Youthful prodigies are frequently middle-age disappointments. Childhood precocity is often merely the herald of the premature coming of the sere and yellow leaf. Hartley Coleridge, at three, was called "the philosopher," by Lamb. "At nine he had written several tragedies, at twelve he was an accomplished Greek scholar, at twenty a fellow of Oriel College, Oxford." He died at forty-seven, having wholly failed to fulfill the glowing promise of his brilliant youth. And his experience is but the type of a large number of instances differing in detail, but like it in disappointing outcome.

There are some exceptions to this in the realm of biography. The present day phenomenal children, whose achievements are given publicity from time to time, and who astonish the savants in the temples by their remarkable intellectual developments at a
tender age, have had their counterparts in the past.

But the rule of the normal unfolding of the powers by a gradual process seems to prevail among those whose after lives count for most in the annals of human attainment. The life that is truest to the normal human type is the one which, in each separate stage of its development, manifests the traits and characteristics appropriate to that stage.

The biographer of one, whose youth was merely that of a typical boy, unmarked by the upthrusts of genius, is inclined to find compensation and reassurance in some such train of thought as the foregoing.

All this has direct application to the life story which this volume seeks to tell. It is the story of a man whose valuable and important contribution to his times it is possible, happily, to indicate in a sharply defined and distinctive manner, as well as to trace it to the influences which made their shaping power felt in the boyhood home.

While fully realizing the part that filial bias might play in moulding his appraisal of the life in question, the writer is inclined to feel that this appraisal does not differ widely from that of those who stood shoulder to shoulder with this valiant defender of the faith, or that of those,—many of them equally sincere and firm in their convictions,—who crossed swords with him in the stormy conflicts of those crisis times in our denominational life.

Contracted to the narrow bounds of a single paragraph, Dr. Bomberger's premier "excuse for existence," that which stands forth as pre-eminently
his gift to his Master, his church, and his own and succeeding times, lies in his able, dauntless and unrelaxing opposition to ecclesiastical influences which at one time threatened to sweep the whole Reformed Church away from its evangelical moorings. This was the supreme work to which he dedicated his life. Because he realized most keenly the greatness of the issues at stake, he gave himself, with all his rare powers of mind and heart, to this cause.

And he lived to see the efforts of the side he so unreservedly espoused crowned with success, and the cause prevail, and to know that he had contributed no small part toward that significant consummation. In the light of this glance ahead at the ripened maturity which followed, additional interest will be lent to the boyhood stage of that life's unfolding.

It is not difficult to find the germ and prophecy, the ruling motives and guiding principles of later years in the seeds of truth hidden in the heart of a boy through the influence of a home steeped in the spirit of vital religious convictions, which he himself always liked to characterize as "pietistic."

John Henry Augustus Bomberger, the one hundredth anniversary of whose birth occurred on the thirteenth day of January in the year of our Lord, 1917, was a normal boy. He was the only son, and, for years, the only child of his parents. A sister, born two years after his birth, in 1819, died four years later. Another sister, Anna, was born in 1831, when he was in his fourteenth year. This resulted in his boyhood's years being spent largely in the companion-
ship of adults, which, as is apt to be the case under such conditions, early developed a somewhat sober cast of mind.

And yet he was in no way "cheated out of childhood." He was a boy among boys, given to the average boy's pursuits,—fun-loving and sharing the usual experiences of weal and woe that cast their lights and shadows upon boyhood's skies.

In some respects it seems almost like impertinence to obtrude family records upon the general reader. And yet the part which heredity plays in the shaping of life is so indubitably and indisputably established, that a biography which fails to find the explanation of personal characteristics in ancestral antecedents, neglects a fertile field.

