Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

PREFACE

Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modem Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, *of Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors' style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be wakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior," which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God's working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists' focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of "f" for "s" and "v" for "u" (and vice versa), the "thee's" and "thou's" of the seventeenth and eighteen centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward's "angry God." William Ellery Channing's debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong's celebration of (and challenge to) the "Anglo-Saxon" race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebearers and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.

Christian Nurture

Horace Bushnell

"And all thy children
shall be taught of the Lord;
and great shall be the peace
of thy children."
Isaiah 54:13

I

WHAT CHRISTIAN NURTURE IS

"Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."—*Ephesians*, vi. 4.

THERE is then some kind of nurture which is of the Lord, deriving a quality and a power from Him, and communicating the same. Being instituted by Him, it will of necessity have a method and a character peculiar to itself, or rather to Him. It will be the Lord's way of education, having aims appropriate to Him, and, if realized in its full intent, terminating in results impossible to be reached by any merely human method.

What then is the true idea of Christian or divine nurture, as distinguished from that which is not Christian? What is its aim? What its method of working? What its powers and instruments? What its contemplated results? Few questions have greater moment; and it is one of the pleasant signs of the times, that the subject involved is beginning to attract new interest, and excite a spirit of inquiry which heretofore has not prevailed in our churches.

In ordinary cases, the better and more instructive way of handling this subject, would be to go directly into the practical methods of parental discipline, and show by what modes of government and instruction we

may hope to realize the best results. But unhappily the public mind is preoccupied extensively by a view of the whole subject, which I must regard as a theoretical mistake, and one which will involve, as long as it continues, practical results systematically injurious. This mistaken view it is necessary, if possible, to remove. And accordingly what I have to say will take the form of an argument on the question thus put in issue; though I design to gather round the subject, as I proceed, as much of practical instruction as the mode of the argument will suffer. Assuming then the question above stated, What is the true idea of Christian education?—I answer in the following proposition, which it will be the aim of my argument to establish, viz:

That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.

In other words, the aim, effort, and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years. I do not affirm that every child may, in fact and without exception, be so trained that he certainly will grow up a Christian. The qualifications it may be necessary to add will be given in another place, where they can be stated more intelligibly.

This doctrine is not a novelty, now rashly and for the first time propounded, as some of you may be tempted to suppose. I shall show you, before I have done with the argument, that it is as old as the Christian church, and prevails extensively at the present day in other parts of the world. Neither let your own experience raise a prejudice against it. If you have endeavored to realize the very truth I here affirm, but find that your children do not exhibit the character you have looked for; if they seem to be intractable to religious influences, and sometimes to display an apparent aversion to the very subject of religion itself, you are not of course to conclude that the doctrine I here maintain is untrue or impracticable. You may be unreasonable in your expectations of your children.

Possibly, there may be seeds of holy principle in them, which you do not discover. A child acts out his present feelings, the feelings of the moment, without qualification or disguise. And how, many times, would all you appear, if you were to do the same? Will you expect of them to be better, and more constant and consistent, than yourselves; or will you rather expect them to be children, human children still, living a mixed life, trying out the good and evil of the world, and preparing, as older Christians do, when they have taken a lesson of sorrow and emptiness, to turn again to the true good?

Perhaps they will go through a rough mental struggle, at some future day, and seem, to others and to themselves, there to have entered on a Christian life.

And yet it may be true that there was still some root of right principle established in their childhood, which is here only quickened and developed, as when Christians of a mature age are revived in their piety, after a period of spiritual lethargy; for it is conceivable that regenerate character may exist, long before it is fully and formally developed.

But suppose there is really no trace or seed of holy principle in your children, has there been no fault of piety and constancy in your church? no want of Christian sensibility and love to God? no carnal spirit visible to them and to all, and imparting its noxious and poisonous quality to the Christian atmosphere in which they have had their nurture? For it is not for you alone to realize all that is included in the idea of Christian education. It belongs to the church of God, according to the degree of its social power over you and in you and around your children, to bear a part of the responsibility with you.

Then, again, have you nothing to blame in yourselves? no lack of faithfulness? no indiscretion of manner or of temper? no mistake of duty, which, with a better and more cultivated piety, you would have been able to avoid? Have you been so nearly even with your privilege and duty, that you can find no relief but to lay some charge upon God, or comfort yourselves in the conviction that he has appointed the failure you deplore? When God marks out a plan of education, or sets up an aim to direct its efforts, you will see, at once, that he could not base it on a want of piety in you, or

on any imperfections that flow from a want of piety. It must be a plan measured by Himself and the fullness of his own gracious intentions.

Besides, you must not assume that we, in this age, are the best Christians that have ever lived, or most likely to produce all the fruits of piety. An assumption so pleasing to our vanity is more easily made than verified, but vanity is the weakest as it is the cheapest of all arguments. We have some good points, in which we compare favorably with other Christians, and Christians of other times, but our style of piety is sadly deficient, in many respects, and that to such a degree that we have little cause for self-congratulation. With all our activity and boldness of movement, there is a certain hardness and rudeness, a want of sensibility to things that do not lie in action, which can not be too much deplored, or too soon rectified. We hold a piety of conquest rather than of love. A kind of public piety, that is strenuous and fiery on great occasions, but wants the beauty of holiness, wants constancy, singleness of aim, loveliness, purity, richness, blamelessness, and—if I may add another term not so immediately religious, but one that carries, by association, a thousand religious qualities—wants domesticity of character; wants them, I mean, not as compared with the perfect standard of Christ, but as compared with other examples of piety that have been given in former times, and others that are given now.

For some reason, we do not make a Christian atmosphere about us—do not produce the conviction that we

are living unto God. There is a marvelous want of savor in our piety. It is a flower of autumn, colored as highly as it need be to the eye, but destitute of fragrance. It is too much to hope that, with such an instrument, we can fulfill the true idea of Christian education. Any such hope were even presumptuous. At the same time, there is no so ready way of removing the deficiencies just described, as to recall our churches to their duties in domestic life; those humble, daily, hourly duties, where the spirit we breathe shall be a perpetual element of power and love, bathing the life of childhood.

Thus much it was necessary to say, for the removal of prejudices that are likely to rise up in your minds, and make you inaccessible to the arguments I may offer. Let all such prejudices be removed, or, if this be too much, let them, at least, be suspended till you have heard what I have to advance; for it can not be desired of you to believe any thing more than what is shown you by adequate proofs. Which also it is right to ask that you will receive, in a spirit of conviction, such as becomes our wretched and low attainments, and with a willingness to let God be exalted, though at the expense of some abasement in ourselves. In pursuing the argument, I shall—

I. Collect some considerations which occur to us, viewing the subject on the human side, and then—

II. Show how far and by what methods God has justified, on his part, the doctrine we maintain.

There is then, as the subject appears to us—

1. No absurdity in supposing that children are to grow up in Christ. On the other hand, if there is no absurdity, there is a very clear moral incongruity in setting up a contrary supposition, to be the aim of a system of Christian education. There could not be a worse or more baleful implication given to a child, than that he is to reject God and all holy principle, till he has come to a mature age. What authority have you from the Scriptures to tell your child, or, by any sign, to show him that you do not expect him truly to love and obey God, till after he has spent whole years in hatred and wrong? What authority to make him feel that he is the most unprivileged of all human beings, capable of sin, but incapable of repentance; old enough to resist all good, but too young to receive any good whatever? It is reasonable to suppose that you have some express authority for a lesson so manifestly cruel and hurtful, else you would shudder to give it. I ask you for the chapter and verse, out of which it is derived. Meantime, wherein would it be less incongruous for you to teach your child that he is to lie and steal, and go the whole round of the vices, and then, after he comes to mature age, reform his conduct by the rules of virtue? Perhaps you do not give your child to expect that he is to grow up in sin; you only expect that he will yourself. That is scarcely better: for that which is your expectation, will assuredly be his; and what is more, any attempt to maintain a discipline at war with your own secret expectations, will only make a hollow and

worthless figment of that which should be an open, earnest reality. You will never practically aim at what you practically despair of, and if you do not practically aim to unite your child to God, you will aim at something less; that is, something unchristian, wrong, sinful.

