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DR. TYLER'S

LETTER TO DR. BUSHNELL,

ON

CHRISTIAN NURTURE.
REV. DR. BUSHNELL,

DEAR SIR,

My attention has been recently directed to a little book, written by you, and published by the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, entitled "Discourses on Christian Nurture." It is a strong recommendation of any book, to be published by that Society, and to carry on the title page, "approved by the committee of publication;" because they have obtained the reputation of being particularly careful to publish nothing which shall militate against sound doctrine, or genuine Christian experience. The Christian public, therefore, were predisposed to think favorably of your discourses; but on perusing them, many have found themselves disappointed, and no small degree of surprise has been expressed, in various quarters, that the Mass. S. S. should have published such a book.

It is possible that you have not been fully understood; and that your views, correctly interpreted, do not possess that dangerous tendency which they have been supposed to possess. If it be so, it is certainly desirable that such explanations should be made, as are necessary to disabuse the public mind; and if the following strictures shall be the means of calling forth from you, satisfactory explanations, their object will be answered. You must be aware, that the influence of your book will depend on the manner in which it is understood, whether it is understood as you intended or not. If it is so understood as to lead persons to flatter themselves that they are Christians, while they are strangers to genuine piety, its tendency is certainly dangerous, however far it may have been from your intention to contribute to such a result. That it will be so
understood, is my honest belief. And this is the reason which has induced me to address to you this letter.

The question which you propose to answer in your discourses is, "What is the true idea of Christian education?" Your answer is given in the following proposition, viz: "That the child is to grow up a Christian. In other words, the aim, effort, and expectation should be, not as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age, but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years."

Is this the true idea of Christian education? Christian education, so far as it relates to parents, I take to be the proper discharge of parental duty. To give the true idea, therefore, of Christian education, would be to point out the true method of educating children, as it is inculcated in the word of God. The text on which your discourses are founded, is addressed by the Apostle to parents. "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The meaning of the word translated nurture, is instruction, and of the word translated admonition, reproof or discipline. By the nurture and admonition of the Lord, therefore, we are to understand that instruction and discipline which God has appointed. The text relates solely to the duty of parents. It teaches nothing as to the results to be expected from the faithful discharge of parental duty. But your proposition has exclusive reference to these results.

If any one were to ask, what is the true idea of ministerial faithfulness? who would think of answering the question by saying, it is that all the people over whom the minister is placed, are to be immediately converted, and to be trained up for heaven? If such was the invariable effect of ministerial faithfulness, this would not be a true answer to the question; for the duty of the minister is entirely distinct from the fruits resulting from the faithful discharge of his duty. But it is not true that faithfulness in a minister will invariably result in the immediate conversion of all his people. The Apostle says, 2 Cor. 2: 15, 16; "We are unto God, a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savour of death unto death, and to the
other, the savour of life unto life.” Besides—was not Christ faithful? But how many of his hearers were hardened in impenitence and unbelief?

When you say, that “the true idea of Christian education,” is “that the child is to grow up a Christian,” I understand you to maintain that this is the end to be aimed at by the Christian parent, and in all ordinary cases, at least, to be expected. You do not, indeed, affirm, that “every child can be made to grow up in Christian piety,” though you think no one can prove the contrary. But you say, “It is presumptively true that such a result can be realized; just as it is presumptively true that a school will forward the pupils in knowledge, though possibly sometimes it may fail to do it.” If I rightly apprehend your meaning, it is, that parents ought to educate their children, not merely with the hope, that they will become Christians, at some time, either in childhood, or at a later period, when God in his infinite wisdom and mercy shall see fit to convert them; but with the expectation that they will grow up Christians from their earliest years.

That the child should grow up a Christian, it is necessary that he should become a Christian. And how is he to become a Christian? Is he made a Christian by education? You admit that there is no “radical goodness of human nature,” and that “the work of Christian education” is not “to educate the good that is in us.” No one is a Christian by nature; for all “are by nature children of wrath.” Those to whom the privilege is given to become the sons of God, are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Not of blood—They are not Christians by natural descent. Grace is not hereditary. Nor of the will of the flesh—They are not converted by any efforts of their own, made in an unrenewed state. Nor of the will of man—They are not converted by moral suasion, or by any efforts of man. They are not made Christians by education. But of God—It is God’s prerogative to change the heart. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

It is a fundamental principle of the Christian scheme, that every child born into the world, is by nature totally depraved, and must be born again in order to become a child of God, and an heir of heaven. Adam, after his apostacy, “begat a son
in his own likeness, after his image;” and this depraved likeness has been perpetuated from generation to generation to the present time. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” “Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” “We have borne the image of the earthy.”