It is not surprising that even as a boy, the lad of whom we write, should display a strong predilection for and responsiveness to the claims of the higher life. A long line of Godfearing ancestors is not merely a valuable asset, in the sense that the memory of their piety is a spur to similar fidelity. But undoubtedly, even though spiritual traits may not be directly transmitted, there is a set and tendency given to the nature under such conditions which make it peculiarly susceptible to spiritual influences. In spite of some glaring exceptions, godliness is cumulative, and it becomes an ever increasing force through the generations, unless unfavorably modified by cross currents. The earliest family records go back four or five decades into the eighteenth century to 1768, when, on November 26th, John Bomberger was born. On De-
cember 2nd, seven years later, in 1775, Anna Maria Hoffnagle, who later became his wife, opened her eyes in Lancaster, the city of his birth.

Their marriage having occurred in due time, the next entry in the record tells of the birth of their son, George Hoffnagle Bomberger, in 1794. There were nine children: six boys, namely, George, John, Michael, Martin, Samuel and William, and three daughters, Harriet, Charlotte and Mary Ann.

Across the sea, in Anhalt-Coethen, Germany, back in 1760, a certain John Henry Hoffmeier first saw the light. On coming to early manhood’s estate, he entered the ministry, and was united in marriage with Gertrude Von Asen. Later they came, as did so many of their race, to make a home for themselves in far away America. Here, on March 16, 1796, a daughter, Mary, was born. She had three brothers, two of whom were Reformed ministers, Charles F. and John William, and four sisters. George H. Bomberger and Mary Hoffmeier were married March 17, 1816, and their only son, John, was born in Lancaster, on Monday, January 13, 1817.

There is a suggestion of the tragic in the meagerness in details of most family records. There are a few scattered dates stripped of special significance; some trivial jottings of flickering recollection—and nothing more. And yet a score or two of life stories, crowded with human experiences, throbbing with passion, thrilled with joy and tingling with pain, lie behind those unrevealing dates, baffling the curiosity
of the biographer. What a small number of the countless lives of earth win biographies, or leave any records of their years of striving and struggle. Even those who gained some fame in their little day—how soon they are forgotten!

“What’s fame, a fancied life in other’s breath,  
A thing beyond us e’en before our death—  
All that there’s of it both begins and ends  
In the small circle of our foes and friends.”

That old genealogical record of the Gospel is typical of the barrenness of most biographical data, “And Judas begat Phares, and Phares begat Esrom, and Esrom begat Aram,” and so on to the end of the chapter. Only a fragment of a sentence is required to sum up the three-score and ten years which had seemed charged with such intense significance for the individual himself. And a dozen generations of toiling men and loving women can be disposed of in a hasty paragraph with the final “and these were all gathered to their fathers,” to round it out.

The maternal grandfather, the Rev. John H. Hoffmeier, was pastor of the Reformed Church in Lancaster for nearly thirty years. Those who went before him were identified with the Reformed Church as far back as it is possible to trace the line.

On his father’s side, the family engaged in business. His father was a well-known Lancaster merchant, and his grandfather was extensively engaged in merchant tailoring.
Unfortunately the grandfather, in the goodness of his heart, endorsed a friend's notes and, as usual, found that the way of the endorser is hard. He failed in business as a direct result and carried his son down with him. Fortunately the son promptly succeeded in turning his mercantile experience to good account as a salesman. A few years later he was appointed Clerk of the Orphans' Court, holding the position for three consecutive terms, nine years. On relinquishing this post he opened a conveyancer's office, in which business he continued until his death in April, 1863, in his seventieth year. His wife had preceded him to the other world, dying on Easter morning in April, 1849. He was survived by his second wife, Henrietta Steinman, of Lancaster, with whom he was united in marriage in 1857.

In a few scattered autobiographical data jotted down by Dr. Bomberger in 1886, he says of his childhood days and the religious atmosphere of his home life: "The religious family life of my childhood's home was very decidedly of the Reformed pietistic type. Next to the Bible were the Heidelberg Catechism, the old Reformed Hymn Book, with its Lobsasswer version of the Psalms, and its warmly pietistic hymns. These were used for daily readings. I remember especially that my grandmother and my mother usually had one or more of these devotional books lying near their sewing chair. I have a copy of Bogatsky's *Golden Treasury*, which was given to my mother by her mother as a Christmas token in 1828.
“After father’s mercantile failure it required considerable economy to maintain the family, as father, happily, had not learned the device of failing rich.