But my child is a sinner, you will say; and how can I expect him to begin a right life, until God gives him a new heart? This is the common way of speaking, and I state the objection in its own phraseology, that it may recognize itself. Who then has told you that a child can not have the new heart of which you speak? Whence do you learn that if you live the life of Christ, before him and with him, the law of the Spirit of Life may not be such as to include and quicken him also? And why should it be thought incredible that there should be some really good principle awakened in the mind of a child? For this is all that is implied in a Christian state. The Christian is one who has simply *begun* to love what is good for its own sake, and why should it be thought impossible for a child to have this love begotten in him? Take any scheme of depravity you please, there is yet nothing in it to forbid the possibility that a child should be led, in his first moral act, to cleave unto what is good and right, any more than in the first of his twentieth year. He is, in that case, only a child converted to good, leading a mixed life as all Christians do. The good in him goes into combat with the evil, and holds a qualified sovereignty. And why may not this internal conflict of goodness cover the whole life from its dawn, as well as any part of it?

And what more appropriate to the doctrine of spiritual influence itself, than to believe that as the Spirit of Jehovah fills all the worlds of matter, and holds a presence of power and government in all objects, so all human souls, the infantile as well as the adult, have a nurture of the Spirit appropriate to their age and their wants? What opinion is more essentially monstrous, in fact, than that which regards the Holy Spirit as having no agency in the immature souls of children who are growing up, helpless and unconscious, into the perils of time?

2. It is to be expected that Christian education will radically differ from that which is not Christian. Now, it is the very character and mark of all unchristian education, that it brings up the child for future conversion. No effort is made, save to form a habit of outward virtue, and, if God please to convert the family to something higher and better, after they come to the age of maturity, it is well. Is then Christian education, or the nurture of the Lord, no way different from this? Or is it rather to be supposed that it will have a higher aim and a more sacred character?

And, since it is the distinction of Christian parents, that they are themselves in the nurture of the Lord, since Christ and the Divine Love, communicated through him, are become the food of their life, what, will they so naturally seek as to have their children partakers with them, heirs together with them, in the grace of life? I am well aware of the common impression that Christian education is sufficiently distinguished by the endeavor

of Christian parents to teach their children the lessons of Scripture history, and the doctrines or dogmas of Scripture theology. But if they are given to understand, at the same time, that these lessons can be expected to produce no fruit till they are come to a mature age—that they are to grow up still in the same character as other children do, who have no such instruction—what is this but to enforce the practical rejection of all the lessons taught them? And which, in truth, is better for them, to grow up in sin under Scripture light, with a heart hardened by so many religious lessons; or to grow up in sin, unvexed and unannoyed by the wearisome drill of lectures that only discourage all practical benefit? Which is better, to be piously brought up in sin, or to be allowed quietly to vegetate in it?

These are questions that I know not how to decide; but the doubt in which they leave us will at least suffice to show that Christian education has, in this view, no such eminent advantages over that which is unchristian, as to raise any broad and dignified distinction between them. We certainly know that much of what is called Christian nurture, only serves to make the subject of religion odious, and that, as nearly as we can discover, in exact proportion to the amount of religious teaching received. And no small share of the difficulty to be overcome afterwards, in the struggle of conversion, is created in just this way.

On the other hand, you will hear, for example, of cases like the following: A young man, correctly but

not religiously brought up, light and gay in his manners, and thoughtless hitherto in regard to any thing of a serious nature, happens accidentally one Sunday, while his friends are gone to ride, to take down a book on the evidences of Christianity. His eye, floating over one of the pages, becomes fixed, and he is surprised to find his feelings flowing out strangely into its holy truths. He is conscious of no struggle of hostility, but a new joy dawns in his being. Henceforth, to the end of a long and useful life, he is a Christian man. The love into which he was surprised continues to flow, and he is remarkable, in the churches, all his life long, as one of the most beautiful, healthful, and dignified examples of Christian piety. Now, a very little miseducation, called Christian, discouraging the piety it teaches, and making enmity itself a necessary ingredient in the struggle of conversion, conversion no reality without a struggle, might have sufficed to close the mind of this man against every thought of religion to the end of life.

Such facts (for the case above given is a fact and not a fancy) compel us to suspect the value of much that is called Christian education. They suggest the possibility also that Christian piety should begin in other and milder forms of exercise, than those which commonly distinguish the conversion of adults; that Christ himself, by that renewing Spirit who can sanctify from the womb, should be practically infused into the childish mind; in other words, that the house, having a domestic Spirit of grace dwelling in it, should become

the church of childhood, the table and hearth a holy rite, and life an element of saving power. Something is wanted that is better than teaching, something that transcends mere effort and will-work—the loveliness of a good life, the repose of faith, the confidence of righteous expectation, the sacred and cheerful liberty of the Spirit—all glowing about the young soul, as a warm and genial nurture, and forming in it, by methods that are silent and imperceptible, a spirit of duty and religious obedience to God. This only is Christian nurture, the nurture of the Lord.

3. It is a fact that all Christian parents would like to see their children grow up in piety; and the better Christians they are, the more earnestly they desire it; and, the more lovely and constant the Christian spirit they manifest, the more likely it is, in general, that their children will early display the Christian character. This is current opinion. But why should a Christian parent, the deeper his piety and the more closely he is drawn to God, be led to desire, the more earnestly, what, in God's view, is even absurd or impossible? And, if it be generally seen that the children of such are more likely to become Christians early, what forbids the hope that, if they were riper still in their piety, living a more single and Christ-like life, and more cultivated in their views of family nurture, they might see their children grow up always in piety towards God? Or, if they may not always see it as clearly as they desire, might they not still be able to implant some holy principle, which shall be the seed of a Christian character

in their children, though not developed fully and visibly till a later period in life?

4. Assuming the corruption of human nature, when should we think it wisest to undertake or expect a remedy? When evil is young and pliant to good, or when it is confirmed by years of sinful habit? And when, in fact, is the human heart found to be so ductile to the motives of religion, as in the simple, ingenuous age of childhood? How easy is it then, as compared with the stubbornness of adult years, to make all wrong seem odious, all good lovely and desirable. If not discouraged by some ill-temper which bruises all the gentle sensibilities, or repelled by some technical view of religious character which puts it beyond his age, how ready is the child to be taken by good, as it were beforehand, and yield his ductile nature to the truth and Spirit of God, and to a fixed prejudice against all that God forbids.

