

The Home Circle of the Christian.

*The Substance of Readings and
Addresses at Croydon.*

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THE SUBSTANCE OF READINGS AND ADDRESSES
AT CROYDON.

It has pleased God to set us in family relationships in this world, not merely that these may be enjoyed in our natural life, but that they might help us to the understanding and enjoyment of heavenly and divine relationships.

The eternal thought of God for men is that He might have a vast family of sons for His heart's satisfaction who are able to respond to Him in dignity, intelligence and affection.

That we might be enabled to grasp this thought of His mind, He has given us the natural relationship of "father."

Further, as the only way this eternal thought

can be reached is by the activity of divine love, He has given us the tender relationship of "mother."

Whilst I am persuaded these natural relationships can only be rightly taken up as we know something of the divine ones, yet by entering into and answering to them we are helped to long after and enjoy those that will last when all that is natural shall have passed away.

The first time we get the thought of father and son is very touching and instructive. Abraham in response to the word of God was going up the hill with Isaac. How his heart yearned over that one—the child of promise! How it must have reached his heart's depth as he heard the words from Isaac's lips, "My father . . . where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" *My* father, what a sense of nearness, yea, of possession, is in these words. It is the simple outburst of the conscious sense of relationship. How is it answered? There is only one answer possible to "my father"; it is, "My son." What fulness is in these words. It is affectionate possession

on the father's part ; " my son," the answer of the deepest feelings of a father's heart.

In our own experience we know how the sense of relationship leads the little ones to know their father, even though unable to realise or understand the father's care on their behalf. So in a spiritual way the babes " know the Father."

In our homes the children learn the care of the father in providing food and clothing for them, and so the Father in the Gospel of Matthew is the Father in the heavens who knows we have need of these things. " Give us this day our daily bread" is there the actual food we accept as shewing a Father's care.

Then the little ones learn that, whilst the father delights to work to provide for them, he goes beyond this and desires their happiness and blessing. Thus in the kingdom of God in Luke's gospel the Father longs for the good and joy of all His children, and, I should judge, in Luke xi., " Give us our needed bread," the spiritual food is in view.

Yet the very word father suggests a thought

beyond this—a yearning that the sons might grow up to the satisfaction of his heart, caring for his interests in affectionate ability and intelligence.

So it is with God revealed to us as Father. It is He who provides our daily bread, it is He who seeks our welfare in every way, but it is He also whose thought it is to have us in association with Him, who is His First-begotten, responding in living intelligence and affection to the innermost beatings of the Father's heart.

What of the *mother* in the home? Often in Scotland I have seen on the walls of the rooms, "What is home without a mother?" If it is not an exact quotation from scripture, it is the right thought; that it is through the unselfish, untiring, devoted care of the mother that the home atmosphere is maintained and the father's longings are realised.

A mother's love is a beautiful thing. Even though sin has come in there remains this mother's love, a wonderful witness to the thought of the Creator-God when first He formed man upon earth.

The law of the mother (Prov. i. 8) holds all through life, even when the mother's voice is no longer to be heard.

Spiritually the mother speaks of the new covenant ; that untiring, unselfish, warming influence of the *love of God* coming in all its winning affection to our hearts, protecting, training, teaching us to walk, keeping us warm, and so building up a constitution that may enable us to profit by the headship of Christ, take character from Him and be led by Him to the fullest place of dignity and joy, even as sons before the Father.

From the moment sin entered this world God presented to men the expectation that there should be born into this world One who should bruise the serpent's head. Doubtless many a Hebrew matron's longing desire was that the promised seed should be her son. The birth of Moses and of Samuel give us a wonderful insight into a mother's feelings.

We like to ponder over the thought of God as He looked onward through the ages, waiting for the day when in a Jewish home the Christ should be born. What a supreme moment

when in the fulness of time the message was sent to Mary, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Think of the wondrous fact ! There in that lowly family circle Christ was born. He who was to bruise the serpent's head, to hold sway as Son of David, and bring everything to pass for the pleasure of God was cradled in a manger. In a spot free from human glory or contamination, where a sinful babe had never lain, *there* lay the infant Saviour.

