

CHAPTER 2: THE POSSIBILITY OF GIVING A SUCCESSFUL TRAINING

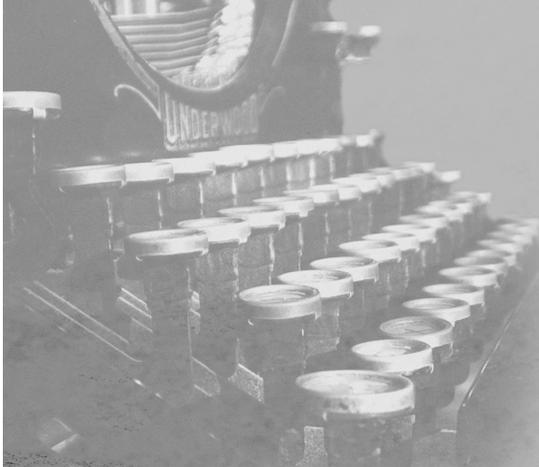
1. Do I understand you then to say positively that if children are rightly trained, it may with certainty be expected that they will become such Christians as have been described?

Yes, we do, and we are prepared to maintain the correctness of the statement. Is it not possible so to curb and train the spirit of the wild animals of the forest that they shall become your willing servants? Can you not so train the wild trees of the wood that they shall yield flowers and fruit to meet your fancy and please your taste? Can you not master and control the stormy wind and destructive lightning, making them willing ministers to help you in your earthly and heavenly enterprises? If you can do all this, surely the beautiful children whom Christ has redeemed with His precious Blood, and whom God has placed under your charge, and whom the Holy Spirit is waiting to influence, can be moulded and fashioned, and trained up in such purity, simplicity, and love, that morally and spiritually they shall be the admiration of God, angels, and good men—thus qualified to answer all those benevolent purposes for which they have been created, and ready to do the will of God on earth as it is done in Heaven. Oh, yes, it can be done, without a doubt, and it can be done with certainty.

2. Do not the Scriptures teach that right training will make right—that is, "righteous" children?

Yes, they do, but like many other important truths, this one is assumed in the Bible as a matter of course rather than stated in any particular form, or with any great frequency. There are, however, some remarkable passages to this effect; and one plain declaration, if not qualified by any other statement in the Holy Book, is as sufficient for our purpose as fifty. I will give one or two.

God says, concerning Abraham,



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For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord. – Gen. 18:19.

It is here implied that there is a way of commanding children which will assuredly result in their keeping the commandments of God, and so ultimately coming to the Tree of Life. Solomon reiterates this truth still more clearly when he says,

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it. – Prov. 22:6.

It is here positively affirmed that if the path be shown to the child, and he be taught to walk in it, he shall not only do so when he reaches the years of manhood, but he shall become permanently good.

Again, this truth is taught by the Holy Spirit through Paul, when he tells the Ephesians that they are to bring up their children

In the nurture and admonition of the Lord. – Eph. 6:4.

There is plainly some kind of nurture, training, admonition or guidance, which is of the Lord, not only because ordered by Him, but having some Divine Power specially connected with it, which, if imparted faithfully, will 'be effective, seeing that the children are not only to have it given, but they are to be brought up, that is, they are to grow up in it. They are not to receive it, and then depart from it, as is ordinarily expected. But they are to grow up on it as a house does on its foundations, and in the power of it, as a branch does in the nurture and life-giving properties of the sap which flows from the tree into which it is grafted.

There seems, further, to be an illustration of this effectual training given us in Paul's description of the spiritual life of Timothy, when he says,

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 Tim. 1:5.

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Here the Apostle connects the godly training of godly ancestors for two or three generations with the godly results to be found in Timothy's faith and devotion. The Apostle evidently did not look upon religious training as a mere speculation—as that sort of chance work which many persons regard their religious dealings with their children to be. Given such a grandmother, and such a mother, the Apostle clearly would have reckoned upon such a son and grandson as the natural, or rather, the Divine, outcome. How could it be otherwise?

3. But do facts support this statement? That is, do the children of Christian parents always turn out devoted saints?

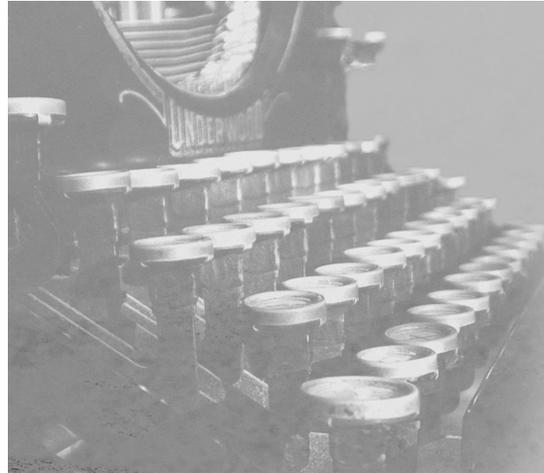
Alas, no! We are ashamed to confess that it is often just the opposite, and were it not only too well known already, we would blush to publish the fact that there is no necessary connexion between a Christian father and a Christian son. Indeed, so uncommon is it for the children of Christians to follow in the track of their parents, that there is little expectation—if any at all—of any youth turning out to be a saint in his school, or workshop, or college, because his father occupies some high position in the Christian church. Nay, it is a still more painful fact that some of the most notorious infidels, abandoned profligates, and bitter enemies of God and righteousness all over the world are the children of professing Christians.