He can not understand, of course, in the earliest stage of childhood, the philosophy of religion as a renovated experience, and that is not the form of the first lessons he is to receive. He is not to be told that he must have a new heart and exercise faith in Christ's atonement. We are to understand, that a right spirit may be virtually exercised in children, when, as yet, it is not intellectually received, or as a form of doctrine. Thus, if they are put upon an effort to be good, connecting the fact that God desires it and will help them in the endeavor, that is all which, in a very early age, they can receive, and that includes every thing—re-

pentance, love, duty, dependence, faith. Nay, the operative truth necessary to a new life, may possibly be communicated through and from the parent, being revealed in his looks, manners, and ways of life, before they are of an age to understand the teaching of words; for the Christian scheme, the gospel, is really wrapped up in the life of every Christian parent, and beams out from him as a living epistle, before it escapes from the lips, or is taught in words. And the Spirit of truth may as well make this living truth effectual, as the preaching of the gospel itself.

Never is it too early for good to be communicated. Infancy and childhood are the ages most pliant to good. And who can think it necessary that the plastic nature of childhood must first be hardened into stone, and stiffened into enmity towards God and all duty, before it can become a candidate for Christian character! There could not be a more unnecessary mistake, and it is as unnatural and pernicious, I fear, as it is unnecessary.

There are many who assume the radical goodness of human nature, and the work of Christian education is, in their view, only to educate or educe the good that is in us. Let no one be disturbed by the suspicion of a coincidence between what I have here said and such a theory. The natural pravity of man is plainly asserted in the Scriptures, and, if it were not, the familiar laws of physiology would require us to believe, what amounts to the same thing. And if neither Scripture nor physiology taught us the doctrine, if the child was born as clear of natural prejudice or damage, as Adam before his sin,

spiritual education, or, what is the same, probation, that which trains a being for a stable, intelligent virtue hereafter, would still involve an experiment of evil, therefore a fall and a bondage under the laws of evil; so that, view the matter as we will, there is no so unreasonable assumption, none so wide of all just philosophy, as that which proposes to form a child to virtue, by simply educing or drawing out what is in him.

The growth of Christian virtue is no vegetable process, no mere onward development. It involves a struggle with evil, a fall and a rescue. The soul becomes established in holy virtue, as a free exercise, only as it is passed round the corner of fall and redemption, ascending thus unto God through a double experience, in which it learns the bitterness of evil and the worth of good, fighting its way out of one, and achieving the other as a victory. The child, therefore, may as well begin life under a law of hereditary damage, as to plunge himself into evil by his own experiment, which he will as naturally do from the simple impulse of curiosity, or the instinct of knowledge, as from any noxious quality in his mold derived by descent. For it is not sin which he derives from his parents; at least, not sin in any sense which imports blame, but only some prejudice to the perfect harmony of this mold, some kind of pravity or obliquity which inclines him to evil. These suggestions are offered, not as necessary to be received in every particular, but simply to show that the scheme of education proposed, is not to be identified with another, which assumes the radical goodness of human

nature, and according to which, if it be true, Christian education is insignificant.

5. It is implied in all our religious philosophy, that if a child ever does any thing in a right spirit, ever loves any thing because it is good and right, it involves the dawn of a new life. This we can not deny or doubt, without bringing in question our whole scheme of doctrine. Is it then incredible that some really good feeling should be called into exercise in a child? In all the discipline of the house, quickened as it should be by the Spirit of God, is it true that he can never once be brought to submit to parental authority lovingly and because it is right? Must we even hold the absurdity of the scripture council—"Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right?" When we speak thus of a love for what is right and good, we must of course discriminate between the mere excitement of a natural sensibility to pleasure in the contemplation of what is good (of which the worst minds are more or less capable,) and a practicable subordination of the soul to its power, a practicable embrace of its law. The child must not only be touched with some gentle emotions toward what is right, but he must love it with a fixed love, love it for the sake of its principle, receive it it as a vital and formative power.

Nor is there any age, which offers itself to God's truth and love, and to that Quickening Spirit whence all good proceeds, with so much of ductile feeling and susceptibilities so tender. The child is under parental authority too for the very purpose, it would seem, of having the otherwise abstract principle of all duty impersonated in his parents, and thus brought home to his practical embrace; so that, learning to obey his parents in the Lord, because it is right, he may thus receive, before he can receive it intellectually, the principle of all piety and holy obedience. And when he is brought to exercise a spirit of true and loving submission to the good law of his parents, what will you see, many times, but a look of childish joy, and a happy sweetness of manner, and a ready delight in authority, as like to all the demonstrations of Christian experience, as any thing childish can be to what is mature?

6. Children have been so trained as never to remember the time when they began to be religious. Baxter was, at one time, greatly troubled concerning himself, because he could recollect no time when there was a gracious change in his character. But he discovered, at length, that "education is as properly a means of grace as preaching," and thus found the sweeter comfort in his love to God, that he learned to love him so early. The European churches, generally, regard Christian piety more as a habit of life, formed under the training of childhood, and less as a marked spiritual change in experience. In Germany, for example, the church includes all the people, and it is remarkable that, under a scheme so loose, and with so much of pernicious error taught in the pulpit, there is yet so much of deep religious feeling, so much of lovely and simple character, and a savor of Christian piety so generally prevalent in the community. So true is this, that the

German people are every day spoken of as a people religious by nature; no other way being observed of accounting for the strong religious bent they manifest. Whereas it is due, beyond any reasonable question, to the fact that children are placed under a form of treatment which expects them to be religious, and are not discouraged by the demand of an experience above their years.

Again, the Moravian Brethren, it is agreed by all, give as ripe and graceful an exhibition of piety, as any body of Christians living on the earth, and it is the radical distinction of their system that it rests its power on Christian education. They make their churches schools of holy nurture to childhood, and expect their children to grow up there, as plants in the house of the Lord. Accordingly it is affirmed that not one in ten of the members of that church, recollects any time when he began to be religious. Is it then incredible that what has been can be? Would it not be wiser and more modest, when facts are against us, to admit that there is certainly some bad error, either in our life, or in our doctrine, or in both, which it becomes us to amend?

Once more, if we narrowly examine the relation of parent and child, we shall not fail to discover something like a law of organic connection, as regards character, subsisting between them. Such a connection as makes it easy to believe, and natural to expect, that the faith of the one will be propagated in the other. Perhaps I should rather say, such a connection as induces the conviction that the character of one is actually included in that of the other, as a seed is formed in the capsule; and being there matured, by a nutriment derived from the stem, is gradually separated from it. It is a singular fact, that many believe substantially the same thing, in regard to evil character, but have no thought of any such possibility in regard to good. There has been much speculation, of late, as to whether a child is born in depravity, or whether the depraved character is superinduced afterwards. But, like many other great questions, it determines much less than is commonly supposed; for, according to the most proper view of the subject, a child is really not born till he emerges from the infantile state, and never before that time can he be said to receive a separate and properly individual nature.