Well may the angelic host proclaim the wondrous fact and herald His birth with praises !

We all delight in looking at the little ones, but never had there been a babe born before free from sin and the fall. Now for the first time God looked upon a babe absolutely holy, perfectly in accord with His thought.

We think of Moses' parents seeing that their son was beautiful, but yet the taint of the fall was there. The home at Nazareth was to shelter One far more beautiful, whose glory and beauty God alone could appreciate.

God had prepared the surroundings for the advent of Jesus, and the beginning of Luke's gospel gives us the details which together present to us the model for our homes.

Surely the Christian can have but one absorbing desire in his home, and that is that something of Christ may come to light. It was only possible for Christ personally to be found in one family circle, but it is possible in every home that He may be found in a moral way.

In Zacharias and Elizabeth we have the first element. They were both of the priestly family, and Zacharias was carrying out his office when he was taken up specially.

It is the thought of God for the christian family that the father and mother should both be priests. This means that they draw near to God on the one hand and are able to draw near to men on the other. Thus if both use their privilege, they are apart in spirit from the course of the world, and living near to God are able to learn what is suitable to Him. Then, again, they are able so to feel for the members of their household that they can

get close to them, securing their confidence. Elizabeth brings before us priestly state, and Zacharias priestly activity. It was *as* he was offering incense the message came.

Then John the Baptist would speak to us of the outcome of this priestly state. His name is not given to him in connection with family greatness, but his name John was given him by divine command. He is apart from the world.

Surely this tells of an atmosphere in the home of nearness to God and separation from the world-system.

The little ones born into such a home would breathe a pure atmosphere from the commencement of their lives, as *priestly* conditions are *holy* conditions, and thus the characteristics of God's house—love, holiness and happiness—would prevail.

Zacharias and Elizabeth dwelt in the hill country. This seems to suggest the parents being in the truth of their calling. Everything takes character from the highest point, and it is only as being in the value of the heavenly calling that the parents are able to

regulate their home. The hill-top is the divine view-point.

Then in Joseph and Mary we get another thought. They were of the tribe of *Judah*—the tribe to which the sceptre was given. This suggests that the parents recognise the authority of the Lord, and that He has given them authority in their home. The husband and father is head of the house, but can only rightly maintain his place as recognising “of what tribe he is,” that is, taking his place in that system of authority in which God is supreme. “The head of every man is Christ . . . and the head of Christ is God.”

Mary would suggest that subjective state necessary so that the influence of the head may pervade the home.

Now Joseph and Mary dwelt at Nazareth. Those that avail themselves of their priestly privilege and have God’s world before them, who dwell in the light and the joy of a heavenly calling, can afford, as far as this scene is concerned, to dwell in a despised spot. They are prepared to take up the reproach in affection for Him who was born in the stable,

cradled in a manger and brought up in the place of which they said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

We can see how baptism comes into this. In faith, and yet in holy fear, the parents would own before the whole universe (God, angels, men and demons) that they set themselves to train their child apart from the world and for the Lord.

The waters of death shut out this scene, and the act of baptism means we do not want a place of greatness here for our loved ones. Then it is *to* the Lord, to Him, to His leadership; what a prospect this opens up! Again, it is in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is in relation to a system of things which is filled with the greatness and glory of all the purposes and counsels of God, all the blessed activities of Him who brings these counsels to pass, and all the unction and power in which all is affected. What a wonderful system it is! One which is filled with the glory of God fully revealed—Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

It is in such a home that Christ is born.

How delightful for God as He looked down into the Nazareth home and saw year after year what was perfectly pleasurable to Him !

Our hearts delight to dwell on Jesus in His early years, perfectly expressing to God what He would delight to see at every succeeding age. In His own Person He was never less than what He had been before all time. It could be said of Him, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God," yet taking His place here He perfectly set forth from childhood to manhood all that was pleasurable to God. Wonderful object of contemplation !

Then we have Him at the age of twelve saying, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?" There comes a time, normally, this passage suggests, at the age of twelve, when each child has to take up individual exercise with God. In our homes when the children are small it has to be what the father and the mother wish and say, but there comes a time, too often missed over perhaps, when the child is to be encouraged to deal directly with God. This will not make the

child less subject. This is suggested by the words, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was *subject* unto them."

