

RELIGION IN THE HOME.¹

THERE is no need to make any apology or explanation for discussing this subject; the state of English life, and of society in general, seem to make its consideration wise and opportune. The decay of religion in the home is responsible for a very large proportion of the dangers and disasters which are troubling us at the present time. Let me instance two only:

1. On all sides men are, apparently, battling with unbelief. Reason is pitting itself against faith. Christian science and its many relations are disputing the rights of many time-honoured, and so-called divine, dogmas; and men do not know where they are—their faith is too little and too weak to protect them. And why? Because for years parents have been neglecting their duty, and they have sent their sons and their daughters out upon the sea of life, with a creed indeed, but with a faith unfed and unfostered. "The candle of the Lord" has been imperfectly trimmed; the oil is very scanty; men's convictions have not been shaped with care and culture. Some of the best of parents have failed in this, and the excuse is just that life has been too full, as the Bishop of London lamented in his recent mission to the West End: "I do not hear much now of the children's hour—the time between tea and dinner. Have the parents' many engagements broken it up?"

2. The decline in the number of ordination candidates is due to the same cause—to a large extent. Other things combine with it to persuade men from this high line of life—*i.e.*, there is a growing impression among Christians that they can serve God as laymen quite as effectively as in the ministry. The money-making spirit, too, is strong in most modern countries. And a few men are influenced by exaggerated views on Higher Criticism. But, besides all this, the Church as a whole is suffering from the absence of the religious spirit in the home, from the failure of parents to encourage their children to take a sensible and a healthy view of the service of the King, from the disrespectful manner in which Church work and Church workers are discussed in the family; and so the last thing too many of our boys dwell upon is the possibility and advisability and privilege of becoming a clergyman. This is all wrong; and if we want a revival in the land, we want, in the first instance, a revival of religion in the home,

¹ The writer is indebted to F. D. Maurice's treatise on "Social Morality" for various items in this article.

for religion in the home is the home of religion; if it is not there, it is not likely to be anywhere.

Now, a proper consideration of the subject demands that we should review the whole situation and recollect the position of the family, the importance of home life, and the relation of religion to it all: how, indeed, the world in general depends, and always has depended, upon this state of life.

(a) The position of the family. This has been much obscured of late, but originally, and ideally, it was everything. Sir Henry Maine was the great authority on Roman institutions, and he tells us that "Archaic law is full in all its provinces of the clearest indications that society in primitive times was not what it is assumed to be at present—a collection of *individuals*. In fact, and in the view of the men who composed it, it was an *aggregation of families*." We can believe this if we think, for we quickly see that the ultimate basis of human society must be the home. "The State—the body politic—may assume many different forms, but its fabric is built up of myriads of separate cells like a honeycomb, and the unit cell on which everything else depends is the family." Plato lost sight of this because he tried too eagerly to grasp the universal; but Aristotle was more temperate and modest, and acknowledges the family as the basis of political society; in his opinion the relations of the household are the germs of the different forms of government. "The family, then," says Sir H. S. Maine, "is the type of an archaic society in all the modifications which it was capable of assuming," and the hearty recognition of this is essential if history is to be understood and appreciated. I have referred you to secular evidence of my contention, and you will wonder whether it is because the thought is foreign to revelation. Nothing of the kind: the history of divine action—*i.e.*, the history of true religion—is related in the most intimate way with family life. Our God is called the God of all the families of the earth, and in many periods He did His work of communicating Himself unto men mainly through the family. This is never more patent than in the case of Abraham. He lives in a family, is never safe beyond the limits of it. Every thought that is awakened in him has to do with a family, making every devout student of the Bible realize that this was the purpose of God, who has set men in families that He may thereby work His work amongst us.

But no one has ever supposed that this great design would be effected automatically, and that, without any effort or care, men would be safeguarded and developed through the influence of the family in which they found themselves. On the contrary, all the world over, among pagans as much as among

Christians, men and women are called upon to assume responsibility and to exercise authority, so as to make the family what it should be, so as to help the State through the family. There is no need to go into any of the classical lore upon this point, though the material for doing so is very extensive, because the divine relations were always being compared with domestic relations, and Plato and Homer busied themselves continually with the subject. But I may just add that Cicero felt the most unshaken conviction that there must be a ground for social life and social morality, and he connects worship with laws; so that it is easy to understand that the first element of Roman faith was domestic—the authority of the father. Just as Jupiter was assuredly the father of the city, so the authority of particular fathers had its support in his authority. That was enough. Each household must have its own *penates*. There must be a divine superintendence over each hearth, and the father of the family must act as priest and mediator day by day. Clear traces of this in the Scriptures will be familiar to many: domestic worship and the priestly system are closely related, and we always have to recollect it as we study the religious habits and education of the patriarchs and the children of Israel.