The declarations of Scripture, and the laws of physiology, I have already intimated, compel the belief that a child's nature is somehow depravated by descent from parents, who are under the corrupting effects of sin. But this, taken as a question relating to the mere *punctum temporis*, or precise point of birth, is not a question of any so grave import as is generally supposed; for the child, after birth, is still within the matrix of the parental life, and will be, more or less, for many years. And the parental life will be flowing into him all that time, just as naturally, and by a law as truly organic, as when the sap of the trunk flows into a limb. We must not govern our thoughts, in such a matter, by our eyes; and because the physical separation has taken place, conclude that no organic relation remains. Even the

physical being of the child is dependent still for many months, in the matter of nutrition, on organic processes not in itself. Meantime, the mental being and character have scarcely begun to have a proper individual life. Will, in conuection with conscience, is the basis of personality, or individuality, and these exist as yet only in their rudimental type, as when the form of a seed is beginning to be unfolded at the root of a flower.

At first, the child is held as a mere passive lump in the arms, and he opens into conscious life under the soul of the parent, streaming into his eyes and ears, through the manners and tones of the nursery. The kind and degree of passivity are gradually changed as life advances. A little farther on it is observed that a smile wakens a smile; any kind of sentiment or passion, playing in the face of the parent, wakens a responsive sentiment or passion. Irritation irritates, a frown withers, love expands a look congenial to itself, and why not holy love? Next the ear is opened to the understanding of words, but what words the child shall hear, he can not choose, and has as little capacity to select the sentiments that are poured into his soul. Farther on, the parents begin to govern him by appeals to will, expressed in commands, and whatever their requirement may be, he can as little withstand it, as the violet can cool the scorching sun, or the tattered leaf can tame the hurricane. Next they appoint his school, choose his books, regulate his company, decide what form of religion, and what religious opinions he shall be taught, by taking him to a church of their own selection. In all

this, they infringe upon no right of the child, they only fulfill an office which belongs to them. Their will and character are designed to be the matrix of the child's will and character. Meantime, he approaches more and more closely, and by a gradual process, to the proper rank and responsibility of an individual creature, during all which process of separation, he is having their exercises and ways translated into him. Then, at last, he comes forth to act his part in such color of evil, and why not of good, as he has derived from them.

The tendency of all our modern speculations is to an extreme individualism, and we carry our doctrines of free will so far as to make little or nothing of organic laws; not observing that character may be, to a great extent, only the free development of exercises previously wrought in us, or extended to us, when other wills had us within their sphere. All the Baptist theories of religion are based in this error. They assume, as a first truth, that no such thing is possible as an organic connection of character, an assumption which is plainly refuted by what we see with our eyes, and, as I shall by and by show, by the declarations of Scripture. We have much to say also, in common with the Baptists, about the beginning of moral ageney, and we seem to fancy that there is some definite moment when a child becomes a moral agent, passing out of a condition where he is a moral nullity, and where no moral agency touches his being. Whereas he is rather to be regarded, at the first, as lying within the moral agency of the parent, and passing out, by degrees, through a course

of mixed agency, to a proper independency and self-possession. The supposition that he becomes, at some certain moment, a complete moral agent, which a moment before he was not, is clumsy, and has no agreement with observation. The separation is gradual. He is never, at any moment after birth, to be regarded as perfectly beyond the sphere of good and bad exercises; for the parent exercises himself in the child, playing his emotions and sentiments, and working a character in him, by virtue of an organic power.

And this is the very idea of Christian education, that it begins with nurture or cultivation. And the intention is that the Christian life and spirit of the parents, which are in and by the Spirit of God, shall flow into the mind of the child, to blend with his incipient and half-formed exercises; that they shall thus beget their own good within him—their thoughts, opinions, faith, and love, which are to become a little more, and yet a little more, his own separate exercise, but still the same in character. The contrary assumption, that virtue must be the product of separate and absolutely independent choice, is pure assumption. As regards the measure of personal merit and demerit, it is doubtless true that every subject of God is to be responsible only for what is his own. But virtue still is rather a *state* of being than an act or series of acts; and, if we look at the causes which induce or prepare such a state, the will of the person himself may have a part among these causes more or less important, and it works no absurdity to suppose that one may be even prepared to such a

state, by causes prior to his own will; so that, when he sets off to act for himself, his struggle and duty may be rather to sustain and perfect the state begun, than to produce a new one. Certain it is that we are never, at any age, so independent as to be wholly out of the reach of organic laws which affect our character.

All society is organic—the church, the state, the school, the family; and there is a spirit in each of these organisms, peculiar to itself, and more or less hostile, more or less favorable to religious character, and to some extent, at least, sovereign over the individual man. A very great share of the power in what is called a revival of religion, is organic power; nor is it any the less divine on that account. The child is only more within the power of organic laws than we all are. We possess only a mixed individuality all our life long. A pure, separate, individual man, living *wholly* within, and from himself, is a mere fiction. No such person ever existed, or ever can. I need not say that this view of an organic connection of character subsisting between parent and child, lays a basis for notions of Christian education, far different from those which now prevail, under the cover of a merely fictitious and mischievous individualism.

Perhaps it may be necessary to add, that, in the strong language I have used concerning the organic connection of character between the parent and the child, it is not designed to assert a power in the parent to renew the child, or that the child can be renewed by any agency of the Spirit less immediate, than that which renews the

parent himself. When a germ is formed on the stem of any plant, the formative instinct of the plant may be said in one view to produce it; but the same solar heat which quickens the plant, must quicken also the germ, and sustain the internal action of growth, by a common presence in both. So, if there be an organic power of character in the parent, such as that of which I have spoken, it is not a complete power in itself, but only such a power as demands the realizing presence of the Spirit of God, both in the parent and the child, to give it effect. As Paul said, "I have begotten you through the gospel," so may we say of the parent, who, having a living gospel enveloped in his life, brings it into organic connection with the soul of childhood. But the declaration excludes the necessity of a divine influence, not more in one case than in the other.

Such are some of the considerations that offer themselves, viewing our subject on the human side, or as it appears in the light of human evidence—all concurring to produce the conviction, that it is the only true idea of Christian education, that the child is to grow up in the life of the parent, and be a Christian in principle, from his earliest years.

I

WHEN AND WHERE THE NURTURE BEGINS

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also."—2 *Timothy*, i. 5.

THIS faith of Timothy, which is but another name for the grace of life in his character, the apostle speaks of here, it will be seen, as a kind of personal hereditament, or heir-loom in the family. He does not mean to say, as I understand him, that it is literally such, or in what sense, and how far, it is such. He only recognizes a godly parentage, doing godly things in him and for him, for one, two, three, or he knows not how many, generations back. He regards his young friend as born of godliness, nurtured and trained by godliness, and indulges a certain pleasant conviction that his present, full developed faith in Jesus, was a seed somehow planted in him by the believing motherhoods of the past, and began to live and grow in him, thus, long before he knew it himself, or others observed it in him. So by a short method, which includes and covers all, the apostle calls it his heir-loom; complimenting his godly motherhood in the figure, and testifying the greater confidence in his piety, that it was so near to being the inborn nobility of his Christian stock.

