

LITTLE COMMUNICANTS.

Our Westminster Confession of Faith assumes that the children of those "who profess the true religion" are "members of the visible Church," together with their parents. They are "born within the pale of the visible Church." Their parents are entitled to the privilege of having their infants publicly sealed with the seal of God's covenant. But such children though "members" of the visible Church are not "members in full communion." With this view the following thoughts are suggested:

When shall children be admitted to full communion in the Church?

1. At what age? Our Directory (chapter ix.) says, "When they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal," &c. It is judiciously added, "The years of discretion in young Christians cannot be precisely fixed. This must be left to the prudence of the eldership." The Church does not prescribe an age at which infant membership shall mature into membership in full communion, as the law fixes twenty-one years for majority. The Church makes depend on mental and spiritual "qualifications" ("knowledge and piety") to be judged by her ordained "officers." Is there not, in fact, however, great timidity and reluctance on the part of ministers and sessions in admitting children to communion, whatever may be the evidence of their piety? Virtually, do not many sessions require that those who are to be so admitted shall have passed beyond childhood—shall be of such age and stature that we could naturally call them youths—young men and young women? This view is not warranted by the phrase "years of discretion," for this phrase is to be interpreted with reference to the subject-matter to which it is here applied. "Years of discretion" is sufficient for holding office in the church, for teaching in the Sunday School, for conducting prayer meetings, or even for taking a visible part in them, and "years of discretion" sufficient for worthily partaking of the Lord's Supper may not be the same. We shall have made some progress in our inquiry if we decisively drop out of our heads all thought of twenty-one years, or fifteen years, or seven years, or any number of years whatever, as determining anything in this matter.

2. What amount of knowledge shall be required? "Sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body," says our Directory. How shall we understand this? Must the young communicant be able to expound the principle on which Christ's expiation is accepted by God? By no means. One holds that young communicants must be educated theologians. What must

they know? How much must they understand? If the child understands that that blessed Redeemer is the Son of God, the Lord of glory, who "became a child like him," and, when grown to manhood, died for our sins; if the child knows and confesses that he himself is a sinner, and with sincere sorrow for that fact asks the Lord Jesus to save him—if he knows that the bread and the cup mean the flesh and the blood of Jesus, and that eating and drinking them signify taking and trusting Him as our Saviour from sin—has not that child "knowledge sufficient to discern the Lord's body?" Does this phrase mean any more than that? Whatever more may be desirable for the satisfaction of a maturing intellect, is it not simply that on which the soul of the most mature and of the dying believer rests in secure hope?

3. What evidences of "piety" shall be demanded in the child communicant? Must the little one be free from faults of conduct or of temper? Why more than an adult communicant? Certainly, in both adults and children, humble and penitent acknowledgment of faults, and prayerful effort to be rid of them, must be evidenced or they cannot come worthily to this table. With such penitence and such trust who dares forbid anyone? But how shall the pastor and elders have evidence of these? We are speaking of children who are "within the pale of the Church," children of believing parents, children in Christian homes, children of the covenant. Cannot such parents, carefully and prayerfully bringing up those children "in the nurture of the Lord," give reliable testimony concerning their habits and behaviour, and the spirit therein manifested? Is not almost every such child in some Sunday School class, and cannot the teacher learn the child's thoughts and feelings? Has not the pastor access to all those classes and all those homes? And has not he the Good Shepherd's word to Simon ever sounding in his heart—"Feed my lambs?" Is it really more difficult for the pastor and elders to ascertain whether a child is a penitent believer than whether an adult is? And is not that all that needs to be ascertained—that he is a penitent believer, not that he is a faultless person?

4. Shall we in all cases wait for children to come to us with the request to be admitted to communion? The most modest and the most tenderly penitent might not dare to do this. The disposition to be led, not to go forward boldly, sweetly becomes Christian childhood. Our Directory assumes this where it says that such children as have been described "ought to be informed it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord's Supper." Who should