But you ask, “Who then has told you that the child cannot have the new heart of which you speak?” I readily grant that God can, if he sees fit, renew, by his Spirit, the heart of a child as soon as he is born, so that he shall, as you express it, “open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.” But the question at issue, relates not to what God is able to do. He is doubtless able to renew the heart of every child, born either of religious or irreligious parents; but this does not prove that he will do it.

Besides—if a child is born again at the commencement of life, so as to “open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed,” (and I do not deny that there are such cases,) what has Christian education had to do in bringing about this event? No Christian instruction, or Christian discipline, could have had any instrumentality in the child’s conversion; for by the supposition, his heart was renewed before he was capable of receiving any verbal instruction. Such instances may occur, in answer to the prayers of God’s people; but they are to be attributed to the sovereign act of God, independently of all human instrumentality. If God, in mercy, will thus renew the hearts of our children, we may indeed expect that they will grow up Christians. On no other supposition, have we a right to expect this. Every child comes into the world depraved, and until renewed by the Holy Ghost, is spiritually dead. No degree of parental faithfulness can impart spiritual life to that child. Nothing but the life-giving energy of the Holy Ghost can do it. This is a truth never to be lost sight of by the Christian parent. Now the question is, has God explicitly informed us in his word, that he will, thus early, renew the hearts of our children, if we will faithfully discharge our parental duties? Where is any such explicit promise to be found?
The duty of the Christian parent is analogous to that of the Christian minister. The minister must labor for the salvation of his people. He must instruct them in the great things which belong to their peace. He must beseech and warn them to become reconciled to God. And he must do these things in humble dependence on divine grace, and with earnest prayer that God will crown his labors with success. But it is not his work to renew the hearts of his people. Nor has he any right to expect, that his hearers will derive any saving benefit from his labors, unless God shall accompany them with the renewing and sanctifying influences of his Spirit. “Who then is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.”

It is true that the faithful minister has reason to hope and believe, that he will not labor in vain. But when, how, and to what extent, God will crown his labors with success, he has no means of determining. God is a holy Sovereign. “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy.” It is true, he employs means, and he gives efficacy to the means of his own appointment; but he does it in his own way, and in his own time, and in such degrees as seemeth good in his sight. It is not always true that the labors of the most faithful minister are crowned with the greatest success. Many more souls seem to have been converted under the preaching of Paul, than under the preaching of Christ. But surely Paul was not more faithful than his Master. The great aim of the Christian minister should be, to do his duty, and to leave the results with God. What God shall do, in connection with his labors, it is not for him to say. If he is faithful, he will be “unto God, a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” The divine direction is, “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” If God shall impart the influences of his Spirit, the seed will vegetate and grow and bring forth fruit. But whether it shall spring up now, or
So with the Christian parent. The great thing at which he is to aim, is to discharge faithfully his duty. This is all that he can do. It belongs to God to say, what shall be the result of his labors. The parent can no more renew the heart of his child, than the preacher can renew the hearts of his hearers. This is the prerogative of God only. No other being in the universe is competent to the task. If a child, born of human parents, were educated by angels, amid the glories of heaven, he would grow up a sinner, unless renewed by the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence it is, that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” The meaning of the term flesh, as here used, is evident from the manner in which it is used elsewhere in the New Testament. “The works of the flesh are manifest.” “In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” “They that are in the flesh, cannot please God.” “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.” “To be carnally minded is death; for the carnal mind is enmity against God.”

The Christian parent, it is true, like the Christian minister, has reason to believe that he will not labor in vain. He knows that parental instruction and discipline, are means of God’s appointment, and means which he has determined to accompany with his blessing. But the time, and manner, and degree in which he will impart his blessing, is known only to himself. In this, he acts as a holy sovereign, as he does in all his dispensations. Nor is the success of Christian parents always in exact proportion to their faithfulness. None have any claims upon their Maker. The most faithful feel that they are unworthy of the least favor for themselves, or for their children, and when they pray for themselves, or for them, they pray for mercy which they know God is under no obligation to grant. If God had promised to save all their children on condition of entire faithfulness on their part, they could not appropriate the promise to themselves, for they know that they are not entirely faithful, but come very far short of their duty.
And here permit me to ask, when you maintain that if parents were faithful, they might expect to see their children, (as a general thing, at least,) grow up Christians from their earliest childhood, what degree of faithfulness, do you consider necessary to insure this result? Must they be sinlessly perfect? If so, what you have written is labor lost; for there are no such parents. But if you mean a degree of faithfulness short of sinless perfection, how great must it be? How faithful must a sinful, erring parent be, to render it certain that God will change the hearts of his children at the very beginning of life, before they are old enough to receive any verbal instruction?