(b) Now, these preliminary remarks will serve to introduce the main subject before us, and will help us to consider in all its importance “home life,” with its manifold calls and its manifold opportunities. And referring first to the duty of the clergy, can I insist too strongly upon the necessity of giving our people plain and almost constant instructions about it? The noble Bishop, Dr. Fraser, was a master upon this point. Speaking at the Sheffield Church Congress, he waxed eloquent against the modern pulpit habit of adding to the principles of Christianity, and of asking men, from whom God only requires faith and repentance, to subscribe to 700 theological prepositions. “I want to see Christianity more human,” he cried. “I want to see it dealing less with pictures of hell and heaven, and more with the difficulties and trials and temptations of this present life. . . . I want to see Christianity a good deal more human than in these later days it has been made to be.” And he practised what he preached; for if there was one thing more characteristic than another about his sermons to ordinary congregations, it was the amount of homely advice which they contained with regard to *home* duties of parents, children, husbands, wives, and so forth.

Therefore, putting the matter in a slightly more dogmatic form, I would say in brief:

1. Let us remember, and remind all others of, the nature of home life; the really sacred nature of the home; the possi-

bility of a man's character receiving in the home nearly all that it can want; the probability of a man's character possessing little that it wants unless it acquire it in the home. To quote Bishop Fraser again, in one of his letters he writes: "I really cannot think how people can care so much for the mere external (and too often illusory) elements of happiness, when all that really gladdens and brightens life lies within that magic circle which God's providence draws round each one to whom He grants the blessings of a *home*. I have always held that home duties have the greatest claim upon us, and that nothing ought to displace them but the most imperious necessity."

And any student of books on domestic education will have observed that the object of the writers has been, by one method or another, to form a character. Their chief skill has been shown in tracing the influence of different members of a family on the characters of each other. The family, small circle as it must be, has been found large enough for the discovery of innumerable varieties of feeling and disposition, every variety having some tendency to produce another by collision or sympathy. So it has been well said: "We do not come into the world as isolated individuals. Each of us is born into a family. A child wakes up to discover that he is already united to his parents and kinsfolk by ties which nothing can abolish or destroy. And out of this primal bond arise our highest virtues and our most sacred claims."

2. Let us remember the peculiar power of family religion, of a religion whose earliest and best and brightest associations can be traced to the home. We are told, as I have already said, that among the Romans and the Greeks there was an intimate connection between the worship of the gods and human relationships. And, as a natural consequence, we know that when the sense of the domestic fellowship became weak, when it gave way, then indeed the weight of the external world became overwhelming: then, whether its powers were contemplated in themselves, or were associated with names and persons, it might become a field for the exercise of demoniacal caprice, which men might try to divert by skill or by sacrifices, but which must ultimately prevail. So likewise Christianity assumes and takes for granted the deep, simple instincts and affections of home, and their practical importance in the sphere of religion. Christ Jesus presupposes that we already understand the meaning of those dear names "father," "mother," "brother," "sister," and bases much of His teaching thereon. As Coventry Patmore has said: "If we misinterpret or deny the family titles and relations, we obscure revelation in its very terms." What

does this mean but that religion is to be learnt, to be cultivated, and in its most important stages to be practised, within the shelter of the four walls; that the soul can there find ample scope for its feelings, and ample encouragement and delight? And the days were in this land of ours when men knew it, and the results were priceless. But we have to lament that the greatly accelerated pace of modern life has broken up some, too many, of the old devotional habits, and the results are, and will be, disastrous. The position cannot be better stated than in the lament of that eminent prelate already twice referred to: "I attach great importance to family religion. I fear the sense of responsibility on the part of the heads of families has decreased. I am afraid there is a very large number of families in England, particularly in the working classes, who never have family prayer. We make a great profession of our Christianity, of our Protestantism, of our 'Gospel light,' but we might sometimes spend a week in a man's house and not know he was a Christian at all." Thus in all circles where the fear of God is a living force, we cannot too seriously inculcate the necessity of the permanent recognition of the beauty of family life, and, as a corollary, of the power and virtue of family religion.

