

Advertiser, July 1/13

Register, July 20/13

TRAINING A CHILD'S CHARACTER.

Professor Jethro Brown, one of the speakers at the opening session of the Public School Teachers' Conference on Monday, in his address on the growing responsibilities of the teacher, had something to say bearing on what he regarded as the declining influence of family life in the development of child-character. He remarked that the great mass of the people had relaxed their hold on an ancient creed without replacing it by any conviction or faith of comparable power. The public school teacher has to work under these changed conditions, so that his responsibilities were greatly increased. He did not mean that the teacher should expound religion! Heaven forbid! (Laughter.) But he did mean that the material which he had to deal with came to him less equipped in some important respects than formerly, and that he must make good the deficiency as best he could. There was a second, and possibly more serious way in which the responsibility of the teacher had been increased. The value of parental discipline as an ally in the training of the youth of the nation was declining. This was partly because the family itself, as a social institution, though not dying, was surely declining. The reasons were many. The decline in the power of religious conviction had weakened the sanctity of the marriage tie. Migrations, social instability generally, divided the family and destroyed its continuity. Supremely, the age of the great cities was upon them, and the whole atmosphere of the modern city was charged with influences hostile to the family. In the civic community, the bonds which united the family group were relaxed. The lodging-house, the flat, the factory, the streets, and the various forms of social activity or dissipation, weakened the family tie, and destroyed the family tradition. Other causes worked towards the same end. They had only to glance at the Statute-book. Modern legislation, by making the State responsible for education, had appreciably weakened the sense of parental responsibility; by sanctioning divorce, had made marriage less sacred; and by protecting womankind, had created a rival to marriage in the shape of a career for women. He did not suggest for a moment that the family would cease to exist; but it would have less of the power to give to men and women the sense of something to live for. The family existed as a social institution in Australia to-day. But in many ways, and through various influences, parental discipline had relaxed. He believed that if they went into the homes of the Australian people they would scarcely find one in four where the training of the child character was intelligently and seriously undertaken. Love and affection might abound; but discipline was non-existent or capricious. But if this were so, an added responsibility was thrown upon the teacher. The moral education of the pupil, his manners, the discipline of his will—these great objects made an ever-increasing demand upon the teacher.

THE POSITION OF THE CHURCHES.

From the Rev. Jas. E. Cresswell:—"Professor Jethro Brown is reported to have said at the Teachers' Conference, 'The value of the church as an ally to the teacher was less than it had ever been.' He then proceeded to discuss a theology which was buried some years ago. Many of his audience must have felt grateful that he spoke with reserve of the Christ, although his unreserved endorsements of Emerson's dictum that there was no faith in divine causes vitiated even that reserve. The question, however, is, 'For what does the teacher stand to-day?' We are told that the playing grounds of our colleges give us men; surely the lecture room and school-room are for a like purpose. They do not exist to turn out self-directed machines, and if it be for the development of manhood and womanhood that they exist, if character be the aim of the teacher, surely the professor's opinion needs revising. These are churches which exist even to-day,

for the propagation of certain dogmas, but the very fact that sectarianism is rapidly breaking down is due to the accent which is being placed by the churches upon the development of such character as shall accord with the divine ideal for which they stand, and for which, despite the occasional stultification of their aim by ritual and formalism, they have ever stood. In my work in country districts the help and encouragement rendered to one another by schools and churches was constantly impressed upon me, and the professor does an ill service to the community in sending the teachers of our country schools back to their work with an impression of the weakened value of the church's work in facilitating that for which both are striving—the implanting of worthy ideals for life. The value if changed, is for the better, inasmuch as the church's work is now in keeping with both scientific knowledge and concerned with social ideals. In conclusion I would respectfully refer the professor to a truth he enunciated in The Hibbert Journal of July, 1910:—"Few of the great causes which have inspired human devotion in the past have suffered so much as Christianity from the uncritical depreciation which confuses essentials with accidental associations." It seems to me that the professor is for the moment erring in this direction."