We have been looking at a home which is suitable to God, the characteristics of which the Spirit of God brings before us in the early chapters of Luke. But we have to feel the havoc that sin has wrought. How often we find in the times of the kings of Israel, the king walked in the evil way of his father, and his mother's name is given. Yet the kingdom of God has been established in the power of the Spirit to meet every weakness and failure.

In Luke iv. we find the next reference to the home. This, Peter's home, is troubled by the fever of his mother-in-law. Fever speaks of the restless condition caused by the working of our own will, so that the walk, the work and the words are all out of accord with the mind of God.

I would not suggest this merely on the part of the mother, but she has a very great part in making the atmosphere of the home, and where there is the working of will how dis-

astrous it is. What is to be done? Thank God the kingdom provides the remedy! The Lord *rebuked* the fever. It is striking that in Matthew the Lord touched her hand, so that her doings might be righteous doings, pleasurable to God. In Mark "He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up," leading her from mere self-interest into the sphere of His interests; but in Luke there is no mention of touching her, He rebukes the fever. The same word is used as to the evil spirit in the synagogue. In this gospel the root of all is reached. The Lord would give us to see the terrible character of our own will, that ally of Satan that has caused so much sorrow and corruption. We need all along our journey to keep our wills under the rebuke of the Lord, that we may be found doing the will of God in our homes, serving Him and His saints. What a happy atmosphere the true mother spirit produces, the peaceful influence of the love of God pervading the home!

Then in chapter v. 18 we have the man who is unable to maintain headship. He is para-

lysed, powerless under his circumstances ; a head of a household absolutely unable to act as head. What a sad condition ! The kingdom again comes to the rescue ; it provides brethren. The four seem to speak of universality. There are brethren all around who are prepared to go to any trouble to bring the weak one to the Lord. "When he saw their faith," the faith of all five, "he said, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house." He obeyed immediately, and the power came with the obedience ; he went to his house. He had come under the headship of Christ, and as coming *under* authority he was now able to go home and assume his rightful place of authority as head of his house. If we feel our weakness it is good to confide in our brethren and together to turn to the Lord. Let us see clearly that power does not come so that we feel strong and then act, but *as* we obey Him and take up the headship the power is granted to us.

Now the wife's side having been put right and then the husband's, the question is as to what is to be made of the home. Matthew

makes a great entertainment for Him in his house. How happy if we can use our home as a place of entertainment for Him, a place where others can come into contact with Him for blessing !

With men the home is oftentimes used to parade their own wealth and greatness, but it is sad if the christian home is filled with mere "dead stock." It is his privilege to furnish and use it for the Lord's interests.

This leads us to the home of Jairus. In this home the Lord wished to lead the inmates from a merely natural to a spiritual condition, in which the natural would remain, but influenced and governed by what is connected with a resurrection sphere. The little girl is twelve years of age, and the scene suggests the moment when in spite of everything that has come in, we can instruct the child into the meaning of what in faith we did in baptism.

We have often thought of baptism as the parents signing their names before the universe, as to the course of training they are taking up for the child, in view of the day when the child shall sign its own name in taking

the Lord's supper ; but is there not an intermediate step, the instruction of the child as to what baptism means ?

Jairus' daughter shut her eyes in death to *one* sphere—the purely natural one—but when she hears, “Little girl, get up,” she opens them into *three* spheres. First the Lord Himself, then Peter, James and John, and then her father and mother. It is wonderful to see what baptism leads to. When the child is baptised it is *to the Lord*, in the presence of the *christian circle*, and taken from and given back to the *parents*.

How enriched is the christian child ! Sometimes a child is born in this world heir or heiress to vast estates and worldly titles, but what is that to being brought into the sphere of the glory of the Lord of all, the sphere of His people with all their accumulation of wealth, and the home circle now dominated by the power of resurrection and where the heavenly light of the “hill country” has its influence ?

