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THE FAMILY AS AN AGENCY FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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officer, and then determine whether the methods he is using are the ones that experience shows to be the best. 8. What provision is made for correcting the faults and increasing the skill of all teachers, leaders, and officers? To what extent does each one take advantage of these provisions?

NOTE.—Avoid treating educational aims and processes in a purely a priori way. Consider the special needs and unavoidable limitations in each case. Always study the attitudes of pupils toward every detail—persons, material, processes. Remember that our standards themselves may need revision.

THE FAMILY AS AN AGENCY FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

CHARLES FRANKLIN THWING, LL.D.

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History gives a presumption in favor of the family as an agency for religious education. For from time immemorial the father has been the high priest of the home. The family hearth was the first altar, the domestic fire the first sacred flame.

To make the family an agency for religious education, it is necessary that the family should be a religious institution. Every human agency springs from a human force, and every lasting human force comes from a human institution. Doing proceeds from being, efficiency from organism, service from character. Yet in turn, the agency re-acts—the doing determines somewhat the being, the efficiency works on and reforms the organism, and service makes, or helps to make, character. The cause, the condition, the result act, re-act, co-operate.

Let us begin at the beginning. This man and this woman, becoming husband and wife, are Christian. All that the word connotes belongs to them. If they are Christian, this institution—the family, is Christian. Being Christian, they are educative in the Christian faith to each other. The intimacies of the wedded life help to reveal the inner truths of the Christian faith. The wedded life unites their hearts in deeper oneness with God himself. A common destiny of these two lives strengthens the mighty Godward trend of their common being.

This husband and wife being Christian, becoming father and

mother, are Christian parents. They enter into the racial and the holy tradition. What can they do to establish a lasting Christian family? What can they do to make their children, like themselves, Christian? That is the crux of the whole question, and to that question I wish to give four answers.

In making the family an agency for religious education, the heads of the family should associate their children with the church. The church should be worthy of this association, and they themselves should make the association yet more worthy. To the church they should not surrender their own responsibility, but the church should add to the value of the training which the child has a right to receive at home. To us, who are Protestant, I commend the rule and example of the Church Roman Catholic. The fidelity of the priesthood, the guardianship of the beliefs, the watchfulness over the interests, of the churchman, the carefulness that the churchman should fulfill all formal demands, and the insistence on paying respect and reverence to the Church, are most significant of what the Protestants do not demand or pay. The reverent use of the Holy Water by the Roman Catholic on entering the church, and the no less holy lighting of the candle and placing it on the altar by the Greek Catholic are pregnant examples of reverence for us unreverential Protestants. In contrast with such methods, the Protestant parent is inclined to say, "I will not oblige my child to do things or to accept beliefs which he does not understand. He should have liberty." Such a declaration if honest is bad logic, and often it is only half honest. It implies often, too, a lack of belief in the parent. If, furthermore, these principles were applied to all concerns of the home, it would result in anarchism. Civilization is perpetuated by the youth of one generation doing, without reason, what the preceding generation has learned to know, with reason, should be done. The Christian home should associate itself in and by and for the children of the church.

What the church in turn should do to make this association of the greatest worth is not the concern of this paper; but I do venture to say that the marks of this association on the part of the church should be: first, love for the child; second, wisdom in understanding the nature of the child; third, honesty in dealing with the child; fourth, the highest purpose for the child's welfare; fifth, good taste.

A second method in constituting the family an agency in religious education is found in the book and the paper. This age is not a book-reading age. It is a paper-reading age. It is an athletic age. It is an age of reading about athletics. I know it is hard to get good

books into the heads, or hands even, of boys and girls. But nevertheless I would use all books that are at all interesting which can give the highest education to these boys and girls, and also I would use all papers which are wholesome. Of all books, I would commend the biography as the best type. Not many can I name, but I do venture to suggest: George Adam Smith's, "Life of Henry Drummond;" "The Life of Forbes-Robertson;" "The Life of David Livingstone;" "The Life of Toynbee;" "The Early Life of Charles Kingsley."

But in choosing books for boys and girls, one has to take boys and girls just where they are, and the book, which to them is stupid and stale, even before it is read, should not be put into their hands even if it be a very good book; rather let that book be chosen which is interesting, even if it be not a book of high literary merit. One wishes to use the gun which will bring down the game.

The third method for promoting religious education in the home is found in associating children with the active philanthropic and religious work of the home. Every home at all worthy seeks to help some other home. The poverty of one home is the problem of another home. The sorrow of one home is the grief of another. The progress and the happiness of one home is the exultation of the other. In every such problem the children may truly share. In such sympathies of joy or of grief the children may easily be led. Through such service the children may almost unconsciously be brought into the life religious.

The fourth and last answer to the question of making the home an agency for religious education lies in the establishment of family worship. I mean prayers in the family each day. One of the great men in American life said to me a few days ago: "My wife and I were the guests in New York of Mrs. and Mr. A. B. (mentioning another outstanding family). At the close of the first evening of our visit, Mr. A. B. said to me, 'We have family prayers in the morning in the library at 7:30. If you will come to the library, we shall be glad to have you join us.' I gave," said my friend, "a very hearty acceptance, and at 7:30 on the following morning, eight of us were assembled in the library, of whom four were children. The children repeated verses, and the host read a passage from the Bible and prayed. A beautiful service it was," said my friend. There is at least one man present in this meeting this afternoon who says that in his boyhood home the reading of the Bible every morning and the daily prayers of his father—prayers that brought eternity into time and stretched out time into eternity, which made God

present, duty glorious as well as binding, and sin impossible—have had an influence over him beyond all words.

I would therefore establish, or perhaps re-establish, the family altar. I would teach the children to listen to prayers and to pray. How one can live without prayer I cannot see or feel. For prayer is the way of approach to God and a way of God's approach to us. The prayer in the family should be daily without dull sameness, earnest without any token of insincerity, broad in its outreach without being thin, deep without obscurity, and heavenly and aspiring without being visionary.

A PARENTS' CLASS FOR THE STUDY OF THE BOY

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Many people who are associated with groups of boys and girls are aware of the importance of preparation for parenthood, which is the greatest function on earth. Because a study of the physical development of the child has been neglected, the necessary mental stimulation not understood, and the widest spiritual development little appreciated by the parent, the child has not come into the full experience of his parents. The real confidential relationship between the parent and youth is interrupted by the little exchange of thought or discussion concerning deep fundamental questions which during adolescence are very much confused in the mind of the boy or girl. More often this lack of companionship between parent and child had its beginnings in the refusal on the part of the parent to answer the child's innocent questions about life. This natural curiosity is the key to the wholesome rich experiences of life, which the parent may bar his child from, by a refusal to answer his questions and a willingness that he should get his first knowledge from the most unwholesome source, the street. Then, when the boy is about sixteen, the parent will wonder why there is no giving of confidence on the part of the child. Then if attempts are made to get together, it is hard and embarrassing and often impossible.

A parents' class is one of the agencies which can help save this waste of the transfer of experience from parent to child and at the same time act as a tonic to keep the parents braced to their high task.