4. Then what becomes of the statement that Christian training will make Christians?

Simply this, that if the children of Christian parents do not turn out Christian it only proves that the right training has not been given in some important particulars. God says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." If appearances seem to contradict this, the appearances must be at fault; God must be true, and that which contradicts Him must be a lie.

5. Can you show in what respect the religious training is likely to have been at fault in the instances of failure referred to?

The most serious lack in the religious training of children, and that which is the cause



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of frequent failure, is THE RELIANCE ON TEACHING ONLY. Multitudes of children are instructed in religious notions and their memories crammed with the facts of ancient religious history, whilst their hearts are left unchanged, uncultivated, and uninspired by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the children are made to believe themselves Christians, and are described to others as "loving Jesus," although unconverted, carnal, and worldly; having nothing more than an outward intellectual acquaintance with the facts and teaching of the Bible. They have just the same kind of acquaintance with Christianity that they have with geography and history. They believe in Christ and all the wonderful things He did, in Palestine, just as they believe in Julius Cæsar and all the wonderful things he did in Italy and elsewhere. But so far from their religious belief making them any stronger to resist the evil forces of their unchanged nature or raising up any barrier against the attacks of their outward enemies, it is about as helpful as their faith in Julius Cæsar. When temptation comes, whether it be from the world, the flesh, or the devil, the flimsy barriers of their intellectual faith give way, and down come the poor children, causing scandal and reproach to those whose names they bear, and whose hope and treasure in all sincerity they have doubtless been. The Master's words apply equally to the children, "*Ye must be born again.*" – John 3:16.

6. Can you name any other cause of the failure of such supposed religious training?

Yes; alas I perhaps the most fatal cause is the absence of the spirit of the teaching that is given. Hence they are not only destitute, as we have already shewn, of genuine godliness, hut also ignorant of its real nature—as ignorant as I should be of the true idea of a living man had I never seen anything more like a man than a corpse from which the spirit had fled. Life is essential to the right exhibition of godliness. The teacher must be the living illustration of the lesson he sets forth. Mind you set the right pattern before your children; they will work to the pattern, so you can have a good guess what the imitation will be.

7. Is there any other cause for the deplorable breakdowns to which reference has been made?

Yes, the withholding of that training which enables children to reduce to practice in their own hearts and lives the lessons which they receive. They are taught, but not

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trained.

But we are anticipating what will be better said further on. As we go forward with our task, the careful reader will be able to judge for himself as to any defect in any training within the sphere of his own observation. Far be the wish from us to condemn anyone who in sincerity has striven or is striving to nurture his children for God and Salvation; nothing can be more foreign to our purpose.

The painful facts we have stated cannot be denied, and in noting some of the causes which lead to them both here and hereafter, we only wish to prevent their being charged back upon God, as though the fault lay at His door. It is our privilege to justify the ways of God to men, and in doing so we have no doubt, that though the statement that children trained in the Divine method will maintain a holy walk may painfully reflect upon the action of some parents in the past, yet we shall thereby secure some more wise and holy training in future, leading to the desired result.

8. Do you maintain, then, that if a suitable training be given to children, they will, if spared, always grow up to be holy men and women?

We reply that where the conditions are complied with, the desired results will be realised. That is, if parents win fear. lessly and faithfully carry out such methods as are suggested directly to their hearts by the Holy Spirit, the teaching of the Bible, and their own common sense, their children will all become true servants and Soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we plant an acorn, an oak tree will be the result; if we carefully cultivate our ground, good crops will follow; and this law of a like cause always producing a like effect in the natural world, applies equally to the world of mind and spirit. Neglect to teach your child his letters, and he will never read. Teach him imperfectly, and he will read imperfectly. Teach him carefully, and he will read perfectly. Just so; give him a careful training in goodness and in God, and he will grow up good and godly. A good tree must bring forth good fruit. "*He that soweth [here or elsewhere] to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*" – Gal. 6:8

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9. This is a most important subject, then, to all who are charged with the care of children?

Certainly it is, and if it had received the attention and care which it deserves, the world would long ago have been peopled with the children of God, and all its forces, high and low, would have come into the possession of the King of kings.

10. But is not this task of training children very difficult and troublesome?

Yes, we doubt not it is. But so are many other tasks on which men set themselves, and which they accomplish successfully, in spite of the trouble and difficulty. Men are at endless trouble in training plants, trees, and animals, in managing business, in devising political schemes, and a million other things—all of which are of comparatively trifling importance when placed alongside this duty. Plants, animals, business, and politics are things of an hour, and perish almost in the very using. But the children that are playing about your feet or lying in your bosom will live for ever in happiness or misery—happiness or misery which will be increased, if not actually brought about by the training you give them. Not only so, but in the Hell or Heaven they will ultimately reach, there will sink or rise with them multitudes of others whom they have influenced one way or the other. Oh, what a trust is yours!

11. Ought not parents earnestly to seek that guidance and strength from God, which will enable them to give their children the training that will qualify them to fulfill the high purpose He has formed concerning them?

Most certainly they ought. On no subject ought parents more regularly, importunately, and believingly to seek help from God, than in all that concerns the deepest interests of their children. God has promised parents as well as others, "all sufficiency in all things," and if any of them "lack wisdom," they have only to ask it of Him. The children should not only be trained for God, but in God. When some celebrated Frenchman was asked, "What is the religion of the child?" he replied, "The religion of its mother!" The parent is its great high priest, through whom, humanly speaking, all the wisdom and grace it receives must come. How carefully then should parents seek Divine help,



and how fully ought they to rely on the co-operation of God, to enable them to rightly live before their children and to be unto them all they need in order to their Salvation!