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**The Religious Education of Children
and Youths**

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The following article is a reprint from the Daily Oregon Statesman. It is now published in the Bulletin as a matter of interest to ministers, teachers and parents.

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The past century is said to be the woman's century; the present is pre-eminently the children's. At this time there are scores of publications directly or indirectly for those of tender years. Within the last decade and a half there has grown up a science of childhood. This is being laid hold upon by public school teachers, Sunday school workers, and even by those who deal with the criminal class of children; as, for instance, Judge Lindsey of Denver. Some theological schools are offering courses in religious pedagogy.

I come with no railing accusation against the church of the past, for I find in her the repository of divine truth which has led our forefathers out of darkness into light. Nor do I condemn the church of the present, for it is yet the salt that savors the lump. But doubtless the observer of the attitude of the church toward the child has more reason to find fault than any of the friendly critics of the present day. But to such a one there is a world of hope and encouragement as he looks into the future to see the triumphs of the church when cultivating its most fruitful field. A century hence our ministerial successors will look upon the efforts of our day as strangely negligent in that which will become a more important feature of their work.

Purpose of Pedagogy.

One of the purposes of modern pedagogy is to present certain material at certain stages in the child's development. He will then receive it with the greatest interest, and it will be retained as a permanent possession. If not presented at that time, the subject will lack much of the necessary interest. If not presented at all, the life will be lacking in its sympathies for that subject. Practically applied, fairy tales are given a place in the kindergarten, corresponding to the understanding of nature by primitive man. In the first grade the studies center in the home. In the second grade children find great interest in the shepherd stage, and the third grades are engaged in agricultural problems. The town, city, national and international affairs are taken up in due season.

Of what great encouragement is it to note that back of city, town, tribe; farther back than farmer's plow or shepherd's staff or poet's cosmogony there was a God, who wrote indel-

ibly upon the human heart! "In the beginning, God." Religion is classed as an instinct. Instinct is "a natural spontaneous impulse or propensity . . . that moves . . . without reasoning toward an essential to . . . existence, preservation and development, and that reason would approve as tending to welfare or some useful end." (Stand. Dict.) Religion is "man's response to the supernatural, manifesting itself first in spontaneous feeling and belief, and as soon as possible in voluntary worship and service." That religion is instinct with which the child is endowed is most strongly illustrated in the religiousness of primitive people, none being found without it. This instinct is quite independent of theological formulas—it is far more generic. The development which occurs, and the final results arrived at, depend upon the environment. Instincts depend upon stimuli for their activity. Hence it is for us to furnish the proper stimuli, thus becoming makers of religious characters in our children.

First Stage Passed Quickly.

Going back now to our citation of the recapitulation theory, namely that each child in its development goes through roughly and quickly, the stages through, which the race has gone, and the remark that a subject not presented at the proper time makes a great loss to the character, we are ready to see how early religious training should begin. If religion is the mainspring of the home it is but natural to expect that a child will have some well developed religious characteristics or habits. And shall we bar God from revealing Himself to such? God and nature are on our side. But the child whose religious nature is not cultivated by parents before five sustains an irreparable loss. Mind, this is not laying great emphasis on forms or shades of belief, but upon the fundamental idea of religion in general. I think it was Emerson who said: "We are tattooed with the ideas of our tribe while we are in the cradle."

The story of Jesus will appeal to the child. There will be a response to the idea of God, anthropomorphic, it is true, but that is just what we might expect, for it is the view of primitive peoples. In fact, this can be used to advantage. The parent

stands in the place of God to the child. His concept of God is of necessity based on his knowledge of the parent. A well known law of pedagogy is the interpretation of the unknown by our knowledge of the related known, or apperception. Jesus constantly used this method—"the kingdom of heaven is like—." A boy was told that God loved just like a father, but seemed displeased with the explanation. On inquiry it was found that the boy's father was cruel in the extreme. The responsibility of parents increases by this view. If we represent God we must be careful.

On Misunderstanding.

One of the most fruitful sources of the misunderstanding of children is the supposition that they are little men and women. Paul understood this error. "When I was a child I thought as a child." To adults Jesus said: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child he shall not enter therein." Realization of this fact will beget in us that sympathy needful in dealing with any class of people. Though the reasoning of age does not come so soon, a start may be made with children from five to eight. A peculiarity or mark of this period is the growth of independence. The child who once enjoyed clinging to mother now tries to swing clear of all such entangling alliances. As for definite religious experience authorities differ. Doubtless children differ much more.

From eight to twelve is a most interesting period. Selfishness is supreme. Reason develops and may be appealed to with more success than formerly. The greatest activity is attained, as also the greatest power of memorizing. Mr. Koons in his "Child's Religious Life" calls attention to these two high water marks. The memory should be given much to do in these years, as it is the time of storing up material for a day that will surely need such stores to draw from. That activity should characterize the devotions of boys and girls goes without saying. The picturesqueness of the Catholic and Anglican church service has much to commend it. Perhaps the surpliced choir could be defended on this ground alone. It is in this period that sex begins to manifest itself, not in its

physiological aspects, but in its psychological. Games are different. The girl who plays with the boys is at once called a tomboy, and the boy who plays with girls is laughed at. Classes for religious instruction should, if possible, be so formed as to recognize this characteristic. This is the great habit-forming period. Suggest, cultivate, strengthen religious habits.