I use the text, accordingly, not to draw some definite conclusion or truth, from the evidently well understood indefiniteness of the terms of it, but simply to head a discussion of the question, *when and where, at what point, and how early, does the office of a genuine nurture begin?*

Having settled our conceptions of the scheme, or doctrinal import, of Christian nurture, finding what place it has, and is to have, in the Christian plan, we are come now to a matter farther in advance, and, in one view, more practical, viz: to a consideration of the modes and means, by which the true idea of a godly nurture may be realized in the training of families. And here it becomes our first endeavor to rectify, or expel a whole set of false impressions, that have grown up round the gate of responsibility itself, turning off, and pushing aside all due concern, till the time of greatest facility and advantage is quite gone by. The very common impression is that nothing is to be done for the religious character of children, till they are old enough to form religious judgments, put forth religious choices, take the meaning of the Christian truths, and perceive what is in them as related to the wants of sin, consciously felt and reflected on. There could not be a more sad or, in fact, more desolating mistake, in any matter, either of duty or of privilege. And it is the more wonderful, the closer in appearance to real fatuity, that it holds its ground so firmly, where all the tenderest pressures of affection might be expected to force it aside, and clear the field of its really cruel usurpations.

In discussing the question proposed, I should not properly cover the whole ground of it, and could not really be said to answer it, if I did not—

1. Bring into view the very important, but rather delicate fact, suggested or distinctly alluded to in the apostle's words, that there is even a kind of ante-natal nurture which must be taken note of, as having much to do with the religious preparations or inductive mercies of childhood. We are physiologically connected and set forth in our beginnings, and it is a matter of immense consequence to our character, what the connection is. In our birth, we not only begin to breathe and circulate blood, but it is a question hugely significant whose the blood may be. For in this we have whole rivers of predispositions, good or bad, set running in us—as much more powerful to shape our future than all tuitional and regulative influences that come after, as they are earlier in their beginning, deeper in their insertion, and more constant in their operation. It is a great mistake to suppose that men and women, such as are to be fathers and mothers, are affected only in their souls by religious experience, and not in their bodies. On mere physiological principles it can not be true, for the mind must temper the body to its own states and changes. Living, therefore, in the peace and purity, holding the equilibrium, flowing in the liberty, reigning in the confidence, of a genuine sanctification, the subjects of such grace are penetrated bodily, all through, by the work of the Spirit in their life. Their appetites are more nearly in heaven's order, their passions more

tempered by reason, their irritabilities more sweetened and calmed, and so far they are entered bodily into the condition of health. Where the constitution was poisoned originally by descent, or has since been broken down by excess and abuse, it may not be wholly restored in this life. I do not suppose that it will; but since the soul is acting itself always into and through the body, when it becomes a temple of the Spirit, the body also must be, just as the Scriptures explicitly teach; undergoing, with the soul, a remedial process in its tempers and humors, and prospering in heaven's order, even as the soul prospereth. This being true, it is impossible, on mere physiological principles, that the children of a truly sanctified parentage should not be advantaged by the grace out of which they are born. And, if the godly character has been kept up in a long line of ancestry, corrupted by no vicious or untoward intermarriages, the advantage must be still greater and more positive. Even temporary changes in the Christian state of character and attainment, will have their effect; how much more the godly keeping of a thoroughly and evenly sanctified life; how much more such a keeping of inbred grace and faith, in a long line of godly ancestors.

I might even state the case more strongly, bringing into the comparison a godly and a vicious parentage. Take a parentage that has in it all the dyspeptic woes of gluttony and self-indulgence, one that is stung and maddened by the fiery pains of intemperance, one that is poisoned and imbruted by the excesses of lust, one

that is broken by domestic wrongs or exasperated by domestic quarrels, one that is fevered by ambitions, one that is soured by the morbid humors of envy and defeat—lengthen out the catalogue, take in all the sins, which, in some true sense, are also vices and have their effect on the body, how is it possible, on any principle of rational physiology, that the children who are sprung of this distempered heritage, should be as pure in their affinities, as close to the order of truth, as ready for the occupany of all good thoughts, as well governed before all government, as ductile in a word to God, as they that are born of a glorious lineage in faith and prayer and God's indwelling peace. Nothing could be more improbable antecedently, or farther off from the actual fact afterward. On the contrary, it is a most dismal and hard lot, as every one knows, to be in the succession of a bad, or vicious parentage. No heritage of wealth could repay, or more than a little soften the bitterness of it.

It is somewhat difficult to investigate the facts of this subject, because of the complexities induced by unpropitious and exceptional marriages. But when such marriages are reduced by the more general, and finally universal, spread of Christian piety, and when the pitch of Christian sanctification is raised, as it will be, by the fuller inspiration from God, breaking into his saints all over the world, it will be found that children are born as much closer to God, and with predispositions that waft them as much more certainly into the ways of duty and piety. It will be as if the faith-power of the past

were descending into the present, flowing on down the future, and the general account of the world will be, that, as it has been corrupted, so also it is in some equally true sense, regenerated from the womb. Precisely that which is named in Scripture, as the fact extraordinary, will become at last the ordinary and even the universal fact.

Here, then, is the real and true beginning of a godly nurture. The child is not to have the sad entail of any sensuality, or excess, or distempered passion upon him. The heritage of love, peace, order, continence and holy courage is to be his. He is not to be morally weakened beforehand, in the womb of folly, by the frivolous, worldly, ambitious, expectations of parents-to-be, concentrating all their nonsense in him. His affinities are to be raised by the godly expectations, rather, and prayers that go before; by the steady and good aims of their industry, by the great impulse of their faith, by the brightness of their hope, by the sweet continence of their religiously pure love in Christ. Born, thus, of a parentage that is ordered in all righteousness, and maintains the right use of every thing, especially the right use of nature and marriage, the child will have just so much of heaven's life and order in him beforehand, as have become fixed properties in the type of his parentage; and by this ante-natal nurture, will be set off in a way of noblest advantage, as respects all safety and success, in the grand experiment he has come into the world to make.

Having called your attention to this very important

but strangely disregarded chapter, in the economy of Christian nurture, I leave it to be more fully and circumstantially developed by your own thoughtful consideration; for it is a matter which will open itself readily, and prove itself by striking and continually recurring facts to such as have it in their hearts to watch for the truth and the duties it requires. We pass now—

2. To that which is the common field of inquiry, and here we raise again the question, where and how early does the work of nurture begin? here to set forth and maintain still another answer, which antedates the common impression, about as decidedly as the one just given. The true, and only true answer is, that the nurture of the soul and character is to begin just when the nurture of the body begins. It is first to be infantile nurture—as such, Christian; then to be a child's nurture; then to be a youth's nurture—advancing by imperceptible gradations, if possible, according to the gradations and stages of the growth, or progress toward maturity.

There is, of course, no absolute classification to be made here, because there are no absolute lines of distinction. A kind of proximate and partly ideal distinction may be made, and I make it simply to serve the convenience of my subject—otherwise impossible to be handled, so as to secure any right practical conviction respecting it. It is the distinction between the age of *impressions* and the age of *tuitional influences;* or between the age of *existence in the will of the parent*, and the age of *will and personal choice in the child.* If the

distinction were laid, between the age previous to language and the age of language, it would amount to nearly the same thing; for the time of personal and responsible choice depends on the measure of intelligence attained to, and the measure of intelligence is well represented, outwardly, by the degree of development in language. Of course it will be understood that we speak, in this distinction, of that which is not sharply defined, and is passed at no precise date or age. The transition is gradual, and it will even be doubtful, when it is passed. No one can say just where a given child passes out of the field of mere impression into the field of responsible action. It will be doubtful, in about the same degree, when it can be said to have come into the power of language. We do not even know that there is not some infinitesimal development of will in the child's first cry, and some instinct of language struggling in that cry. Our object in the distinction is not to assume any thing in respect to such matters, but simply to accommodate our own ignorance, by raising a distribution that enables us to speak of times and characteristics truly enough to serve the conditions of general accurary, and to assist, in that manner, the purposes of our discussion.

