

## THE FAMILY ALTAR

by

H. C. Mullen.

From time to time I hear some preacher voice his alarm at the failure of our denomination to live up to some standard of the church covenant. One man seems to be collared about one thing and another something else.

Personally, I think I am distressed most over the neglect of family prayer, - the old-fashioned family altar. We all pledged ourselves to regularly conduct family devotions when we solemnly took the covenant in joining the church. I have often wondered what a test, by show of hands, would reveal in an assembly of our people, if asked to witness concerning a family altar in their homes. Reader, what would your answer be?

I consider the family altar the greatest institution for good upon the face of the earth. As goes the home, so goes the world. I place the family altar ahead of the church, ahead of the Sunday School. Brother, Sister, if that child of yours is not taught to pray, and you have not prayed with him and for him and told him how to believe and get saved, then please don't blame anyone but yourself if that child grows up to despise the church, and goes with the world. Do not blame the pastor or the evangelist or the church. If Children are not prayed with and taught to pray when very young, all too soon, they are out from under home influence, and the world gets them.

It is a difficult matter these days of hurry to always have family prayer, but it can be done. If not in the rush of the morning, then at noon after dinner, or after supper, or before the family retires at night. This matter should be the most serious duty of the household and be no more crowded out, nor neglected, than lighting the fire, or washing one's face.

We brought up a family of six and know whereof we speak. All were taught to pray before they could speak plainly. My wife and I agreed that if our children slipped by the family altar, and were not saved, we would never blame the church or evangelist. They all believed and trusted God in early years, and when older, came out in a stronger and public way in the church. The oldest to follow the Lord in Baptism was only fourteen.

There is multiplied evidence everywhere to tell us of the influence of the family Altar. Listen to this from a prison chaplain: "When I was chaplain of a penitentiary in Arkansas, out of seventeen hundred convicts, I found only one who had been brought up in a home where they had old-fashioned family Altar. I heard since that he was pardoned, as he was found innocent of the crime with which he was charged.

There was an atmosphere in the old-fashioned home, a kind of prophylaxis, (preventive treatment) which made it impossible for skepticism or atheism to live there." The home influence makes a deeper impression, and lasts longer than any other. Children that are taught to pray at the family Altar do not find it hard to pray in church. I have found in calling that many people will not pray, or if they do, seem to find it very hard and embarrassing. This should not be, and would not, if they had been brought up to pray before people.

I was not brought up where there was a family Altar. I was not taught to pray even at the bedside at night. I never heard my mother pray until I started a family Altar when I got converted at twenty. It was a great cross for me to pray before anyone, at first, but I soon overcame the fear, for I knew I should pray, and I needed the help that praying in public gave me. I have often wondered what my early boyhood life would have been had I been prayed with and taught to pray. I am a firm believer in childhood conversions. Altogether too much of our

work is restoration work. We do not work hard enough with the children before they go into sin and unbelief. Mothers and fathers wait too long; the time to lead children to the Lord is when they are under parental care. All too soon they get "too big" to stay in for family prayer, "too big" to go to church and Sunday school; "too big" for the mother and father to use some pressure upon them to make them stay to family prayer or go to Sunday School. Most children are out from under discipline at a very early age, so what is to be done must be done early, otherwise they are out and gone and lost in the world and sin. Children are saved as young as four, and some of the world's greatest Christians were saved young. They usually think deeper than we give them credit for.

I will recall when the question whether I was saved or not first came to my heart, and a yearning came upon me to know. I could not have been more than four, mother was rocking me to sleep on her lap and was singing, "Oh can we say we are ready, ready for the soul's bright home?" The spirit of God whispered to me and I wished I knew I was ready. If my mother had only talked to me then and prayed with me and told me how to trust in Jesus, how easily I could have been led into salvation.

Before I was twelve I passed by several other crisis when my heart was very tender and I longed to know the Lord, but not a soul ever spoke to me, so I slipped by, and in a few years my heart was hard and my spirit bitter. I went a long ways from God and only the faithful Holy Spirit ever brought me back. I had some lasting influence from home, for my father prayed in pray-meetings and both parents lived morally good and gave me good moral teaching. The conversion of my sister, four years older than I, had a deep impression upon me, for I saw a real change in her, but about this time she left home so I seldom saw her. How I have wished I had found the Lord when a boy. What heartaches it would have saved me, and how much more I could have done for the Lord's Kingdom.

Brother, Sister, if you are a Christian and have no family altar in your home, then for your own soul's sake, and for the sake of your loved ones, start one at once, and never let it go down, even when that worldly company comes to visit you, or the children bring home their un-saved friends. These are but most excellent opportunities for witnessing for the Lord and for winning others to Him

Will you do it? Amen!

## CHURCH ATTENDANCE

### WHAT MY PRESENCE DID:

It caused people to have confidence in me.

It made people know that I regarded my spiritual welfare and that of others as a matter of great importance.

It had a good effect on the services.

It made my friends feel more welcome.

It encouraged the brethren and helped the preacher in his work.

It caused others to come to Christ and say, "I believe that"; I believe that is enough to save a man." That man is a power for good.

It made my life stronger for another week.

It removed stumbling blocks from the sinner's path.

It caused others to say: "He practiced what he preached."—Selected

"I do not know that I shall live to see a single convert, but I would not leave my present field of labour to be made king of the greatest empire on the globe".

—A. Judson