There are many parents who are eminently pious, and whose piety shines in nothing more conspicuously, than in the education of their children. But they see no evidence that their children are pious. On the contrary, they think they see decisive evidence that they are not. To such parents you say, "If you have endeavored to realize the very truth I here affirm, but find that your children do not exhibit the character you have looked for; if they seem to be intractable to religious influences, and sometimes to display an apparent aversion to the very subject of religion itself, you are not, of course, to conclude that the doctrine I here maintain, is untrue or impracticable. You may be unreasonable in your expectations of your children. Possibly, there may be seeds of holy principle in them, which you do not discover. . . . . . It is conceivable that regenerate character may exist, long before it is fully and formally developed."

The tendency of these remarks, I cannot but regard as exceedingly dangerous to the souls of men. Are Christian parents to presume that their children are pious, when they give not the least evidence of the fact?—when "they seem to be intractable to religious influences," and to manifest "aversion to the very subject of religion itself?" But you say, "a child acts out his present feelings, the feelings of the moment, without qualification or disguise." Very true. And for that reason, I believe that if there is any good thing in the heart of the child, it will sometimes show itself. We do not expect that the child who is sanctified from the womb, will be sinlessly perfect; but we do expect that the child whose heart has been renewed by divine grace, will sometimes, at least, appear dif-
ferently from the one who has not been renewed. We do not expect that he will be "intractable to religious influences." No parent has a right to presume, that some "seeds of holy principle" have been implanted in the heart of his child, till he sees some evidence of the fact. He is taught in the scriptures, that his child is, by nature, a child of wrath, even as others—that he is born depraved, with a nature prone to evil, and that he will continue so, till renewed by the Holy Spirit. So long as he sees no evidence that a new disposition has been implanted within him, he has reason to believe that he is still in his natural state. He is to presume that his child is spiritually dead, till he exhibits some signs of spiritual life.

If parents presume that their children are pious, while they give no evidence of piety; while they are "intractable to religious influences," and manifest "aversion to the very subject of religion itself;" it will have a most unhappy influence on their own feelings and conduct. They will not feel that deep solicitude for their children which their case demands, nor will they impart to them the instruction which is suited to their condition. Their whole deportment in reference to their children will be likely to be such, as will encourage them to think well of their spiritual state.

Nor is this all. Your book is to be read, not by parents only, but by children and youth; and what impression will it make on their minds? Here is a youth who never felt any particular interest in the subject of religion. He is a stranger to all the feelings of the pious heart, and often feels an aversion to the whole subject of religion. It never entered into his thoughts that such a person as he could possibly be a Christian. But he has pious parents, who have felt great solicitude for his spiritual welfare, and who have endeavored to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He cannot accuse them of unfaithfulness, but on the contrary, believes they have discharged their duty. He reads your book, and is there taught that "regenerate character may exist long before it is formally developed"—that those who are religiously educated, although they may "seem to be intractable to religious influences, and sometimes display an apparent aversion to the very subject of religion itself," may, notwithstanding, have some "seeds of holy principle" in them which have not yet been
discovered by themselves, or by others. He is moreover taught that this is to be presumed to be true of those children and youth whose parents have been faithful. He presumes, of course, that he is a Christian, and that his immortal interests are safe. Multitudes of such youth will read your book; and who can tell how many will be thus deluded to the ruin of their souls?

There are other parts of your discourses which are fraught with the same dangerous tendency; particularly what you say of an organic connection subsisting between parents and their children, and the subject of Infant Baptism.

In relation to the first of these topics, your language is, "If we narrowly examine the relation of parent and child, we shall not fail to discover something like a law of organic connection, as regards character, subsisting between them—such a connection as makes it easy to believe, and natural to expect, that the faith of the one will be propagated in the other. Perhaps I should rather say, such a connection as induces the conviction that the character of the one is actually included in the character of the other, as the seed is formed in the capsule, and being there matured by nutriment derived from the stem, is gradually separated from it."