But of course our subject invites us to go much further, and to put the responsibility on the right shoulders, for it is not enough to be general. If good is to come, we must insist on the respective members of the home learning where their duty in this matter lies.

And first come the fathers, with their high and, as the Bible would seem to say, their holy position, and would to God that it was the universally recognised feature in life that it is meant to be. Two points about it eclipse all others:

1. That it means authority. To the paternal authority Rome owed its strength and freedom, and Virgil was right in believing that the ground of his nation's stability lay in the reverence for fathers; for the authority of the Consul rested ultimately on the father's authority, the obedience of the soldier on the obedience of the child.

2. That it means specific duties, and chiefly that he must educate his child; so far as he has any authority over him, that must be an education. Parental authority is God ordered, and is to be used as the very ground of education, that the faculties and energies of the child, which otherwise might lie dormant, may be duly developed.

And when we speak of education, we are doubtless agreed that its whole base and foundation should be laid in religion, and that a religious spirit should permeate the whole, and a religious aspect be given to the whole. Certainly this is

where the father's authority may be righteously exercised; this is the main direction that it should take.

Compelling—yes, *compelling*—the children to read, to learn, and, as far as possible, to understand the Scriptures. Every minister knows how woeful is the ignorance of his Confirmation candidates as to the position of the books of the Bible, as well as concerning their contents. The misfortune is the children's, the fault is the parents'.

I use the word "compel," but the compulsion would speedily be qualified if men would be men, and, like Bishop Ridley, gentlest of English Reformers, would read the Bible with, and expound it to, their household; for he did it, "being marvellous careful over his family, that they might be a spectacle of all virtue and honesty to others."

Compelling—yea, *compelling*—the children to attend a proper place of worship on Sunday morning and evening. The first person to be blamed for many an empty church is the parson. I am not sure that the real culprits are not the parents in our land. The authority of the parents is undoubted. What right have the children to call it into question? It is a divine ordinance, and only weakness and wickedness evade it. But, again, whilst I use the word "compel," the compulsion would speedily be qualified if the father did his duty and took the children. And here let me offer a criticism, rather than a condemnation, of the P.S.A. movement. It has some advantages perhaps, but a P.S.A. often means a "selfish Sunday evening and morning," the father "doing" his religion by himself, and forming the unnatural and baneful habit of isolating himself from his family in the most important matter of life. No wonder the Church's work and welfare is not discussed at all, or, if discussed, is referred to in a far from kindly spirit. No wonder there is little or no interest in parochial efforts in many a home, when the father goes one way and the children another, and there is no common worship and devotion. How different it all might be, and is intended to be! How much better would be our religious tone, how much greater the sympathy with all the will of God!

I will not stay to suggest the many departments which would feel the effect of the father's authority and unselfish earnestness. Let me be content by saying over again in another way what I said at the outset: "Candidates for the ministry would then be plentiful." The *Church Chronicle* in South Africa for August 26, 1904, had an article dealing with lay work, and how evangelistic zeal among laity would give a great impetus to the provision of an African-born ministry. "As it is," says the writer, "most of the clergy in our

province who can claim this distinction are the sons of clergymen. They have inherited from their fathers the love of the sacred ministry, and, undeterred by the self-denial which it calls for, they have chosen it as their lot in life. So we believe it would be with the laity. The father's unselfish devotion would leave its mark upon his household; in many cases would call forth enthusiasm among his children for the ministry of souls."

Secondly comes the mother, with her splendid power and unchallenged influence. Her position is not equal to that of the father, and yet it is almost as important. Though the institutions of Rome, already mentioned, especially testify to the authority of the father or his dominion, yet the influence of the mother is never forgotten in its most characteristic legends, in its most trustworthy records.

And what should be—and, thank God, very often is—the work of the mother in the home? It is twofold at least.

1. In stating the first, let me quote a master of thought who had much to teach Englishmen thirty years ago: "The union of the mother's influence with the father's helps to distinguish authority from dominion, as well as to counteract any disposition which there might be in the male parent to demand of his son mere agreement with his conclusions. She never can regard a child as a possession; she never can appeal exclusively or mainly to his intellect. The authority is not weakened by her co-operation; it is divested of its inhumanity, it is made effectual for the whole of the child's existence, not for one section of it." We all know what that means; for we have all had the stern summons of a father's voice coming to us softened and deepened through notes of feminine devotion and self-sacrifice. Thus the mother often makes the father's authority perfect.

