

Visitor Pulpit.

THE CHRISTIAN MOTHER.

A SERMON BY DR. TALMAGE.

Moreover, his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

The story of Deborah and Abigail is very apt to discourage a woman's soul. She says within herself, "It is impossible that I ever can achieve any such grandeur of character, and I don't mean to try;" as though a child should refuse to play the eight notes because he cannot execute a "William Tell."

Hannah was the wife of Elkanah, who was a person very much like herself—unromantic and plain, never having fought a battle or been the subject of a marvellous escape.

The brightest time in all the history of that family was the birth of Samuel. Although no star ran along the heavens pointing down to his birthplace, I think the angels of God stooped at the coming of so wonderful a prophet.

As Samuel had been given in answer to prayer, Elkanah and all his family, save Hannah, started up to Shiloh to offer sacrifice of thanksgiving. The cradle where the child slept was altar enough for Hannah's grateful heart, but when the boy was old enough she took him to Shiloh and took three bullocks, and an ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and made offering of sacrifice unto the Lord, and there according to a previous vow, she left him; for there he was to stay all the days of his life, and minister in the temple.

Years rolled on, and every year Hannah made with her own hand a garment for Samuel, and took it over to him. The lad would have got along well without that garment, for I suppose he was well clad by the ministry of the temple; but Hannah could not be contented unless she was all the time doing something for her darling boy. "Moreover, his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice."

I. Hannah stands before you, then in the first place, as

AN INDUSTRIOUS MOTHER.

There was no need for her to work. Elkanah, her husband, was far from poor. He belonged to a distinguished family; for the Bible tells us that he was the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of John, the son of Zuph. "Who were they?" you say. I do not know; but they were distinguished people, no doubt, or their names would have been mentioned.

Hannah might have seated herself with her family, and, with folded arms and dishevelled hair, read novels from year to year, if there had been any to read; but when I see her making that garment, and taking it over to Samuel, I know she is industrious from principle as well as from pleasure. God would not have a mother become a drudge or a slave; He would have her employ all the helps possible in this day in the rearing of her children. But Hannah ought never to be ashamed to be found making a coat for Samuel.

Most mothers need no counsel in this direction. The wrinkles on their brow, the pallor on their cheek, the thimble-mark on their finger, attest that they are faithful in their maternal duties. The bloom, and the brightness, and the vivacity of girlhood have given place for the grander dignity, and usefulness, and industry of motherhood. But there is

A HEATHERISM IDEA

getting abroad in some of the families of Americans; there are mothers who banish themselves from the home circle. For three fourths of their maternal duties they prove themselves incompetent. They are ignorant of what their children wear, and what their children eat, and what their children read. They intrust to irresponsible persons these young immortals, and allow them to be under influences which may cripple their bodies, or taint their purity, or spoil their manners, or destroy their souls.

From the awkward cut of Samuel's coat you know his mother Hannah did not make it. Out from under flaming chandeliers, and off from imported carpets, and down the granite stairs, there has come a great crowd of children in this day, untrained, saucy, incompetent for all practical duties of life, ready to be caught in the first whirl of crime and sensuality. Indolent and unfaithful mothers will make indolent and unfaithful children. You cannot expect neat-

ness and order in any house where the daughters see nothing but slatternness and upside-downativeness in their parents. Let Hannah be idle, and most certainly Samuel will grow up idle.

Who are the industrious men in all our occupations and professions? Who are they who are managing the merchandise of the world, building the walls, tinning the roofs, weaving the carpets, making the laws, governing the nations, making the earth to quake, and heave, and roar, and rattle with the tread of gigantic enterprises? Who are they? For the most part they descended from industrious mothers, who, in the old homestead, used to spin their own yarn, and weave their own carpets, and plait their own door-mats, and flag their own chairs, and do their own work. The stalwart men and the influential women of this day, ninety-nine out of a hundred of them, came from such an illustrious ancestry of hard knuckles and homespun.