If this statement is true, I see not why the child of every pious parent has not a right to presume, that he is himself pious. If there is "a law of organic connection subsisting between them"—if "the character of one is actually included in the character of the other," I would seriously inquire, if those who are children of God, are not born of blood? Is not grace hereditary? You say, "The child after birth, is still within the matrix of the parental life, and will be more or less for many years. And the parental life will be flowing into him all that time, just as naturally, and by a law as truly organic, as when the sap of the trunk flows into a limb." And are we then to understand, that the child is as much a part of the parent, as the branch is a part of the tree; and partakes of the character of the parent, just as the branch partakes of the nature of the tree? If this be so, then should a child not possess the character of his parent, it would be just as strange and unnatural, as if the branch of a vine should prove to be the limb of a thorn-bush.
You give us to understand that you do not intend to "assert a power in the parent to renew the child, or that the child can be renewed by any agency of the Spirit less immediate than that which renews the parent himself." Very true, because, if there is such an organic connection between the parent and child as you maintain, then the agency which renews the parent, must renew the child at the same time. If by any supernatural power, the nature of a tree should be changed, the change would pervade all the branches. And if any new branches should shoot forth, they too would partake of the nature of the tree as thus changed. According to your theory, therefore, I see not but the children born of parents already pious, must be Christians by nature. I do not charge you with holding this sentiment, although it seems to me to be a legitimate inference from your theory.

Other things which you have said, seem to imply that piety, in your view, is hereditary in the same sense that depravity is. You say, "we discover in the scriptures that the organic law of which I have spoken, is distinctly recognized, and that character in children, is often regarded as, in some very important sense, derivative from their parents. It is thus that 'sin has passed upon all men.' 'By the offense of one, judgment came upon all.' Christian faith is also spoken of in a similar way."

Now it must be remembered, that in consequence of the apostacy of Adam, "sin hath passed upon all men." There is no exception. Corruption of nature has passed through every generation, and not an individual has escaped the infection. Now, if grace is, in the same sense, hereditary; if piety is derivative from parents as sin is, then the children of pious parents must all be pious. But I do not understand you to maintain that all the children of pious parents, are, without an exception, children of God. Your reasoning, therefore, would seem to prove, more than you are willing to affirm.

But in view of what you have said on this subject, I would ask, what opinion will the children of pious parents be likely to form of their own character and spiritual state?

But I proceed to notice what you say of infant or household baptism. It is "a rite," you say, "which supposes the fact of an organic connection of character between the parent and
the child; a seal of faith in the parent, applied over to the child, on the ground of a presumption that his faith is wrapped up in the parent's faith; so that he is accounted a believer from the beginning. . . . Thus it is that infant baptism becomes an appropriate rite. It sees the child in the parent, counts him presumptively a believer, and a christian, and with the parent baptizes him also. Furthermore, you will perceive, that it must be presumed, either that the child will grow up a believer, or that he will not. The Baptist presumes that he will not, and therefore declares the rite to be inappropriate. God presumes that he will, and therefore appoints it. The Baptist tells the child that nothing but sin can be expected of him; God tells him that for his parents' sake, whose faith he is to follow, he has written his own name upon him, and expects him to grow up in all duty and piety."

And is this the import of infant baptism? Is the child baptized, because he is presumed to be a Christian by reason of the organic connection subsisting between him and his parent? Then surely, baptized children, especially if they have reason to believe that their parents are truly pious, have a right to presume that they are Christians, and have an inheritance in heaven, although they discover in themselves no evidences of a renewed heart.

Suppose a pastor should call together the baptized children of his flock, and should thus address them.

There is an organic connection between you and your parents, which induces the conviction that your character is actually included in theirs;—and you have been baptized on the presumption that you are Christians—that your faith was wrapped up in your parents' faith, so that you have been accounted believers from the beginning. If your parents are truly pious and faithful, you have a right to presume that you have been born again, although neither you nor your parents can, as yet, discover any evidences of a renewed heart. You may now "seem to be intractable to religious influences, and sometimes to display an apparent aversion to the very subject of religion itself;" but you are not, of course, to conclude that you are in an unrenewed state. "Regenerate character may exist, long before it is formally developed." "Some root of right principle" may have been implanted in you, in very
early childhood, which sooner or later will manifest itself. You have reason to presume it is so. Be encouraged, therefore, to cherish the hope that your immortal interests are secured.

What Christian pastor would dare take the responsibility of making such an address to the baptized children and youth of his congregation? But I would seriously inquire whether some things contained in your discourses, will not be likely to make the same impression, as would be made by such an address?

The following passage, intended to describe the nature of conversion, I cannot but regard as containing error of a very dangerous tendency.