Now the very common assumption is that, in what we have called the age of impressions, there is really nothing done, or to be done, for the religious character. The lack of all genuine apprehensions, in respect to this matter, among people otherwise intelligent and awake, is really wonderful; it amounts even to a kind of

coarseness. Full of all fondness, and all highest expectation respecting their children, and having also many Christian desires for their welfare, they seem never to have brought their minds down close enough to the soul of infancy, to imagine that any thing of consequence is going on with it. What can they do, till they can speak to it? what can it do, till it speaks? As if there were no process going on to bring it forward into language; or as if that process had itself nothing to do with the bringing on of intelligence, and no deep, seminal working toward a character, unfolding and to be unfolded in it. The child, in other words, is to come into intelligence through perfect unintelligence! to get the power of words out of words themselves, and without any experience whereby their meaning is developed! to be taught responsibility under moral and religious ideas, when the experience has unfolded no such ideas! In this first stage, therefore, which I have called the stage of impressions, how very commonly will it be found that the parents, even Christian parents, discharge themselves, in the most innocently unthinking way possible, of so much as a conception of responsibility. The child can not talk, what then can it know? So they dress it in all fineries, practice it in shows and swells and all the petty airs of foppery and brave assumption, act it into looks and manners not fit to be acted any where, provoking the repetition of its bad tricks by laughing at them, indulging freely every sort of temper towards it, or, it may be, filling the house with a din of scolding between

the parents—all this in simple security, as if their child were only a thing, or an ape! What hurt can the simple creature get from any thing done before it, toward it, or upon it, when it can talk of nothing, and will not so much as remember any thing it has seen or heard? Doubtless there is a wise care to be had of it, when it is old enough to be taught and commanded, but till then there is nothing to be done, but simply to foster the plaything kindly, enjoy it freely, or abuse it pettishly, at pleasure!

Just contrary to this, I suspect, and I think it can also be shown by sufficient evidence, that more is done to affect, or fix the moral and religious character of children, before the age of language than after; that the age of impressions, when parents are commonly waiting, in idle security, or trifling away their time in mischievous indiscretions, or giving up their children to the chance of such keeping as nurses and attendants may exercise, is in fact their golden opportunity; when more is likely to be done for their advantage or damage, than in all the instruction and discipline of their minority afterward.

And something like this I think we should augur beforehand, from the peculiar, full-born intensity of the maternal affection, at the moment when it first embraces the newly arrived object. It scarcely appears to grow, never to grow tender and self-sacrificing in its care. It turns itself to its charge, with a love that is boundless and fathomless, at the first. As if just then and there, some highest and most sacred office of motherhood

were required to begin. Is it only that the child demands her physical nurture and carefulness? That is not the answer of her consciousness. Her maternity scorns all comparison with that of the mere animals. Her love, as she herself feels, looks through the body into the inborn personality of her child,—the man or woman to be. Nay, more than that, if she could sound her consciousness deeply enough, she would find a certain religiousness in it, measurable by no scale of mere earthly and temporal love. Here springs the secret of her maternity, and its semi-divine proportions. It is the call and equipment of God, for a work on the impressional and plastic age of a soul. Christianized as it should be, and wrought in by the grace of the Spirit, the minuteness of its care, its gentleness, its patience, its almost divine faithfulness, are prepared for the shaping of a soul's immortality. And, to make the work a sure one, the intrusted soul is allowed to have no will as yet of its own, that this motherhood may more certainly plant the angel in the man, uniting him to all heavenly goodness by predispositions from itself, before he is united, as he will be, by choices of his own. Nothing but this explains and measures the wonderful proportions of maternity.

It will be seen at once, and will readily be taken as a confirmation of the transcendent importance of what is done, or possible to be done, for children, in their impressional and plastic age, that whatever is impressed or inserted here, at this early point, must be profoundly seminal, as regards all the future developments of the

character. And though it can not, by the supposition, amount to character, in the responsible sense of that term, it may be the seed, in some very important sense, of all the future character to be unfolded; just as we familiarly think of sin itself, as a character in blame when the will is ripe, though prepared, in still another view, by the seminal damages and misaffections derived from sinning ancestors. So when a child, during the whole period of impressions, or passive recipiencies, previous to the development of his responsible will, lives in the life and feeling of his parents, and they in the molds of the Spirit, they will, of course, be shaping themselves in him, or him in themselves, and the effects wrought in him will be preparations of what he will by-and-bye do from himself; seeds, in that manner possibly, even of a regenerate life and character.

That we may conceive this matter more adequately and exactly, consider, a moment, that whole contour of dispositions, affections, tempers, affinities, aspirations, which come into power in a soul after the will is set fast in a life of duty and devotion. These things, we conceive, follow in a sense the will, and then become in turn a new element about the will—a new heart, as we say, prompting to new acts and a continued life of new obedience. Now what I would affirm is, that just this same contour of dispositions and affinities may be prepared under, and come after, the will of the parents, when the child is living in their will, and be ready as a new element, or new heart, to prompt the child's will, or put it forward in the choice of all duty, whenever it

is so matured as to choose for itself. Of course these regenerated dispositions and affinities, this general disposedness to good, which we call a new heart, supposes a work of the Spirit; and, if the parents live in the Spirit as they ought, they will have the Spirit for the child as truly as for themselves, and the child will be grown, so to speak, in the molds of the Spirit, even from his infancy.

This will be yet more probable, if we glance at some of the particular facts and conditions involved. Thus if we speak of impressions, or the age of impressions, and of that as an age prior to language, what kind of religious impressions can be raised in a soul, it may be asked, when the child is not far enough developed in language to be taught any thing about God, or Christ, or itself, that belongs to intelligence? And the sufficient answer must be, that language itself has no meaning till rudimental impressions are first begotten in the life of experience, to give it a meaning. Words are useful to propagate meanings, or to farther develop and combine meanings, but a child would never know the meaning of any word in a language, just by hearing the sound of it in his ears. He must learn to put the meaning into it, by having found that meaning in his impressions, and then the word becomes significant. And it requires a certain wakefulness and capacity of intelligent apprehension, to receive or take up such impressions. Thus a dog would never get hold of any religious impression at the family prayers, all his lifetime; but a child will be fast gathering up, out of his

little life and experience, impressional states and associations, that give meanings to the words of prayer, as they, in turn, give meanings to the facts of his experience. All language supposes impressions first made. The word *light* does not signify any thing, till the eye has taken the impression of light. The word *love* is unmeaning, to one who has not loved and received love. The word *God*, raises no conception of God, till the idea of such a being has been somehow generated and associated with that particular sound. How far off is it then from all sound apprehensions of fact, to imagine that nothing religious can be done for a child till after he is far enough developed in language to be taught; when in fact he could not be thus developed in language at all, if the meanings of language were not somehow started in him by the impressions derived from his experience.

