

**VIEWS OF CHRISTIAN
NURTURE,
AND OF SUBJECTS
ADJACENT THERETO**

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Views of Christian nurture, and of subjects adjacent thereto by Horace Bushnell

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HORACE BUSHNELL.

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PREFACE.

As the attention of the public mind is now earnestly fixed on the great subject of Christian Nurture, it seems to be a matter of consequence, if not of justice, that those, who are anxious to know the merits of the question in debate, should have the means at their command. It was fortunately made a condition, when I gave up the manuscript of my "Discourses" to the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, that I should have the right to publish them myself, "with other things." Encountering, as I do, every day, the complaint that they cannot be had, I have at length concluded, after waiting a proper time for their emancipation, that it is my duty, both to the public and also to them as my children, to give them their liberty. There are many very important questions connected with this subject, which, as yet, have been scarcely touched in our discussion, and I would gladly have undertaken a new and complete work, covering the whole ground, if I had time and strength for such a labor. Perhaps some other, who is more competent, will assume the task. There are some advantages, however, in having the discussion which is already a matter of history and, in that shape, has its interest, preserve its historical form. I republish therefore the "Discourses" and the "Argument," in company with three or four other articles, which have a certain relation to the view maintained, and will therefore assist the public to come at a more thorough understanding of my general position. The associated reasons too, which give a truth its complement, are often necessary to a full and hearty conviction of its validity. Of course, it will sometimes occur, in such a collection, that a thought is repeated.

The article on the "Spiritual Economy of Revivals," was designed chiefly to remove that dismal state of despair and lethargy, consequent on the presumption practically held, that there can be nothing good, no real piety, save what appears in the shape of a revival,—a state which is the most disheartening impediment to the

* Christian minister, that can be conceived. It will not be supposed, of course, that I have any more implicit admiration of the Revival system than I had nine years ago, when the article was written.

The article, "Growth, not Conquest, the True Method of Christian Progress," originally appeared under a different title, which, as a matter of taste, I have preferred to change. It was the head on Christian training, in this article, which led to the preparation of the "Discourses," and thus to the present discussion.

I have added a Sermon, that was written three or four years since, on the "Organic Unity of the Family," only reproducing some parts of the argument. This, it is hoped, will render what I have said on that subject more intelligible to such as have found difficulty in realizing the truth of what I have said in more condensed forms.

Also a Sermon written several months since, which I have entitled "The Scene of the Pentecost and a Christian Parish," the object of which is to give an external description of the mode or manner, by which a Christian church may best advance the cause of religion. Some persons get their most satisfactory impressions of a subject through external descriptions, or inventories, and not through interior principles.

Not concealing the importance of the question we have now on hand, let us handle it earnestly, neither fearing to make the decision, nor making it hastily. At the same time, it should be understood and remembered, that the question is one that involves, in one way or another, all the most abstruse points in theology; one moreover that concerns a child, a very peculiar being, whose internal history is the darker, that it does not lie within the scope of adult consciousness and experience. Therefore my readers will need to have some patience with themselves, and it will not be wrong if they extend some degree of patience to me.

CHRISTIAN NURTURE.

DISCOURSE I.

EPHESIANS 6: 4. BRING THEM UP IN THE NURTURE AND ADMONITION OF THE LORD.

THERE is then some kind of nurture which is of the Lord, deriving a quality and a power from Him, and communicating the same. Being instituted by Him, it will of necessity have a method and a character peculiar to itself, or rather to Him. It will be the Lord's way of education, having aims appropriate to Him, and if realized in its full intent, terminating in results impossible to be reached by any merely human method.

What then is the true idea of Christian, or divine nurture, as distinguished from that which is not Christian? What is its aim? What its method of working? What its powers and instruments? What its contemplated results? Few questions have greater moment, and it is one of the pleasant signs of the times, that the subject involved is beginning to attract new interest, and excite a spirit of inquiry which heretofore has not prevailed in our churches.

In ordinary cases, the better and more instructive way of handling this subject, would be to go directly into the practical methods of parental discipline, and show by what modes of government and instruction we may hope to realize the best results. But unhappily the public mind is pre-occupied extensively by a view of the whole subject, which I must regard as

sa theoretical mistake, and one which must involve, as long as it continues, practical results systematically injurious. This mistaken view it is necessary, if possible, to remove. And accordingly what I have to say will take the form of an argument on the question thus put in issue; though I design to gather round the subject, as I proceed, as much of practical instruction as the mode of the argument will suffer. Assuming then the question above stated, What is the true idea of Christian education?—I answer in the following proposition, which it will be the aim of my argument to establish, 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. I do not affirm that every child may, in fact and without exception, be so trained that he certainly will grow up a Christian. The qualifications it may be necessary to add, will be given in another place, where they can be stated more intelligibly.

This doctrine is not a novelty, nor rashly and for the first time propounded, as some of you may be tempted to suppose. I shall show you, before I have done with the argument, that it is as old as the Christian church, and prevails extensively at the present day, in other parts of the world. Neither let your own experience raise a prejudice against it. 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. A child acts out his present feelings, the feelings of the moment, without qualification or disguise. And how, many times, would all you appear, if you were to do the same? Will you expect of them to be better and more constant and consistent than yourselves; or will you rather expect them to be children, human children still, living a mixed life, trying out the good and evil of the world, and preparing, as older Christians do, when they have taken a lesson of sorrow and emptiness, to turn again to the true good? Perhaps they will go through a rough mental struggle, at some future day, and seem, to others and to themselves, there to have entered on a Christian life. And yet it may be true that there was still some root of right principle established in their childhood, which is here only quickened and developed, as when Christians of a mature age are revived in their piety, after a period of spiritual lethargy; for it is conceivable that regenerate character may exist, long before it is fully and formally developed. But suppose there is really no trace or seed of holy principle in your children, has there been no fault of piety and constancy in your church, no want of Christian sensibility and love to God, no carnal spirit visible to them and to all, and imparting its noxious and poisonous quality to the Christian atmosphere in which they have had their nurture? For it is not for you alone to realize all that is included in the idea of Christian education. It belongs to the church of God, according to the degree of its social power over you and in you and around your children, to bear a part of the responsibility with you. Then, again, have you nothing to blame in yourselves, no lack of faithfulness, no indiscretion of manner, or of temper, no mistake of duty, which, with a better and more cultivated piety, you would have been able to avoid? Have you been so nearly even with your privilege and duty, that you can find no relief but to lay some charge upon God, or comfort yourselves in the conviction that he has appointed the