"A young man, correctly, but not religiously brought up, light and gay in his manners, thoughtless hitherto in regard to anything of a serious nature, happens accidentally one Sunday, while his friends are gone to ride, to take down a book on the evidences of Christianity. His eye floating over one of the pages, becomes fixed, and he is surprised to find his feelings flowing out strangely into its holy truths. He is conscious of no struggle of hostility; but a new joy dawns in his being. Henceforth, to the end of a long and useful life, he is a Christian man. The love into which he was surprised, continues to flow, and he is remarkable in the churches all his life long, as one of the most beautiful, healthful, and dignified examples of Christian piety."

Can it be that you suppose this to be a description of genuine conversion? Does it resemble the conversion of the publican, or the prodigal, or the Phillipian jailor, or the Apostle Paul, or the thousands converted on the day of Pentecost? Here is a thoughtless, giddy youth, who suddenly becomes a Christian, without any conviction of sin, or any contrition for it. "He is conscious of no struggle of hostility," and of no change from enmity to love. He has no idea that he has been the enemy of God all his days, and that he is justly condemned by the divine law to everlasting death. While pressing his way down to ruin, contemning the authority of God, and virtually declaring that he will not have the Lord to reign over him; and in a state of thoughtless security, suddenly "a new joy dawns in his being." And this is considered genuine conver-
sion. And the person thus converted is said to be "henceforth to the end of a long and useful life, a Christian man," and "one of the most beautiful, healthful, and dignified examples of Christian piety."

Now all this is a fancy sketch. It is not drawn from real life. Such a conversion I cannot believe, ever did, or ever will result in a life of genuine piety. That a person may, in this way, be led to believe himself a Christian, I readily admit. I admit also, that having thus commenced a religious life, he may persevere, and be a zealous pharisee all his days. But the humble, devoted Christian, has not so learned Christ. To be born again, to pass from death to life, to become a new creature, and to be translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son, is not so small a matter.

But you say, "A little mis-education, called Christian, discouraging the piety it teaches, and making enmity itself a necessary ingredient in the struggle of conversion, and conversion no reality without a struggle, might have sufficed to close the mind of this man against every thought of religion to the end of life." That is, if I understand you—If this thoughtless sinner, who was living in constant rebellion against God, had been taught that he was an enemy to his Maker, and that he needed an entire transformation of moral character, to prepare him for heaven; it might have been the means of his ruin. It was better for him to be as he was, without any religious instruction, than to be thus instructed. But is not every unrenewed man the enemy of God? Has not the Apostle declared, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned?" Are we not taught that all men are by nature, "dead in trespasses and sins," and that they must be quickened by the power of the Holy Ghost? And is it dangerous to teach sinners their true character and condition? Must they be flattered in their sins? Must the truth be concealed from them? Must they be led to think well of themselves, in order to promote their conversion?

But you say, "We certainly know that much of what is called Christian nurture, only serves to make the subject of religion odious, and that as nearly as we can discover, in exact
proportion to the amount of religious teaching received." That Christian parents are sometimes injudicious, and create needless prejudice by an offensive manner of teaching their children, is doubtless true. Their teaching, and their discipline should be imbued with a spirit of love. But they must teach their children truths to which the natural heart is opposed. True religion, lovely as it is, is not lovely to a carnal mind. If it is, the sinner's heart needs not to be changed. But if the carnal mind is enmity against God, then the clearer the views which the sinner has of the divine character, and of the nature of holiness, the more will the opposition of his heart be called into exercise. Christ said to the Jews, "Ye have both seen and hated, both me and my Father."

The fact that a certain course of religious instruction "serves to make the subject of religion odious," by no means proves that that instruction is wrong; for no religious teaching ever excited the opposition of the carnal heart, more than the preaching of Christ. The religion which he taught to the Jews, was so odious in their sight, and filled them with such malice and rage, that nothing could satisfy them but his blood. If it be a fact that sinners hate the light, and love darkness rather than light, it is to be expected that when the truth is brought clearly before their minds, it will awaken opposition. And must it then be concealed? Must the sinner be taught nothing which is not agreeable to his taste? How then is he ever to see the reason for that divine injunction, "Be ye reconciled to God!" How is he ever to repent of his whole life of rebellion against his Maker? I can well conceive that under the most judicious and faithful religious instruction, the subject of religion may be made to appear odious, and that the sinner may, in this way, be brought to a sight of the desperate wickedness of his heart, and through divine grace, be led to the exercise of true and saving repentance.

You think, however, that "Christian piety should begin in milder forms of exercise." Much that is called piety does thus begin. But whether it is the piety which prepares the soul for heaven, the disclosures of the last day will decide.