Observe, again, how very quick the child's eye is, in the passive age of infancy, to catch impressions, and receive the meaning of looks, voices, and motions. It peruses all faces, and colors, and sounds. Every sentiment that looks into its eyes, looks back out of its eyes, and plays in miniature on its countenance. The tear that steals down the cheek of a mother's suppressed grief, gathers the little infantile face into a responsive sob. With a kind of wondering silence, which is next thing to adoration, it studies the mother in her prayer, and looks up piously with her, in that exploring watch, that signifies unspoken prayer. If the child is handled fretfully, scolded, jerked, or simply laid aside

unaffectionately, in no warmth of motherly gentleness, it feels the sting of just that which is felt towards it; and so it is angered by anger, irritated by irritation, fretted by fretfulness; having thus impressed, just that kind of impatience or ill-nature, which is felt towards it, and growing faithfully into the bad mold offered, as by a fixed law. There is great importance, in this manner, even in the handling of infancy. If it is unchristian, it will beget unchristian states, or impressions. If it is gentle, even patient and loving, it prepares a mood and temper like its own. There is scarcely room to doubt, that all most crabbed, hateful, resentful, passionate, ill-natured characters; all most even, lovely, firm and true, are prepared, in a great degree, by the handling of the nursery. To these and all such modes of feeling and treatment as make up the element of the infant's life, it is passive as wax to the seal. So that if we consider how small a speck, falling into the nucleus of a crystal, may disturb its form; or, how even a mote of foreign matter present in the quickening egg, will suffice to produce a deformity; considering, also, on the other hand, what nice conditions of repose, in one case, and what accurately modulated supplies of heat in the other, are necessary to a perfect product; then only do we begin to imagine what work is going on, in the soul of a child, in this first chapter of life, the age of impressions.

It must also greatly affect our judgments on this point, to observe that, when this first age of impressions is gone by, there is, after that, no such thing any

more as a possibility of absolute control. Thus far the child has been more a candidate for personality than a person. He has been as a seed forming in the capsule of the parent-stem, getting every thing from that stem, and fashioned, in its kind, by the fashioning kind of that. But now, having been gradually and imperceptibly ripened, as the seed separates and falls off, to be another and complete form of life in itself, so the child comes out, in his own power, a complete person, able to choose responsibly for himself. Now he is no more in the power of the parent, as before; the dominion of the older life is supplanted, by the self-asserting competency of the younger; what can the old stalk do upon the seed that is already ripe? The transition here is very gradual, it is true, covering even a space of years; and something may be done for the child's character by instruction, by the skillful management of motives, and the tender solicitudes of parental watching and prayer; but less and less, of course, the older the child becomes, and the more completely his personal responsibility is developed. But how very fearful the change, and how much it means, that the child, once plastic and passive to the will of the parent, has gotten by the point of absolute disposability, and is never again to be properly in that will! The perilous power of self-care and self-assertion has come, and what is to be the result? And how much does it signify to the parent, when he feels his power to be thus growing difficult, weak, doubtful, or finally quite ended! What a conception it is, that he once had his child in absolute direction, and the fashioning of his own superior will, to dress, to feed, to handle, to play himself into his sentiments, be the disposition of his dispositions, the temper of his tempers. Was there not something great to be done then, when the advantage was so great—now to be done no more? It will be difficult to shake off that impression; impossible to a really thoughtful Christian soul. And if the will, now matured and gone over into complete self-assertion, rushes into all wildness and profligacy, unrestrained and unrestrainable, the recollection of a time when it was restrainable and could have been molded, even as wax itself, will return with inevitable certainty upon the parents, and taunt, O how bitterly, the neglectfulness and lightness, by which they cast their opportunity away!

I bring into view accordingly, just here, a consideration that goes further to establish the position I am asserting, than any other, and one that is naturally suggested by the topic just adverted to. We call this first chapter of life the age of impressions; we speak of the child as being in a sense passive and plastic, living in the will of the parents, having no will developed for responsible action. It might be imagined from the use of such terms, that the infant or very young child has no will at all. But that is not any true conception. It has no *responsible* will, because it is not acquainted, as yet, with those laws and limits and conditions of choice that make it responsible. Nevertheless it has will, blind will, as strongly developed as any other faculty, and sometimes even most strongly of all. The mani-

festations of it are sometimes even frightful. And precisely this it is which makes the age of impressions, the age prior to language and responsible choice, most profoundly critical in its importance. It is the age in which the will-power of the soul is to be tamed or subordinated to a higher control; that of obedience to parents, that of duty and religion. And, in this view, it is that every thing most important to the religious character turns just here. Is this infant child to fill the universe with his complete and total self-assertion, owning no superior, or is he to learn the self-submission of allegiance, obedience, duty to God? Is he to become a demon let loose in God's eternity, or an angel and free prince of the realm?

That he may be this, he is now given, will and all, as wax, to the wise molding-power of control. Beginning, then, to lift his will in mutiny, and swell in self-asserting obstinacy, refusing to go or come, or stand, or withhold in this or that, let there be no fight begun, or issue made with him, as if it were the true thing now to break his will, or drive him out of it by mere terrors and pains. This willfulness, or obstinacy, is not so purely bad, or evil, as it seems. It is partly his feeling of himself and you, in which he is getting hold of the conditions of authority, and feeling out his limitations. No, this breaking of a child's will to which many well-meaning parents set themselves, with such instant, almost passionate resolution, is the way they take to make him a coward, or a thief, or a hypocrite, or a mean-spirited and driveling sycophant—nothing in fact

is more dreadful to thought than this breaking of a will, when it breaks, as it often does, the personality itself, and all highest, noblest firmness of manhood. The true problem is different; it is not to break, but to bend rather, to draw the will down, or away from self-assertion toward self-devotion, to teach it the way of submitting to wise limitations, and raise it into the great and glorious liberties of a state of loyalty to God. See then how it is to be done. The child has no force, however stout he is in his will. Take him up then, when the fit is upon him, carry him, stand him on his feet, set him here or there, do just that in him which he refuses to do in himself—all this gently and kindly, as if he were capable of maintaining no issue at all. Do it again and again, as often as may be necessary. By-and-bye, he will begin to perceive that his obstinacy is but the fussing of his weakness; till finally, as the sense of limitation comes up into a sense of law and duty, he will be found to have learned, even beforehand, the folly of mere self-assertion. And when he has reached this point of felt obligation to obedience, it will no longer break him down to enforce his compliance, but it will even exalt into greater dignity and capacity, that sublime power of self-government, by which his manhood is to be most distinguished.

By a different treatment at the point or crisis just named, that is by raising an issue to be driven straight through by terror and storm, one of two results almost equally bad were likely to follow; the child would either have been quite broken down by fear, the lowest

of all possible motives when separated from moral convictions, or else would have been made a hundred fold more obstinate by his triumph. Nature provided for his easy subjugation, by putting him in the hands of a superior strength, which could manage him without any fight of enforcement—to have him schooled and tempered to a customary self-surrender which takes nothing from his natural force and manliness. And so is accomplished what, in one view, is the great problem of life; that on which all duty and allegiance to God, in the state even of conversion, depends.