And who are these people in society, light as froth, blown every whither of temptation and fashion—the peddlers of filthy stories, the dancing-jacks of political parties, the scum of society, the tavern-lounging, the store-infesting, the men of low wink, and filthy chuckle, and brass breast-pins, and rotten associations? For the most part, they came from mothers idle and disgusting—the scandal-mongers of society, going from house to house, attending to everybody's business but not their own, believing in witches, and ghosts, and horse-shoes to keep the devil out of the churn, and by a godless life setting their children on the very verge of hell. The mothers of Samuel Johnson, and of Alfred the Great, and of Isaac Newton, and of St. Augustine, and of Richard Cecil, and of President Edwards, for the most part were industrious, hard-working mothers.

Now, while I congratulate all Christian mothers upon the wealth and the modern science which may afford them all kinds of help, let me say that every mother ought to be observant of her children's food, her children's companionships. However much help Hannah may have, I think she ought every year, at least, make one garment for Samuel. The Lord have mercy on the man that is so unfortunate as to have had a lazy mother!

II. Again, Hannah stands before you as

AN INTELLIGENT MOTHER.

From the way in which she talked in this chapter, and from the way she managed this boy, you know she was intelligent. There are no persons in a community who need to be so wise and well-informed as mothers.

Oh! this work of culture in children for this world and the next! This child is timid, and it must be roused up and pushed out into activity. This child is forward, and he must be held back and tamed down into modesty and politeness. Rewards for one, punishment for another. That which will make George will ruin John. The rod is necessary in one case, while a frown of displeasure is more than enough in another. Whipping and a dark closet do not exhaust all the rounds of domestic discipline. There have been children who have grown up and gone to glory without ever having their ears boxed.

Oh! how much care and tenderness are necessary in the rearing of children! But in this day, when there are so many books on the subject, no parent is excusable in being ignorant of the best mode of bringing up a child. If parents knew more of diets there would not be so many dyspeptic stomachs, and weak nerves and inactive livers among children. If parents knew more of physiology there would not be so many curved spines, and cramped chests, and inflamed throats, and diseased lungs as there are among children. If parents knew more of art, and were in sympathy with all that is beautiful, there would not be so many children coming out in the world with boorish proclivities. If parents knew more of Christ, and practiced more of His religion, there would not be so many little feet already starting on the wrong road, and all around us voices of riot and blasphemy would not come up with such ecstasy of infernal triumph.

The eaglets in the eyrie have no advantages over the eaglets of a thousand years ago; the kids have no superior way of climbing up the rocks than the old goats taught hundreds of years ago; the whelps know no more now than did the whelps of ages ago—they are taught no more by the lions of the desert; but it is a shame that in this day, when they are so many opportunities of improving ourselves in the best manner of cultivating children, that so often there is no more advancement in this respect than there has been among the kids and the eaglets and the whelps.

III. Again, Hannah stands before you as

A CHRISTIAN MOTHER.

From her prayers and from the way she consecrated her boy to God, I know that she was good. A mother may have the finest culture, the most brilliant surroundings; but she is not fit for her duties unless she be a Christian mother. There may be well-read libraries in the house; and exquisite music in the parlor; and the canvas of the best artists adorning the walls; and the wardrobe be-crowded with tasteful apparel; and the children be wonderful for their attainments, and make the house ring with laughter and innocent mirth; but there is something awful-looking in that house if it be not also the residence of a Christian mother.

I bless God that there are not many prayerless mothers—not many of them. The weight of responsibility is so great that they feel the need of a divine hand to help, and a divine voice to comfort, and a divine heart to sympathize. Thousands of mothers have been led into the kingdom of God by the hands of their little children. There were hundreds of mothers who would not have been Christians had it not been for the prattle of their little ones. Standing some day in the nursery they be-thought themselves. "This child, God has given me to raise for eternity. What is my influence upon it? Not being a Christian myself, how can I ever expect him to become a Christian? Lord help me!"