"The European churches generally," you say, "regard Christian piety more as a habit of life, formed under the train-
ing of childhood, and less as a marked spiritual change in experience." That this is true of many persons, not only in Europe, but in this country, there can be no doubt. Multitudes deny that there is any such thing as an instantaneous change of character, produced by the special agency of the Holy Spirit. No wonder, therefore, that they should regard Christian piety, as only a habit of life, formed under the training of childhood. But it remains to be proved, that what they regard as Christian piety, is really such. All is not true religion which passes under that name. The Pharisees were very religious. And they were trained up from their childhood to be so. But their religion was abomination in the sight of God. The Roman Catholics are also very religious in their way; and so are the numerous tribes of pagans. And their religion is the result of their early training. But of what value is it in the sight of God?

You proceed—"In Germany, for example, the church includes all the people; and it is remarkable that under a scheme so loose, and with so much of pernicious error taught in the pulpit, there is yet so much of deep religious feeling, so much of lovely and simple character, and a savour of Christian piety, so generally prevalent in the community. So true is this, that the German people are every day spoken of as a people religious by nature; no other way being observed of accounting for the strong religious bent which they manifest. Whereas it is due, beyond any reasonable question, to the fact that children are placed under a form of treatment which expects them to be religious, and are not discouraged by the demand of an experience above their years." And are we then to go to Germany for the true idea of Christian education? "Under a scheme so loose, and with so much of pernicious error taught in the pulpit," are we to expect to find more lovely forms of piety, and better examples of parental faithfulness, than in our own happy New England?

But "The German people are every day spoken of as a people religious by nature." And suppose they are religious by nature. They are not the only people of whom this may be affirmed with truth. It has often been said, that "man is a religious being." It is certainly true that mankind generally seem disposed to believe and practice some kind of religion. But the religion which mankind, by nature, are disposed to
embrace, is a religion which is agreeable to a totally depraved heart. Men may be religious by nature. But they are not Christians by nature. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." It is easy to train up children to be religious, if they are taught a religion which is pleasing to the natural heart. But to train up children to be truly pious, transcends the power of man.

Permit me to express the opinion, that much of what is called Christian nurture, only serves to train up persons in a state of spiritual delusion. The child is taught to be good, and led to believe that he is good, if he says his prayers, repeats his hymns, and attends to certain prescribed forms. No instruction is given which is suited to lead him to feel that he is a sinner, under condemnation; and that he needs repentance and pardon, and a change of character, to prepare him for heaven. He is "encouraged" to think well of himself, and hence he is filled with spiritual pride, and grows up a pharisee, alive without the law, and trusting in himself that he is righteous.

It should be the object of the Christian parent, to lead his child, as soon as possible, to a knowledge of his true character and condition as a sinner—to show him from the frequent exhibitions of a wayward disposition, the wickedness of his heart, and the necessity of a new heart to prepare him for heaven. But this, you will say, is suited to discourage the child. Discourage him from what? From trusting in himself that he is righteous; and he ought to be thus discouraged. Self-righteousness, if not repented of and abandoned, will as certainly destroy the soul as any other form of sin. Every child that is saved, must be saved by grace, through the blood of atonement, and the sanctification of the Spirit; and every thing which is done to encourage him to expect salvation in any other way, must sooner or later be undone, or the child is ruined.

I was not a little surprised by the following paragraph in your book.

"I once took up a book from a Sabbath-school library, one problem of which was, to teach a child that he wants a new heart. A lovely boy, (for it was a narrative) was called every day, to resolve that he would do no wrong that day; a task
which he undertook most cheerfully at first, and even with a show of delight. But before the sun went down, he was sure to fall into some ill-temper, or to be overtaken by some infirmity. Whereupon the conclusion was immediately sprung upon him, that he wanted a new heart. We are even amazed that any teacher of ordinary intelligence, should not at once have imagined how she herself would fare under such kind of regimen. And the practical cruelty of the experiment is yet more to be deplored, than its want of consideration. Had the problem been how to discourage most effectually every ingenuous struggle of childhood, no readier or surer method could have been devised."

