

THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE YOUNG OF THE CHURCH,

ESPECIALLY OF THOSE CHANGING THEIR PLACES OF RESIDENCE.

The young have always formed a portion of the Church of God. The Lord said unto Abraham, 'I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee' (Gen. xvii. 7.) Jesus said unto his disciples, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God' (Mark x. 14). Peter preached unto the multitude on the day of Pentecost, 'The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call' (Acts ii. 39). In accordance with these Scripture testimonies, our Confession of Faith says, 'The Visible Church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children' (Chap. xxv. 2).

In virtue of this relation of the children to the Church, and as the outward token of it, circumcision, which was required of Abraham, as a sign of the everlasting covenant which God had established with him, was enjoined to be also administered to every man-child of Abraham's posterity. (Gen. xvii. 10-13.) That change of nature and of relation to God, which circumcision denoted under the Abrahamic covenant, baptism denotes under the Gospel. 'Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. xxviii. 19). But in Christ Jesus there is no distinction between male and female, any more than between bond and free. (Gal. iii. 28.) Baptism, and every spiritual privilege belongs equally to the female as to the male, and all analogy suggests, apart from other considerations, a corresponding application and extension of the initiating ordinance to the children of believing parents, under the Gospel. That the child of a believing parent, whether male or female stands in a special relation to the Church, is certain from the reasoning of the apostle. 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the (believing) wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the (believing) husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy' (1 Cor. vii. 14). As to the practice of the apostles, four instances are recorded in which families or households were baptized, three of these on the profession of faith by the head of the family,—viz. those of Cornelius (Acts x. 22, 48, xi. 14), of Lydia (Acts xvi. 14, 15), and of the jailor at Philippi (Acts xvi. 31, 33),—and the fourth that of Stephanas (1

Cor. i. 16). Could we read such accounts in the reports of any modern Christian mission, and imagine or deem it probable, that in none of these households there were any children? Accordingly, our Confession of Faith lays down the position, 'Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized' (Chap. xxviii. 4).

This relation of the young to the Church gives them special claims upon her interest and care, and the circumstances of modern society call for her increasing solicitude and watchfulness for their spiritual welfare. The subject having been brought formally before Synod of 1872 by an overture from the Presbytery of Edinburgh for the 'superintendence of young persons changing their places of residence,' the overture was remitted to presbyteries for their careful consideration, and a special committee was appointed to bring up a maturely digested report. This report was presented to last Synod, with a detailed scheme for the attainment of the object, which was adopted *ad interim*. To carry out the object, the universal co-operation of the presbyteries, and still more of the sessions, of the Church is requisite. Its importance is great and urgent. It concerns all the young, and therefore all the families of the Church, and all who are interested in the guardianship and welfare of the rising generation. That the grounds and provisions of the scheme may obtain the fullest publicity among the members as well as the official hearers of the Church, the greater part of the Committee's report is subjoined.—

The radical principle of such superintendence is that baptism constitutes membership with the Visible Church, and therefore that every child received into the Church by baptism is thereby constituted a member of it, and placed under the care of its overseers, on whom thenceforth the obligation rests to look after and promote its spiritual welfare, with due regard to the prior and higher authority and obligation of the parent to seek that end. This principle is formally embodied in the rules of our Church relative to membership and discipline, as the following extracts show: 'The members of a congregation are the persons, male and female, who have been received into full communion. In the sense of enjoying the superintendence of the Church, the children of members are also members of it' (Chap. iii. sec. 1, R. 1). 'The proper subjects of discipline are Church members. It embraces not only members in full communion, but also baptized children who are hearers in the church and have arrived at an age at which they are responsible to society' (Chap. vi. sec. 2, R. 3). Still more explicitly, and for 'the