May our hearts desire that the atmosphere of the home might be kept under the pro-

tection and holy exercise of baptism and our heavenly calling ! The truth of this would clear out many books and bits of furniture. We forget sometimes the immense influence of surroundings even from the earliest moments of a child's history, and alas, many a sorrow in a family has thus been caused !

We need to have the conversation under the same influence. How often the subjects of conversation are harmful ; difficulties among God's people are talked over before the young ones, or fellow Christians criticised adversely. Thus the little ones grow up not to regard the greatness and glory of the kingdom or the privilege of belonging to the christian circle with all its distinctions, but grow up versed in every failure and trouble which has torn the saints of God.

"He commanded something to eat to be given to her." Was this said to the mother and father ? Undoubtedly ; but not only to them. The child belongs to the circle of Christians, and to them also the word applies.

It is true that we as parents, especially the

father as head, are responsible to give the children some spiritual food. What should we think of a father who goes to work day after day and provides no breakfast for his little ones ?

It is through the head of the house that the answer comes to the prayer of Matthew vii., "Give us this day our daily bread," yet is there not just as much need to provide some *spiritual* food ? The children go off to school, where alas, increasingly they hear what is contrary to sound doctrine ; where too often Christ is belittled, and where temptations of every sort may arise. How important and obligatory it is for the head of the house to provide something to fortify the young hearts, to strengthen and build them up to resist what is evil. The best way to prevent a piece of land from becoming a dumping ground for rubbish is to *build* on it.

Besides this we, as belonging to the christian circle, are responsible and privileged to supply nourishment to the young ones who belong to us all. Let us remember this in our readings. There is a growing desire everywhere on the

part of the children to come to the meetings. Let us see, nay, let *them* see and feel that they are not forgotten, but that something is given them to eat. Oh, that our homes were more like the home of Jairus !

I like to think of it as built up from the other incidents : the mother as under the Lord's control, the father fully able, under the headship of Christ, to act as head, the house devoted to the Lord's interests, and the delight and natural happiness of the family under the influence of the Lord Himself and the christian circle.

For the young children the path is simple, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord : for this is right." But as they grow older they begin to take up things for themselves with God, whilst ever affectionately confiding in their parents, who watch over them with desire for their welfare, body, soul and spirit.

They, too, have their share in the health and wealth of the home. How often the insubjection of the children has been a dishonour to their parents and a sorrow to the christian circle. Not only is it theirs not to hinder, but

it is theirs to take up the exercise for themselves, and to seek that the home circle is preserved from the bringing in of what is harmful, and enriched by their own simple allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

It seems to me that homes such as that of Jairus become in a practical way the inn of Luke x. In such a home those wounded on their way, those sick and sore at heart, would find shelter, food and service. When healed and at rest they would be encouraged to sit at His feet and hear His words.

It is the whole christian circle that in the thought of God constitutes the inn, but it is only as in the truth of the house of God that we become *practically* of use in this way. It should be a matter of exercise to us, how far our homes are thus in accord with the house of God ; how far those in sore distress could be brought to our homes in the confidence that the appearance of the home, the behaviour of the children, the conversation at meals might all encourage the soul in the Lord, and lead to a longing desire to answer more to the desire of His heart.

One would like to magnify the thought of the christian home. The homes of believers are privileged to form the "inn" in town and village, not a permanent spot, but a place where, stopped from further straying, souls may be helped and encouraged to go further.

"When I come again," suggests there is more beyond. And there is ; there is the home of Luke xv. It is not now an inn, but the home where God dwells. It is the present enjoyment in the christian circle of the home joys, where the music of the heart of God is responded to by the feet of the dancers. The Lord had been obliged to say, "We have piped unto you and ye have not danced," but through the blessed influence of the Spirit, the ministry of Christ, and the warming atmosphere of the christian circle, the heart and feet may now respond, and we may touch a scene of fulness and delight, dwelling in the house of God in the dignity and joy of sonship.

One word more. Many may say, I have no family circle, I live alone, or it may be isolated in an ungodly household ; none of this can

be for me. That is not so. You may only have a room, indeed only a part of a room, shared perforce by others, but you can seek that that room, or that part of a room, be held after the pattern of a christian home, yielding pleasure to Him who has called us to His kingdom and glory.