Are there anxious mothers, who know nothing of the infinite help of religion? Then I commend to them Hannah, the pious mother of Samuel. Do not think it is absolutely impossible that your children should come up iniquitous. Out of just such fair brows, and bright eyes, and soft hands and innocent hearts, crime gets its victims—extirpating purity from the heart, and rubbing out the smoothness from the brow, and quenching the lustre of the eye, and shrivelling up and poisoning, and putrefying, and scathing, and scalding, and blasting, and burning with shame and woe.

Every child is a bundle of tremendous possibilities; and whether that child shall come forth to life, its heart attuned to the eternal harmonies, and after a life of usefulness on earth go to a life of joy in heaven; or whether across it shall jar eternal discords, and after a life of wrong-doing on earth it shall go to a home of impenetrable darkness and an abyss of immeasurable plunge, is being decided by nursery song and Sabbath lesson, and evening prayer, and walk, and ride, and look, and frown, and smile. Oh! how many children in glory, crowding all the battlements, and lifting a million-voiced hosanna, were brought to God through Christian parentage.

One hundred-and-twenty clergymen were together, and they were telling their experience and ancestry; and of the one hundred and twenty clergymen, how many of them, do you suppose, assigned as the means of their conversion the influence of a Christian mother? One hundred out of the one hundred and twenty! Philip Doddridge was brought to God by the scripture lesson on the Dutch tile of a chimney fireplace. The mother thinks she is only rocking a child but at the same time she may be rocking the fate of nations, rocking the glories of heaven. The same maternal power that may lift the child up may press a child down.

A daughter came to a worldly mother and said she was anxious about her sins, and she had been praying all night. The mother said: "Oh, stop praying! I don't believe in praying. Get over all those religious notions and I'll give you a dress that will cost \$500, and you may wear it next week to that party." The daughter took the dress, and she moved in the gay circle, the gayest of all the gay, that night; and sure enough, all religious impressions were gone, and she stopped praying. A few months after she came to die, and in her closing moments said: "Mother bring me that dress that cost \$500." The mother thought it a very strange request, but she brought it to please the dying child. "Now," said the daughter, "mother hang that dress on the foot of the bed," and the dress was hung there on the foot of the bed. Then the dying girl got up on one elbow and looked at her mother, and then pointed to the dress and said: "Mother, that dress is the price of my soul!" Oh, what a momentous thing it is to be a mother!

IV. Again, and lastly, Hannah stands before you

THE REWARDED MOTHER.

For all the coats she made for Samuel, for all the prayers she offered for him, for the discipline exerted over him, she got abundant compensation in the piety, and the usefulness, and the popularity of her son Samuel; and that is true in all ages. Every mother gets full pay for all the prayers and tears in behalf of all her children. That man useful in commercial life; that man prominent in a profession; that master mechanic—why every step he takes in life has an echo of gladness in the old heart that long ago taught him to be a Christian, and heroic and earnest.

The story of what you have done, or what you have written, of the influence you have exerted, has gone back to the old homestead—for there is some one always ready to carry good tidings—and that story makes the needle in the old mother's tremulous hand fly quicker, and the pail in the father's hand come down upon the barn floor with a vigorous thump. Parents love to hear good news from their children. Do you send them good news always?

Look out for the young man who speaks of his father as "the governor," the "squire," or the "old chap." Look out for the young woman who calls her mother her "maternal ancestor," or the "old woman." The eye that mocketh at his father and refuseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley, shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

God grant that all these parents may have the great satisfaction of seeing their children grow up Christians. But oh! the pang of that mother who after a life of street-gadding and gossip-retailing, hanging on the children the fripperies and follies of this world, sees those children tossed out on the sea of life like foam on the wave, or nonentities in a world where only bravery and stalwart character can stand the shock? But blessed be the mother who looks upon her children as sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Oh! the satisfaction of Hannah in seeing Samuel serving at the altar; of Mother Eunice in seeing her Titmohy learned in the Scriptures. That is the mother's recompense, to see children coming up useful in the world, reclaiming the lost, healing the sick, pitying the ignorant, earnest and useful in every sphere. That throws a new light back on the old family Bible whenever she reads it, and that will be ointment to soothe the aching limbs of decrepitude, and light up the closing hours of life's day with the glories of an autumnal sunset!