2. But more. Besides her position, she nearly always has a way with her which tells mightily for good or ill. "Because my mother wants me to," is a constant reason for various acts of children, and a good enough reason too. So that where the mother is obedient to the faith, it becomes usually easy and simple for her both to form religious habits in her children and to inspire them with a living faith. Some of you have heard of Mr. Buckle, a man who, in words at least, treated morality as poor in comparison with intellect. This was his testimony, that no mere arguments for immortality had ever had much weight with him, but that when he remembered his mother he could not disbelieve in it. Coming from such a source, the testimony is of unspeakable worth. Thus, we all welcome the words of Marie Corelli, when she says that a happy home is the best and surest safeguard

against all evil ; and that where home is not happy, there the devil may freely enter and find his hands full. "With women, and women only, this happiness in the home must find its foundation. They only are responsible, for no matter how wild and erring a man may be, if he can always rely on finding somewhere in the world a peaceful, well-ordered, and undishonoured home, he will feel the saving grace of it sooner or later, and turn to it as the one bright beacon in a darkening wilderness." Yet we would go further, and say that woman, mother, has the right and the power to make home holy ; to make it a house of God ; to fill it with a sensible and spiritual atmosphere ; to order its life, its amusements, its conversation, so that God is above all, the chief authority in everything. And where the mother does not do it, or help in doing it, it is not often done.

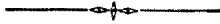
I do not pretend that this is by any means all that should be urged upon the subject before us. There are other branches of it of very grave importance, such as the conduct of the children in their homes, and the treatment and training of the servants in our households. Both of these are practical points which should never be lost sight of. But the first and chief responsibility rests upon the parents, and, unless we are mistaken, the parents of all classes need a regular course of instruction in the matter, for their negligence is quite woeful. There may be excuses for some, and God can be trusted to make full allowance everywhere ; but there can be no good defence for the fact mentioned by Bishop Ingram to his Diocesan Conference that 79 per cent. of the parents of boys at one public school had no family prayers or religious teaching for their children at all.

This is blank paganism, and worse ; for the old heathens had very right notions about the way in which a child ought to be trained up. They had great belief in a pure domestic education. One of them said : "Let nothing unclean ever enter into a house where a little child is," and yet how many English children are habitually the witnesses or hearers of drunkenness, quarrelling, swearing, gambling, and wantonness ! A Roman poet has said : "The greatest possible reverence is due to a child." Verily, the spirit of our Master is in that dictum, and yet thousands of English parents have no other ambition for their children than that they should be as polished corners in some temple of Mammon.

We shall never have in England education such as we ought to have, and such as would be in the highest sense a blessing to the nation and to the world, until parents rise to a higher conception of their duties to their children than they do now ; but if we could rouse them, and keep them roused, it would

be the simplest solution to many a vexing problem, such as the "religious question": it would be the death-warrant to infidelity, bridge-madness, harlotry, and vice; it would be the shortest way for the bringing in of the kingdom of Christ.

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"GOD IS LOVE" AND ITS IMPLICATION.

IT is astonishing how this precious text is misunderstood and even perverted by many who quote it. This was very apparent in the correspondence which lately took place in the *Daily Telegraph* on the question, "Do We Believe?" Many of the sceptical writers quoted it with a view of showing that the God who is so described in the Bible could not possibly be so cruel (so they put it) as to punish sinners in the way that other Scriptures affirm that He will, and therefore that those latter texts cannot be inspired, and must be rejected. They do not seem to see their inconsistency in quoting this one text as authoritative and truthful, while they regard other texts from the same book, and indeed other passages from the same speaker or writer, as having no authority.

But the truth is that they really do not understand what love is and what it implies, or they surely would see that there is no inconsistency, still less any contradiction, between such passages and those that they contrast with them. Such writers evidently take a merely sentimental view of love. They think of the God who is so described as they do of a very easy, amiable, Eli-like character, who is very lenient with sin and sinners, who is always disposed to overlook their faults, and who could not find it in His heart to punish them, still less to consign them to what those Scriptures plainly describe as "the damnation of hell."

With regard to Eli, if he had loved Israelitish society and its well-being, he would not have said to his sons, "Nay, my sons, it is no good thing that I hear," but he would have said, "It is an awfully wicked thing that I hear—a thing that I hate, and unless you cease at once from such ways and repent of them, I must visit you with my hot displeasure."

Now, I want to try and show that the error in question arises from a misconception of what love is, and what the highest and truest of human love is. These writers do not see that love necessarily implies hate. There cannot be true love, even in man, without hatred (excluding, of course, every