

"THE MAKING OF A MAN"

INTRODUCTION

One of the things uppermost in the minds of parents today is the future of their children. They want them to grow up into men and women of good character and useful citizenship, able to get along happily with themselves and their associates and to make a worthy place for themselves in their world.

Parents and those of you who will some day be parents will be interested, therefore, in a young man named Timothy. He was born in the first century in a town called Lystra in Asia Minor. Early in his life he came to know Paul and became his associate and friend. For a while they traveled together, until Timothy was placed in charge of the church in Ephesus, a heavy responsibility for a young man. Luke said in the Acts of the Apostles that Timothy was "well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium", and Paul, writing to him in one of the two letters which bear his name in the New Testament, addressed him as "my true child in the faith". One of these letters was the last the apostle ever wrote. He was in Rome, a prisoner facing martyrdom. In his loneliness he needed a friend, and so he writes to this young man: "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas....has deserted me....Luke alone is with me". The picture we get of Timothy is that of a person sound in his character, successful in his work, and valued as a friend. He is the kind of young man any parent would be proud to call son.

How did he become so? What are the factors which went into the making of Timothy? Students of human nature would suggest three factors, and when we read between the lines we find each of them present in the life of this young man, Timothy. I want to lift up these three factors in your thinking this morning, on this particular Sunday when we have placed special emphasis upon the home, the family, and the church.

HEREDITY

In the first place, there is heredity. The apostle wrote to Timothy, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you". The first element which went into the making of Timothy was heredity; he was fortunate in having a good mother and a good grandmother. We have a goodly number of grandmothers in this congregation. May I remind those of you who are grandmothers that your influence on young lives is great and is significant.

The wisdom of the race is often summed up in its proverbs, and many of them speak to this point. "A stream cannot rise higher than its source" says one. Another reminds us that "You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear". "If you want to make a gentleman" says another, "you have to start with his grand father." When Woodrow Wilson was president of Princeton University, the father of one of his students asked him, "Why is it, Mr. President, you do not make more out of our boys?" "Because" said Mr. Wilson, "thy are your boys".

All students of sociology will remember the impressive statistics suggesting the influence of heredity in the cases of the Edwards and the Jukes families. Some inquisitive scholar, rummaging around in old records, has computed that of 1,394 descendants of Richard and

Eliza Edwards in the last 300 years, 12 have been college presidents, 65 professors, 265 college graduates, 60 physicians, 100 clergymen, 60 authors, 100 lawyers, 30 judges, 80 public officials, 3 congressmen, 2 senators and 2 presidents. Distinguished names like Aaron Burr, Eli Whitney, Grover Cleveland, and US Grant grace the Edwards family record. On the other hand, during the same period, out of 1,220 members of the Jukes family, 300 died in infancy, 440 were wrecked by disease, 310 were professional paupers, and there were 50 prostitutes, 60 thieves, 7 murderers, and 53 other criminals. All of which points up the importance of heredity and suggests to sons and daughters why parents have a natural interest in the persons they choose for marriage.

One day a father, trying to inspire his son to a more careful application to his school work and household chores, said to him, "Son, do you know what Abraham Lincoln was doing when he was your age?" "No, sir" said the boy, "But I know what he was doing when he was your age!" Like father, like son - a chip off the old block.

So when we begin to look into the making of Timothy we discover that he had heredity on his side. His mother and grandmother were devout believers in the faith, and his was a goodly heritage. However, heredity is not the sole factor involved; there are other factors which move in and give direction in the unfolding of young lives.

ENVIRONMENT

In addition to heredity, our students of human nature tell us that in the formation of character the second most important factor is that of environment. And this is what Oliver Wendell Holmes meant when he wrote, "Education is second only to nature. Imagine all the infants born this year in Boston and Timbuctoo to change places". Simonides said long ago that "the city teaches the man". He knew that Athens turned out people different from those who lived in Sparta. One of the Sitwells wrote that he was educated in the holidays from Eton. What he meant was that we are being educated when we are away from school as well as when we are there, because life is molded by environment and we become like that with which we live.

The Russians have discovered that fact and are moving toward almost total control of the child's environment during his school years. By 1970 they expect to have more than fifty per cent of all pupils, from kindergarten through secondary grades, in boarding schools. This decision grew out of research. Their aim is to produce a common Soviet character which subordinates self to the state, and they have found that children whose parents have not had this "collective character" schooling do not respond so readily if they continue to live at home. So, until such parents die out and are replaced by new ones from the system, more and more children will live in boarding schools. The point of the plan is that a controlled environment will produce a controlled character.

Of all the environmental influences which play upon a growing life, none is so effective as the home. A survey was made to find out what determines a child's moral ideas and ideals, and it was found that his parents exert the strongest influence, his school teachers next, his friends third, and his church-school teachers fourth.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it..."

Home is the first school a child knows; it leaves its mark upon him as long as he lives. Parents should strive to be what they want their children to be.