It only remains to add that we are not to assume the comparative unimportance of what is done upon a child, in his age of impressions, because there is really no character of virtue or vice, of blame or praise, developed in that age. Be it so—it is so by the supposition. But the power, the root, the seed, is implanted nevertheless, in most cases, of what he will be. Not in every case, but often, the seed of a regenerate life is implanted—that which makes the child a Christian in God's view, as certainly as if he were already out in the testimony and formal profession of his faith. I was just now speaking of the dreadful power of will or willfulness, some times manifested even in this first age, that we have called the age of impressions, and of the ways in which, by one kind of mismanagement or another, the character may be turned to vices that are as opposite, as the vices of meanness and the crimes of violence and blood. So it will be found that almost every sort of mismanagement, or neglect, plants some

seed of vice and misery that grows out afterwards into a character in its own kind. Thus the child by a continually worry of his little life, under abusive words, and harsh, flashy tempers, grows to be a bed of nettles in all his personal tempers, and will so be prepared to break out, in the age of choice, into almost any vice of ill-nature. A child can be pampered in feeding, so as to become, in a sense, all body; so that, when he comes into choice and responsible action, he is already a confirmed sensualist, showing it in the lines of his face, even before it appears in his tastes, habits and vices. Thus we have a way of wondering that the children of this or that family should turn out so poorly, but the real fact is, probably, if we knew it, that what we call their turning out, is only their growing out, in just that which was first grown in, by the mismanagement of their infancy and childhood. What they took in as impression, or contagion, is developed by choice—not at once, perhaps, but finally, after the poison has had time to work. And in just the same way, doubtless, it may be true, in multitudes of Christian conversions, that what appear to be such to others, and also to the subjects themselves, are only the restored activity and more fully developed results of some predispositional state, or initially sanctified property, in the tempers and subtle affinities of their childhood. They are now born into that by the assent of their own will, which they were in before, without their will. What they do not remember still remembers them, and now claims a right in them. What was before unconscious, flames

out into consciousness, and they break forth into praise and thanksgiving, in that which, long ago, took them initially, and touched them softly without thanks. For there is such a thing as a seed of character in religion, preceding all religious development. Even as Calvin, speaking of the regenerative grace there may be in the heart of infancy itself, testifies—"the work of God is not yet without existence, because it is not observed and understood by us."

By these and many other considerations that might be named, it is made clear, I think, to any judicious and thoughtful person, that the most important age of Christian nurture is the first; that which we have called the age of impressions, just that age, in which the duties and cares of a really Christian nurture are so commonly postponed, or assumed to have not yet arrived. I have no scales to measure quantities of effect in this matter of early training, but I may be allowed to express my solemn conviction, that more, as a general fact, is done, or lost by neglect of doing, on a child's immortality, in the first three years of his life, than in all his years of discipline afterwards. And I name this particular time, or date, that I may not be supposed to lay the chief stress of duty and care on the latter part of what I have called the age of impressions; which, as it is a matter somewhat indefinite, may be taken to cover the space of three or four times this number of years; the development of language, and of moral ideas being only partially accomplished, in most cases, for so long a time. Let every Christian father and mother understand, when

their child is three years old, that they have done more than half of all they will ever do for his character. What can be more strangely wide of all just apprehension, than the immense efficacy, imputed by most parents to the Christian ministry, compared with what they take to be the almost insignificant power conferred on them in their parental charge and duties. Why, if all preachers of Christ could have their hearers, for whole months and years, in their own will, as parents do their children, so as to move them by a look, a motion, a smile, a frown, and act their own sentiments and emotions over in them at pleasure; if, also, a little farther on, they had them in authority to command, direct, tell them whither to go, what to learn, what to do, regulate their hours, their books, their pleasures, their company, and call them to prayer over their own knees every night and morning, who could think it impossible, in the use of such a power, to produce almost any result? Should not such a ministry be expected to fashion all who come under it to newness of life? Let no parent, shifting off his duties to his children, in this manner, think to have his defects made up, and the consequent damages mended afterwards, when they have come to their maturity, by the comparatively slender, always doubtful, efficacy of preaching and pulpit harangue.

If now I am right in the view I have been trying to establish, it will readily occur to you that irreparable damage may be and must often be done by the self-indulgence of those parents, who place their children

mostly in the charge of nurses and attendants for just those years of their life, in which the greatest and most absolute effects are to be wrought in their character. The lightness that prevails, on this point, is really astonishing. Many parents do not even take pains to know any thing about the tempers, the truthfulness, the character generally, of the nurses to whom their children are thus confidingly trusted. No matter—the child is too young to be poisoned, or at all hurt, by their influence. And so they give over, to these faithless and often cruelly false hirelings of the nursery, to be always with them, under their power, associated with their persons, handled by their roughness, and imprinted, day and night, by the coarse, bad sentiments of their voices and faces, these helpless, hapless beings whom they call their children, and think they are really making much of, in the instituting of a nursery for them and their keeping. Such a mother ought to see that she is making much more of herself than of her child. This whole scheme of nurture is a scheme of self-indulgence. Now is the time when her little one most needs to see her face, and hear her voice, and feel her gentle hand. Now is the time when her child's eternity pleads most entreatingly for the benefit of her motherly charge and presence. What mother would not be dismayed by the thought of having her family grow up into the sentiments of her nurse, and come forward into life as being in the succession to her character! And yet how often is this most exactly what she has provided for.

Again, it is very clear that, in this early kind of nurture, faithfully maintained, there is a call for the greatest personal holiness in the parents, and that just those conditions are added, which will make true holiness closest to nature, and most beautifully attractive—saving it from all the repulsive appearances of severity and sanctimony. In this charge and nurture of infant children, nothing is to be done by an artificial, lecturing process; nothing, or little by what can be called government. We are to get our effects chiefly by just being what we ought, and making a right presence of love and life to our children. They are in a plastic age that is receiving its type, not from our words, but from our spirit, and whose character is shaping in the molds of ours. Living under this conviction, we are held to a sound verity and reality in every thing. The defect of our character is not to be made up here, by the sanctity of our words; we must be all that we would have our children feel and receive. Thus, if a man were to be set before a mirror, with the feeling that the exact image of what he *is*, for the day, is there to be produced and left as a permanent and fixed image forever, to what carefulness, what delicate sincerity of spirit would he be moved. And will he be less moved to the same, when that mirror is the soul of his child?

Inducted, thus, into a more profoundly real holiness, we shall, at the same time, grow more natural in it. The family quality of our piety, living itself into our children, will moisten the dry individualism we suffer, relieve the eccentricities we display, set purity in the

place of bustle and presumption, growth in the place of conquest, sound health in the place of spasmodic exaltations; for when a conviction is felt in Christian families, that living is to be a means of grace, and as God will suffer it, a regenerating power, then will our piety become a domestic spirit, and as much more tender, as it is closer to the life of childhood. Now, we have a kind of piety that contains, practically speaking, only adults, or those who are old enough to reflect and act for themselves, and it is as if we lived in an *adult world*, where every one is for himself. If we could abolish also distinctions of age, and sex, and office, we should only make up a style of religion somewhat drier and farther off from nature than we now have. We can never come into the true mode of living that God has appointed for us, until we regard each generation as hovering over the next, acting itself into the next, and casting thus a type of character in the next, before it comes to act for itself. Then we shall have gentle cares and feelings; then the families will become bonds of spiritual life; example, education and government, being Christian powers, will be regulated by a Christian spirit; the rigidities of religious principle will be softened by the tender affections of nature twining among them, and the common life of the house dignified by the sober and momentous cares of the life to come. And thus Christian piety, being oftener a habit in the soul than a conquest over it, will be as much more respectable and consistent as it is earlier in the birth and closer to nature.