Age of Puberty.

The age of puberty is the most momentous and far-reaching of any in the formation of a man or woman. The functioning of sex is in itself a wonderful event, guarded, as we believe, in these latter days so as to avoid some of the dreadful results which have cursed the period in by-gone years. But the reconstruction of the body is not to be compared with the psychic reconstruction. The latter is far more important, far more difficult to understand. We know that every boy will become a man and that every girl will bud into womanhood, but when we study the mental, moral, or religious change we are at a loss to know what to expect. Here, if anywhere, it is the unexpected that always happens. However, there are some fundamentals which are helpful. The intense egoism of the preceding period gives way to altruism. This is a most fortunate thing, for it enables parents, teachers, and pastors to use the youth for ends which work good in two directions. But it is also the age of morbid aloneness. There is a feeling that no one understands the case; and such is pretty nearly true. Recently I heard a breathless boy of thirteen tell his mother that Miss So-and-So, a teacher, understood boys! What would we not give to be the inspirer of a remark like that? One of the most uncomfortable things to happen to us is to be misunderstood. If we are morbidly self-conscious, how dear will be that friends who understand us! A few years ago a pastor said to me: "I am beginning to understand the adolescent. It is a study of absorbing interest." I might have added, "And of how much more profit than eschatology," which had split his church in two.

We have seen that the adolescent is at once altruistic, yet introspective. Here is another set of contra-

dictions—the birth of love, and the death of love. Many a mother has grieved over the heartlessness of a once gentle girl. The "help-mother" spirit has all died out. There is a spirit of terrorizing the other members of the family. There is a reckless disregard of law of every kind. The altruism spoken of above has to be looked for elsewhere. The subject gets interested in adults and begins to feel the footing of an adult. The appellation "Mr." or "Miss" is very pleasant to the ears. A service to the opposite sex is a source of keenest joy. The youth ten years ago liked to lean on some one, now likes to have some one lean on him. The waning love for mother is soon reborn on a higher level. Patience, sympathy, and study should be the constant attitude of him who is any way connected with early adolescents.

Early Religious Attitude.

The foregoing will prepare us for a more intelligent study of the early adolescent's religious attitude. Even if the child has been carefully nurtured and kept in the church, never departing permanently from the fold, this period has something for him. He will have, naturally, a new birth in his religious life as he is having in his physical and psychical. When he has hitherto accepted on authority he now accepts by his own faith or reason. Morally he is now fully responsible, and whether we help or hinder he will push on to his own conclusions. The Jewish lad becomes a son of the law at this age; and Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran catechumens are graduated into church membership. It is right. At no time earlier or later could confirmation mean so much.

We should put forth our most intelligent and strenuous efforts for the unconverted youth from twelve to fifteen. As it is now, under conditions far from ideal, the high water age of conversion is sixteen. How few work for or expect conversions below that age? The fact that little work is done for them, yet so many are converted at sixteen shows how fruitful a field it is. The religious status of the unconverted early adolescent is, like the characteristics mentioned above, a contradiction. This will emphasize the thought that the pubescent boy or girl is a bundle of contradictions. This will also give point to the assertion that such

are never so near the kingdom, or in greater danger of becoming confirmed unbelievers. Ingersoll, Des Cartes and Rousseau are pointed as proof. As to his religious tendencies, they are just what we should expect. That vague longing for unknown sources of comfort, the feeling of not being understood, the wild ambition and altruistic impulse, the feeling of personal responsibility—all conspire to turn the mind to Christ. Conscience is in a state of transition. Those who are religiously inclined are apt to adopt fads. We shall not go amiss if we devote most of our time in revival meetings to those from twelve to fifteen.

The opposite characteristic, that of doubt and irreligious, is born of the physical and psychical stress and storm of the period. The testing on their own account of all things which enter life, the tendency to carping criticism, the embracing of fads of religious doubt, keeps hordes in the ranks of Satan never to change their allegiance. The dare-devil spirit is dominant. A visit to state industrial schools reveals how very real are the bad girl and bad boy. Likewise a visit to any of our penal institutions is a sad revelation of the multitudes who rush to do evil while yet young. To the person in puberty may be applied such words as "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," "Youth is the time to serve the Lord," and "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flow leads on to fortune; omitted, all their lives are laid in shallows and miseries."

Points Summed Up.

Briefly summing up, we have the following periods, characteristics, and hints for treatment:

1. The little child. Dependent. Receives impressions from family spirit, devotions, etc., and church services.

2. The child from four to eight. Dawn of independence and reason. Delights in stories of bible characters.

3. Eight to thirteen; no longer a child, but boy or girl. Period of greatest activity and memory power. Catechism, psalms, choice scripture.

4. Twelve to sixteen, pubescent or early adolescent. Time of greatest religious activity, and greatest danger of the development of criminal or immoral tendencies; in a word, the crisis of life. Conversion is on an adult basis.