world far remote from that in which his parents and elders live.

Is he not a Christian child? Does he not live within the charmed circle of Church life? He has been taught what sin is, what the sins of childhood too often are, but also how to get rid of them. Nay, he was taught all about redeeming love first, and his first act of conscious sin was the sin of a son, was rebellion against a heavenly Father, not that of a little heathen wretch who knows of no covenant relationship between himself and an angry God. The thought of Jesus is entwined with the earliest memories of His mother, stands out the first distinct image in the dim dawn of consciousness. Does a pained expression appear on her face, it is followed by the thought of a pained, not an *angry*, look on His. The child is already a believer, as a believer he sins, as a believer he is forgiven—unless any one will be so daring as to affirm that a child cannot believe, and cannot be forgiven. And so, imperceptibly, showers of divine influence fall upon the young heart.

He grows up a happy child, sinful yet happy, for can he have the painful experiences of a reprobate adult or even of an adult Christian? He is a believer, and he is happy enjoying everything in this glorious world. He knows that there are dark places he must not enter and dark deeds he must not even name, but home is such a happy place that these places and deeds fill him with unutterable dread. Home is paradise; all that would exclude him from home must be hell. Nor has the Church been unmindful of him in the meantime. His father, being priest at home, has not handed him over to the care of the average Sunday school teacher or sent him to a children's service with its dreary platitudes, most childish and yet most unchildlike in many cases. He has given him a religious training at home. But the lad has learned to love the Church and the minister. The sermon often flies over his head, and why not? Does not the conversation of his seniors often do so, and yet the lad likes to listen. But there is the singing, reading and prayer. The habit is formed of attending church as one having a right to be there. Then comes the time of decision which synchronizes with opening manhood, not a time of startled thought upon dread and unfamiliar realities, but a spiritual coming of age, and he takes his place at the communion table with a joy and a pride, as of some young patriot now enrolled in his country's armies, now privileged with a voice in her affairs.

We have been drawing not a fancy picture as some may think, but an ideal picture, one realized sometimes in the present day, and destined to be realized increasingly in the future. And we would ask seriously, does our practice correspond with our creed? Are not many parents in our Church hoping that their children may somehow or other be converted in after life instead of making every effort to secure their regeneration in childhood. If the doctor told them that their child had a tendency to consumption they would seek to check the disease by cod liver oil, fresh air, exercise, and every other expedient that parental anxiety can dictate. What would be the thought of the parent who should neglect the disease till the child was fourteen, and take it then to the physician to be cured? And not less foolish and wicked are those parents who would substitute the perilous expedient of a conversion, brought about by violent appeals to the emotional nature in boyhood or youth, for the gentle growth in piety which we have described.

All that we have said is quite consistent with the doctrine of original sin. Of course the taint is there in the brightest and the best. But the mother of a diseased child does not terrify it by perpetually dwelling on the disease; she does all that loving care and medical skill can do to expel it from the system. And we believe in election. We are Calvinists. With no savage glee, with infinite sorrow rather, we recognize the mysterious fact that all these means may fail, and the Esau nature be developed, and the child of perdition emerge from the bosom of a Christian family. But should that hinder us from believing in the promises of God which are to us and to our children? If we believe that in most cases children who are well fed, well trained, and developed, will grow up to be healthy men and women, shall we abandon all faith in the ordinary sequences of nature when we enter the spiritual sphere? Does it make no difference, does it count for nothing in most cases, that a child is a believer's child; and if it does not, whose blame is it? Is it the blame of the parents or of the children? And if it is admitted that being the child of a believer does count for something in many cases, why not use every

effort so that it may count for something in every case? Here it seems to us that our Church has a great advantage over others that might be named. In a country where the churches are vibrating between the hot fit of a revival and the cold fit of a reaction from it, seeking to do in a week or two of spasmodic effort what ought to be the growth of years, what permanent results might we not achieve, and what a happy influence might we not exert upon our neighbours, if we could only carry out our theory about baptism and Church membership to its legitimate issue. We hear a great deal about the success of the methods so popular among our Nonconformist neighbours. We don't hear much about the ghastly failures, about those who are galvanized into a semblance of spiritual life only to fall back again into a worse kind of spiritual death. It is to be feared that in many of our churches the young are no longer looked upon as the children of the covenant. No wonder many Presbyterians think so little of baptism when they realize so little what it means both for children and parents. If our ministers baptize the children of those who are not professing Christians, and if, instead of seeking to train up the children as Christians in the Christian faith, they bring some ignorant evangelist now and then into their churches to convert the young people, they need not say much about the Church of the future. It will be a poor Church. We shall have plenty of that shrill metallic sort of piety so common in this country, plenty of materialistic devotion and sensational preaching, but very little of that manly, undemonstrative, yet thoroughly heartfelt religion, which has made Presbyterianism a power in the past. To those who wish our cause to prosper in England we would say, "Take care of the children, the men and women will take care of themselves." Simply to work out our own creed, and follow the example of our greatest leaders and thinkers in the past, will save us from that breach between religion and culture, between sacred and secular life, from that vulgarizing of the spiritual, and that attempt at spiritualizing the vulgar, which is so characteristic of a great deal of the Church life which we see around us.—*London Weekly Review*.

GET NEARER.

Some people imagine that Sinai is extinct. Certain pulpits seem to be pitched so far away from the sublime mountain that its august peak is no longer visible, and its righteous thunders against sin are no longer audible. With this school of rose-water ministers the theology of law is voted obsolete and barbarous; the world is to be tamed and sweetened and sanctified entirely by a theology of love. They preach a one-sided God—all mercy and no justice—with one-half of His glorious attributes put under eclipse. Even sinners are not to be warned, with tears and entreaties, to flee from the wrath to come. They are to be coaxed into holiness by a magical process which makes nothing of repentance, and simply requires a "faith" which costs no more labour than the snap of a finger. This shallow system may produce long rolls of converts, but it does not produce solid, subsoiled Christians.—*Dr. Cuyler*.

BELIEF IN ONE'S WORK.

Successful workers will generally be found to be those who believe the most intensely. Even in speech, the effectiveness of an utterance may often be measured by the force of the conviction that prompted it. Much more is it true of work, that its results depend largely upon the faith with which we pursue it. So of a man's moral convictions; if they are feeble, his moral life will be feeble also. If he utters a truth, it will carry the impression that he is in some doubt about it; and even the most palpable truism might be taken from his lips at a discount.

Apply the principle to a man in business. Let him believe thoroughly in his work, that it is honourable and may be made profitable, and he will be likely to pursue it more enthusiastically and earnestly, and if there are either dollars or honours in it he will be pretty sure to gain them. A brickmaker with a firm conviction that there is a fortune in his bank of clay would be much more likely to realize it than the owner of a gold mine who doubted the success of working it.

Only let one's convictions be strong enough to stand alone, and there need be few fears but they will make their way. Their intensity will overcome not only one's own doubts, but those of other people. They will laugh at clouds, and come bounding into