We are not surprised therefore to learn that our young friend Timothy was surrounded by a home environment which encouraged the making of a real man. Not only were his mother and grandmother persons who practiced their faith, but they saw to it that religion was taught in the home. The head of the home is the father and the heart is the mother. The atmosphere of a home is created by the mother, and by example and instruction Timothy's mother clothed him in an environment which was the most valuable garment he ever wore.

I read recently of a traveling man who took with him a folding photograph album containing pictures of his parents, his wife and children, a lifelong friend, a teacher who was a strong influence in his life, and a minister who had meant something special to him. And whenever he arrived at his hotel he took the album out and unfolded these pictures and all of his plans had to have the approval of that group. It is a picturesque way of putting the power of environment in the making of a man. Happy is that boy or girl whose home, like Timothy's, is peopled by persons whose influence for the good life is a help and not a hindrance.

PERSONAL CHOICE

So much for heredity and environment. Wise men have agreed down across the years that there is a third factor involved in the making of a man. They call this personal choice. And Paul recognized that truth and time and again we find him appealing to Timothy's free will. "Shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness" he said. "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you". Paul had the sense to see that what a man makes of himself in the way of character and achievement rests not merely on heredity and environment, but on what he does. Remember those lines from that poem by Robert Frost: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I....I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

Sometimes we wonder why two brothers in the same home, with identical heredity and environment, develop so differently. The answer lies in this third fact of personal choice. One day a little boy brought home from school his report card. He knew that it was a poor one, one that required some explanation to his parents, and so when he handed it to his father he said, "Dad...what do you think is responsible for this - heredity or environment?" Now when this sort of thing happens in your home you have your answer: free will and personal effort are linked with heredity and environment in determining character and achievement.

There is a fable concerning a fresh young man who decided that he would confound the wise man of the village by a puzzle he had thought out. He would hold a live bird in his hand and ask the seer if the bird were dead or alive. If the seer answered "dead", he would let it fly away, but if he answered "alive" he would crush it into lifelessness. He thought he had a watertight case, but when he asked his question the seer answered, "As you will, my son, as you will".

The gift of God to every man, woman, boy and girl is free will. And many a person with two strikes against him has come through to win the game of character and achievement.

HOW DOES ONE DO THAT? How does one do that? I think every parent knows that the central problem in dealing with a child is to make him want to do the things that will make a man of him. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. You can give a child a good heredity and a worthy environment, but how can you present the truth of God so that it will bring him in line with the will of God.

The answer lies in the Christian understanding of the meaning of human personality. The child in your home is first of all a bundle of desires, of selfish wants, a little animal - perhaps he gives you ample evidence of this from time to time - but he is also made in the image of God. And that means that he is akin to the world of the spirit, and it opens the door to a new kind of environment. Paul lived in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Rome, just as your child lives in this city, but Paul also lived "in Christ". More than fifty times you find him referring to this truth in his letters. This environment made a new man of him. And what he learned from his own experience, he set down in the following words: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." As your child grows up, encourage him to center his life in Christ so that his mind and his spirit may be controlled by the mind and spirit of Christ. This is the parent's opportunity - to put the Christ centered life that expresses itself in an outgoing love and concern for others before their children. This is the parents' opportunity - to help their children grow in their understanding of the life of Christ, to teach them how to pray, to encourage habits of churchmanship, and to be the means whereby their children are brought into the Presence of Him who can create a new environment.

Rufus Jones said that one summer day when he was a boy his mother and father before leaving for town told him to weed the turnip patch in their absence. He said he had never understood the Biblical phrase "from everlasting to everlasting" until he looked at those long rows of turnips on that hot afternoon. After his mother and father left two friends of his came by with fishing poles and a can of worms. They invited him to go fishing and promised to help him with his work when they got back, and he went. But fishermen are seldom conscious of time, and when he arrived home late that afternoon his mother was waiting for him. He knew he was in for it, and he knew he deserved it. She led him to his room where it always happened. "But" he said, "This time it didn't happen. Instead a miracle happened...mother put me in a chair, kneeled down, put her hand on me and told God all about me. She told Him she had always expected me to be the man of her hopes, and then went on to tell him how I had disappointed her hopes. 'O God' she said, 'take this boy of mine and make him the boy and the man he is divinely designed to be'. Then she bent over and kissed me and went out and left me in the silence with God." Then he added, "I never consciously disobeyed her after that."

We need to remember that our children are not only our children, but also children of God. They have a divine heredity. And as they are introduced to the matters of the faith so that they live and move in the environment of the spirit, they will grow into the men and

We need to remember that our children are not only our children, but also children of God. They have a divine heredity. And as they are introduced to the matters of the faith so that they live and move in the environment of the spirit, and as they see the head of the family and the heart of the family live under divine authority, they will respond more and more to their authority and they will grow into the men and the women they are divinely designed to be.

LET US PRAY: God, our Father, we would remember before Thee at this time the homes of our land. Strengthen them that they may continue to be cradles of thy truth and love which has been brought close to us in the life of Jesus Christ who as a child increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. This we ask in his name. Amen