“The language ordinarily spoken from my earliest years at home was English, though both father and mother could, of course, speak German. They used the latter language whenever they did not wish me to know of what they were talking.

“My earliest school recollections are linked with the school connected with grandfather Hoffmeier’s church. My first teacher was a Mr. Deininger, whose brother is at present (1886) the pastor of a Lutheran church in York, Pa. About 1824 we moved from East King street to North Queen, into a house adjoining Samson’s brush factory. From there I was sent to a Mrs. Lennakay’s (or Lemerkay’s) school, kept in a small room in a house next south of the Railway Hotel, opposite the Pennsylvania Railway depot. After that I went to the parochial school again under Mr. Anthony Zulich, the successor of Mr. Deininger, as organist in the First Reformed Church. He was organist in the church at Easton, Pennsylvania, when I became pastor there in 1845. Subsequently I attended the higher English school of a Mr. Fuller, a retired lawyer, in a small frame building across the alley from the First Reformed Church. Altogether these earlier school advantages were of an inferior character.

“In 1828 the Lancaster Academy was opened in a room in Kuhn’s (drug store) building. The first
teacher was Mr. James H. Wilson, who had just graduated from Princeton. He was a son of the eminent Dr. Wilson, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Washington Square, Philadelphia. He was doubtless a fine scholar, but quite young, probably under twenty, and without experience."

There is something pathetic in the thought of these meagre and fragmentary experiences of the boy's efforts to secure expert guidance in the unfolding of his child-mind. In contrast with the almost prodigal provision for the training of the child in our thoroughly equipped schools today these early day educational disadvantages seem absurdly inadequate.

Probably one of the most striking changes which marks the difference between those times and the present, is to be found in our open-eyed recognition of the supreme importance of providing the very best opportunity possible for the culture of the pre-adolescent mind. We have grown so familiar with the privileges of our generation in this respect, that we are often apt to fail to appreciate with sufficient keenness of recognition and gratitude, their inestimable value.

One important part of the service rendered by the biographer who reminds us of this pitiful lack of educational facilities of the childhood of earlier times, is the awakening of a fuller appreciation of present day opportunities. Today, the world's greatest scholars are devoting their best efforts to the study of the child-mind. The best method for helping the unfolding intellect; the most valuable equipment,
books without number, and all else needed to secure the most satisfactory results, have been lavishly provided, and placed at the disposal of the lower grade teachers in our admirably appointed schools. The child is king today, and everything else is made to give way to adequate provision for his training.

One of the reflections awakened by this change in conditions is the high commendation due to those who, like the one whose story this book is telling, conquered unfavorable circumstances, and in spite of the educational deficiencies of childhood, rose to an intellectual eminence, which gave no evidence of that poverty in juvenile advantages.

The subject of this sketch spent three years in Lancaster Academy, which enrolled at first less than a score of pupils. Among these pupils was the Rev. Dr. F. A. Muhlenberg, who occupied the chair of Greek in the University of Pennsylvania.

In January, 1832, when he was fifteen years of age, he was sent to the High School which the Reformed Church had opened a short time before this at York. This school was under the management of the Rev. Frederick A. Rauch, Ph.D., who, later, became the first president of Marshall College.

Dr. Rauch was a learned man, thoroughly equipped in his profession, who did not merely assign lessons and exact recitations, but who taught his pupils how to study, and instilled in their minds a love of knowledge.

His pupil ever held in grateful memory the instructions of this Christian scholar, and counted him
the first real teacher whose tuition he enjoyed. After two years of diligent study in this High School, in which he sought to "make up" for the vagrant character of most of his previous ventures in the realms of learning, he was admitted to the Theological Seminary at the early age of seventeen.