I know not that I ever saw the book of which you speak. But your account of it, has led me to think it is probably a very good and useful book. The object I cannot but regard as very important, viz. "to teach a child that he wants a new heart." This was the first lesson which our Saviour taught to Nicodemus; nor was he deterred from teaching it, through fear of discouraging the Jewish ruler from making any effort to secure his salvation. The manner of teaching this lesson, strikes me as particularly happy. The child is led to see from his prone-ness to break his resolutions to do what is right, and to "fall into some ill-temper," that he has a wicked heart, and needs a new heart. What can be a more important part of Christian education than this? But this, you seem to think, is very improper instruction to be given to a child. And would you, then, have the child encouraged to believe that he is good, and is growing up good? What can be more directly suited to confirm him in a state of consummate self-righteousness? Besides—if the child is not to be taught that he needs a new heart, for what would you teach him to pray? And of what is he to be taught to repent, if not of those wicked feelings which are so constantly manifesting themselves? But you intimate that the child cannot understand what is meant by a new heart. But surely this language is very easily explained, and can be made as intelligible as the direction to be good. Cannot the child be made to understand very early, that certain feelings which he indulges, are wicked feelings; and that these constitute a wicked heart? And can he not be made to understand, that he needs to have feelings of an opposite char-
acter, and that to have such feelings is to have a new heart? If the child is not to be taught that he is a sinner, how can he be taught the need of a Saviour?

I repeat it—That mode of training children which teaches them to be good, and encourages them to believe that they are good, if they attend to certain prescribed forms, is suited to train them up pharisees, and not Christians.

You say, “There could not be a worse or more baleful implication given to a child, than that he is to reject God and all holy principle, till he has come to mature age. What authority have you from the scriptures to tell your child, or by any sign to show him that you do not expect him truly to love and obey God, till after he has spent whole years in hatred and wrong? What authority to make him feel that he is the most unprivileged of all human beings, capable of sin, but incapable of repentance; old enough to resist all good, but too young to receive any good whatever? It is reasonable to suppose, that you have some express authority for a lesson so manifestly cruel and hurtful, else you would shudder to give it. I ask you for the chapter and verse out of which it is derived.”

Do you mean to intimate, that this is the view of Christian education which is commonly held by our churches? If you do, I must repel the insinuation as unjust and slanderous. The most faithful parents, it is true, come very far short of their duty; but what Christian parent ever taught his children such a lesson as you have here described? What truly Christian parent, does not teach his children, that it is their duty to remember their Creator in the days of their youth—to repent of their sins—to love God—to believe in Christ, and to lead a holy life? What truly Christian parent, does not teach his children, that if they are old enough to sin, they are old enough to repent, and that they cannot too early become the disciples of Christ? What Christian parent does not believe that God can renew the heart of a child in his earliest years, and that cases of this kind do sometimes occur?

But the question is, are Christian parents to presume that their children have been regenerated, while they give no evidence of piety? It is a fact which cannot be denied, that a large proportion of the children of pious parents, during the years of childhood, give as decisive evidence that they have
not been born again, as the children of other parents. They appear to be as entirely destitute of every pious feeling, and to manifest an equal proneness to evil. And are these children to be encouraged to presume that some "seeds of holy principle" have been implanted in their hearts? I cannot think of a more likely way to ruin their souls.

That Christian parents have great encouragement to be faithful to their children, is certainly true. And far be it from me to detract one iota from the encouragement which God has given them. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." We are here taught, what has been found to be true in all ages of the church. Impressions made in childhood, are usually permanent. Under faithful instruction and discipline, children form correct habits, which they carry with them through life; and many of them become truly pious. But this text does not teach that if children are trained up in the way they should go, they will begin to walk in it before they are born—(that is, before they are really born, for you tell us, "a child is really not born till he immerses from the infantile state.") And such a supposition is proved to be false by the whole history of the church. Let Christian parents rejoice, and give thanks to God, when they see any evidence of piety in their children at whatever age. But let them not presume, nor teach their children to presume, that they have been spiritually renewed, while they are strangers to every feeling of the pious heart.

Your readers will be surprised at what you say of baptismal regeneration. You do, indeed, discard this doctrine, as maintained by Romanists and High Church-Episcopalians; but I understand you to hold that baptism is, in some sense, regeneration. You say, "The Jewish nation regarded other nations as unclean. Hence when a Gentile family wished to become Jewish citizens, they were baptized in token of cleansing. Then they were said to be reborn, or regenerated, so as to be accounted true descendants of Abraham. We use the word naturalize, that is, to make natural born, in the same sense. But Christ had come to set up a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of heaven; and finding all men aliens, and spiritually unclean, he applies over the rite of baptism, which was familiar to the Jews ("art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not..."
these things?" giving it a higher sense, "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Are you sure that by the phrase "born of water," our Saviour meant baptism? That he did not, I have attempted to show at length, in an article on Baptismal Regeneration, in the second volume of the New Englander. To this article I must refer you for a full expression of my views on this subject. In the mean time, permit me to say, that according to your interpretation, baptism is essential to salvation. The declaration of our Saviour is absolute. "Except a man be born of water, &c., he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." And did Christ mean to affirm, that except a man be baptized, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven? Did he not say to the unbaptized thief, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise?" The Apostle said, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Philip said to the eunuch, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" [be baptized.] If the eunuch was a true believer, he was regenerated before his baptism—consequently baptism is not regeneration, nor has it any necessary connection with regeneration.

