

and familiarly explained; then, the sentiment, the doctrines and duties were illustrated to meet our infant minds; and, last of all, the truth was urged upon our consciences that we might "lay it up in our hearts and practise it in our lives." Those were solemn seasons, those Sabbath evenings. Seldom did they pass without witnessing many of that group in tears; and now, though years have rolled away, and changes have come over me, and the world has worked some of its hardening influence on my heart, my eyes fill with tears at the memory of that sacred season, and of the instructions I then received. Gray hairs may come, and memory may fail as life's light burns dimly, but those Sabbath evenings will be among the last objects to be forgotten. I think I shall remember them till death comes, and in a dying hour shall thank God for parents that hallowed those hours with their pious counsels, and their solemn prayers.

It was a rule in my father's house, and a good one, that each child should commit to memory one answer in the Catechism each day, until the whole was learned. The labours of the week were rehearsed on the Sabbath; in the morning my mother heard us repeat our lesson that we might be prepared for the general examination in the evening, when my father attended to our recitations, and enforced the truth upon our attention, and sought in prayer the blessing of heaven for each of our souls. God bless those parents! May they never know

"How worse than serpent's tooth it is,

To have a thankless child."

Doubtless the instruction which children receive from faithful pious parents, is one of the most efficient means that can be employed for their conversion. In my own case that instruction was directly connected with, and founded upon that system of doctrine embodied from the word of God, in the Shorter Catechism; and when the Holy Spirit was applied to my heart to awaken me to a sense of sin and danger, the truth thus taught was the truth most prominent in my thoughts, and most powerfully impressed on my soul. Assailed as I was, (during a protracted season of conviction and spiritual conflict,) the truth furnished by that Catechism was a shield against the suggestions of sceptics, and the desires and reasonings of a corrupt mind. Well do I remember, that in hours of temptation to doubt or disbelieve, that same truth was a wall of fire round about me.

And when, some years afterwards, the Lord, as I trust, called me to stand before the Presbytery as a candidate for the gospel ministry, that same Shorter Catechism, with its Scripture proofs, was of more service to me in the hour of trial, than all the books of Theology which I had read. Scarcely a question could be asked upon the great truths of the gospel, that was not clearly and happily to be answered from the pages that were studied, not in the Seminary, but in the nursery at my mother's knee. So it has been in preaching the

gospel; the doctrines and duties of the word of God, as they are summarily set forth in the Shorter Catechism, have been constantly before me, and have furnished unailing themes of systematic and precious instruction. Hence it is not strange that one of my first labors among a people, has been to place a copy of this little book in the hands of each of the children of the church, and to exhort and charge their parents most solemnly to see that their children were required to learn it.

It was not a part of my purpose in presenting this subject, to write a personal story, and yet this simple record will furnish both argument and illustration. I commend the example of those who taught me the Catechism, as worthy of universal imitation, and my fear is that such parents are not as numerous in the church at the present day, as they were some thirty or forty years ago. It is a fact that cannot be denied that the good old practice of catechising the children has long since been dispensed with, in families and churches in many parts of our country; and if it be true that in many churches there has been a departure from the faith of our fathers, and that error has gradually and insidiously found its way into the minds and hearts of our people, I believe that this evil may, in a great measure, be justly attributed to the abandonment of the Shorter Catechism.

It is not in my heart to bring any charge of error or defection against the churches, but I will tell a story that will show what I mean, by saying that the distinguishing doctrines of the church, as taught in her standards, ought to be instilled into the minds of her children. Not long since I was passing the night with an elder in the Presbyterian church, who in the course of conversation complained to me that his minister believed "in the final perseverance of the saints." He was grieved that his pastor was so weak as to believe, and so "imprudent" as to preach such a doctrine. I expressed my astonishment that an elder in the church should make such a complaint, and said to him that I was as weak and imprudent as his excellent minister. He was still more surprised, and enquired again, "What, do you believe in the doctrine of election?" "Certainly," said I, and preach it as one of the most precious doctrines of the Bible." His surprise was now unbounded, and I embraced the opportunity to urge upon his attention the great truths of the gospel system that he had ignorantly professed to receive.

Who thinks that such unbelief would have been found in this man's mind if he had been early and faithfully taught the Shorter Catechism? Either, he would have been more Orthodox in his faith, or knowing that he did not believe as his brethren do, he would have sought another communion. Such examples are not unusual. I could easily multiply them, but have no disposition to give needless uneasiness to any minds.