In later years Dr. Bomberger frequently referred with pleasure to the happy days spent in his grandfather Hoffmeier's home. For years he was the only grandchild and, in consequence, filled a prominent niche in the family affections and plans. His constant association with older people gave a tinge of seriousness to his earlier years.

At a very early age his earnestly religious parents and grandparents dedicated him to the ministry, and this seems soon to have become a settled purpose with the boy. It was no doubt confirmed by the influence of his clergyman grandfather, in their long talks in the latter's home.

But this more sober thought of the life work to which he had been devoted cast no sombre shadow upon the spirits of the growing boy. His grandfather's home and large garden afforded a favorite playground for his childhood amusement. Hidden away beneath the currant bushes of the parsonage garden, at Easter, according to the custom, he found carefully constructed rabbits' nests filled with eggs, reflecting all of the rainbow's hues, and he engaged in the search with all the zest of any happy, healthy boy.

The time-honored harp, upon which the Rev. Dr.
J. H. A. Bomberger

Hoffmeier emulated the skill of David, was another delight for the lad for whom, throughout his life, music always had the strongest possible charm, and it doubtless did much toward awakening that love of melody. The harp is still treasured as a precious heirloom by members of the Hoffmeier family. The varied influences, many of them almost too trifling to be mentioned, which play their part in shaping youthful lives and give direction to the stream of tendency, afford a fruitful theme for the reflectively inclined. The balance struck between deprivations and advantages, as we ordinarily measure these factors, is significant in the trend which is given to the life most intimately affected by them. Much of the imagery with which the mind is furnished in later years may oftentimes be traced back to the years of immaturity and to the deep impressions made upon them by associations and surroundings. They stamp the seal of influence upon the most receptive of all things, the soul of a child, and all eternity will not efface it.

It is impossible to contemplate any childhood with its sensitive-plate readiness to receive life impressions without keenly realizing anew what tremendous issues are at stake, and how irreparably character results are at the mercy of what often seem like wholly casual and careless touches.

And all this lends additional emphasis to the trite, but immeasurably important thought of childhood as opportunity.

This finds striking exemplification in the in-
fluences which gathered about the childhood we are considering. It is not difficult to account for much that emerged in the long life spent by Dr. Bomberger in the pastorate, the editorial sanctum, and the president's office and professor's chair at Ursinus College, by reference to the influences and experiences of his boyhood days. Although their resources were limited, his devoted parents succeeded, at who can tell what cost of personal sacrifice, in sending him out into life's warfare, girded for the fray with those things which are most essential.

He inherited an untarnished name. With this, there came down to him constitutional vigor and physical soundness which were an immensely valuable asset throughout the course of his more than three score years and ten. From his earliest recollections the spirit of a sincere and fervent religion pervaded his home. Spiritual-mindedness far from being a pose, or an incidental thing, was wrought into the fibre of his home life. This is clearly in evidence in extant letters written by his mother to him a few years later. They breathe a spirit of child-like trust in God, and an unaffected devoutness.

A spiritual home atmosphere such as this does far more even than formal precept, to arouse and foster the religious instincts in the heart of a child. And when, as was the case here, a home life steeped in genuine religious fervor is combined with systematic instruction in the great principles of revealed truth, Christ comes to stand forth as the supreme reality to the unfolding life, and regeneration is as
natural a process as the bursting of a bud into a blossom, or the development of the seed into the blade and ear.

With all this there was a full appreciation of the incalculable importance of thorough mental and moral equipment for the lifework. While his parents' educational advantages were limited, they cherished the fondest hopes, and made great sacrifices, in order that their only son might be able to spend eight or ten years in intellectual preparation for the calling to which he had given his life. And when all is summed up, what more than these advantages could any boy ask for? His was a sound body, in a well furnished mind, with the weight of home influence and example thrown upon the side of the higher interests of the soul. The youth going forth from such a home as this might well feel that he was adequately girded for the fray.

JOHN H. BOMBERGER.