But if the phrase "born of water," does not mean baptism, what does it mean? I suppose that the term water is used, in this passage, not in a literal, but figurative sense, and that to be "born of water and of the Spirit," are but different modes of expression, to denote the same thing. The one, however, may be designed to point out the nature of the effect produced, and the other the agent by whom it is produced. The passage is thus paraphrased by Dr. Scott. "'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit'—except his heart be purified by that inward washing of the Holy Spirit, of which water hath been the constant emblem, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Should it be said, that the form of expression clearly imports that two distinct things are intended, I would reply, that similar phraseology is often used to describe, not two distinct things, but what, in the sense above supposed, is one and the same thing. Take the following texts as examples. "Make you a new heart, and a new spirit." "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

What is
the difference between a new heart and a new spirit? "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." In this text, water and spirit evidently denote the same thing. The promise expressed in figurative language in the first part of the passage, is repeated in literal language in the last part. John the Baptist, speaking of Christ, said, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." That by fire is here intended literal fire, no one will pretend.*

The meaning, as commonly expounded, is, that Christ should baptize with the Holy Ghost, "which has the energy and efficacy of fire, to refine us from our dross and corruptions." So in the passage under consideration, to be "born of water and of the Spirit," is to be renewed by the Holy Spirit, which like water purifies us from the pollutions of sin."

You are now apprized of my principal objections to your book. There are other things in it, to which I should take exceptions; but my object has been to notice those which I deem of the most dangerous tendency.

I should do you injustice not to say, that there are some things in your discourses, of which I highly approve. So far as it is your aim to stimulate parents to more devoted and self-denying labor in the education of their children, the object is certainly commendable. What you say with a design to impress on their minds the importance of making "the first article of family discipline, a constant and careful discipline of themselves," is particularly excellent. This cannot be too strenuously urged. It is a point in which all parents more or less fail. The most faithful feel that they have great occasion for deep humiliation before God, that they have no more constant command of their feelings, and that they exhibit before their families, no more of the spirit of Christ. The conduct of those "who only storm about their house with heathenish fero-

* There may be an allusion, in this passage, to the miracle which occurred on the day of Pentecost. But still, no one supposes that the cloven tongues, like as of fire, were tongues of literal fire. If then we should admit, that there is an allusion to baptism in John 3: 5, it would not be necessary to suppose that the term water is used in a literal sense. It may be used in the sense expressed by Dr. Scott, in the paraphrase given above.
city; who lecture, and threaten, and castigate, and bruise, and call this family government, cannot be too severely reprobated. While a firm and decided government is maintained in the family, and faithful religious instruction is imparted, the whole should be accompanied by the example of a meek and quiet spirit. A bad example in the parent, as well as in the Christian minister, will destroy the effect of the best instructions. Had it been the simple object of your discourses, to point out "the practical methods of parental discipline," and by the presentation of scriptural motives, to stimulate Christian parents to a faithful discharge of their duty, I cannot but think you would have performed an important service for the church. But by confining yourself to the results to be expected from the faithful discharge of parental duty, and attempting to correct what you regard as a theoretical mistake," with which you suppose "the public mind is extensively preoccupied," you have been led, as it seems to me, into very dangerous errors—errors which, I fear, will more than neutralize all the good things contained in your book.

I have given you my views with frankness. You will not impute what I have written, to any want of kind feelings towards you personally; but to what you may, perhaps, regard, a mistaken sense of duty. As you have spoken freely of "the view of Christian education," which is commonly held by our churches, you will not complain of those who shall speak freely of that view of the subject, which is maintained by yourself. I only ask that you will read what I have written with candor, and give it that weight, which, after prayerful consideration, it shall seem to you to demand.

Your friend and brother in the gospel,

B. Tyler.

East Windsor Hill, June 7, 1847.

P. S. The foregoing letter was read at the late annual meeting of the North Association of Hartford County. The brethren expressed their unanimous approbation of it, and requested that it might be published. It has also been submitted to the examination of several other gentlemen of high respectability, all of whom have concurred in the opinion and request of the Association.