There she sits, the old Christian mother, ripe for heaven. Her eyesight is almost gone, but the splendors of the celestial kindle up her vision. The gray light of heaven's mora has struck through the gray locks which are folded back over the wrinkled temples. She stoops very much now under the burden of care she used to carry for her children. She sits at home, too old to find her way to the house of God; but while she sits there, all the past comes back, and the children that forty years ago tripped around her arm-chair with their griefs, and joys, and sorrows—those children are gone now. Some caught up into a better realm, where they shall never die, and others out in the broad world, testing the excellency of a Christian mother's discipline. Her last days are full of peace; and calmer and sweeter will her spirit become, until the gates of life shall lift and let in the worn-out pilgrim into eternal springtime and youth, where the limbs never ache, and the eyes never grow dim, and the staff of the exhausted and decrepit pilgrim shall become the palm of the immortal athlete!

THE THREE CALLS.

These fearfully solemn words represent the Holy Spirit as pleading with a youth to give his heart to God and go to work in the vineyard:

O slumberer, rouse thee, despise not the truth, But give thy Creator the days of thy youth; Why standest there idle, the day breaketh, see, The Lord of the vineyard is waiting for thee.

But the youth is blinded by the god of this world. He must taste of earthly pleasures, knowing not that, like apples of Sodom they will turn to ashes on his lips. He would be a Christian, but oh, not yet.

Holy Spirit, by thy power, grant me yet another hour; Earthly pleasures I would prove, Earthly joys and earthly love. Scarcely yet has dawned the day. Holy Spirit, wait, I pray.

The dew of the morning has passed the freshness and beauty of the early morn, the flowers are withering in the noontide heat. The youth reclines on the grassy slope, beneath cooling shades; the zephyrs fan his brow. His thoughts are still on pleasure, but again comes the warning voice:

O loiterer, speed thee, the morn wears apace, Then squander no longer the moments of grace, But haste while there's time, with thy Master agree, The Lord of the vineyard stands waiting for thee.

But the youth is on enchanted ground. Life seems made only for pleasure. What need of haste? The day is only just begun.

Holy Spirit, stay, oh stay; brightly beams the early day; Let me linger in these bowers; God shall have my noon-tide hours. Chide me not for my delay; Holy Spirit wait, I pray.

The day wears on. The shadows of evening are stretched out. The

sun has almost run his course. Darkness hurries on, and yet the youth lingers. Once more, and for the last time, the Spirit calls:

O sinner, arouse thee, thy morning is passed. Already the shadows are lengthening fast; Escape for thy life, from the dark mountains flee, The Lord of the vineyard yet waiteth for thee.

But nothing can rouse the sinner. He will not turn away from the syren song of pleasure. "Surely there is time enough," and with this comforting thought, he cries:

Spirit, cease thy mournful lay; leave me to myself, I pray: Earth has flung her spells around me, Pleasure's silken chain hath bound me; When the sun his path hath trod, Spirit, then I'll turn to God.

Poor, lost soul, repeating the folly, the insane folly of trembling Felix, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will call for thee." But the long-suffering God declares, "My Spirit shall not always strive." Mournfully, pityingly, the Spirit turns away, and the sad, wailing cry bursts from the heart of the Infinite Son. "He is joined to his idols, let him alone."

Darkness, like a pall, covers the once bright and joyous scene; darkness that may be felt, no ray of sunlight, no rift in the cloud—utter impenetrable gloom.

Hark! borne on the wind is the bell's solemn toll; 'Tis mournfully pealing the knell of a soul: The Spirit's sweet pleading and strivings are o'er, The Lord of the vineyard stands waiting no more.

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