

INFANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP. SHIP.

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And 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.---GENESIS XVII: 7.

XII. FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH.

It need not surprise us if persons unaccustomed to close study; and untaught to reason logically, should be unable to remove the difficulties that arise in their minds on the subject of infant Church membership; seeing, that men of extensive information, and trained to reason correctly, have come to different conclusions on the subject.

As under the Jewish dispensation the male children only received circumcision, which sealed to them the blessings of the covenant, the question has been asked, in what relation did female children stand to the covenant? Were they, without the seal of circumcision entitled to its privileges, and recognized as members of the Church?

With a view of satisfying enquiring minds on this, and some other points, I notice.

I. That the Scriptures clearly recognize circumcised infants, and those not circumcised, as component parts of the old Testament Church.

The martyr Stephen, in that memorable speech which he delivered immediately before his death, which is recorded in the 7th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, at the 38 verse; referring to Moses, says that he was with the Church in the wilderness." Of what did that Church consist? Of six hundred thousand men besides women and children, EXOD. XII. 37. A similar specification, but more minute, and therefore more to our purpose, is furnished in connection with the renewal of the Church's covenant engagement before the death of Moses. In strains of deep pathos, that man of God, on the borders of Canaan and of eternity thus addressed the congregated Israelites, "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the

hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day. That he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, DEUT. XXIX, 10-13. Were the children excluded from that vast assembly that entered that day into covenant with God? By no means. One of the most interesting classes presented before the Lord on that solemn day, consisted of little ones who were expressly comprehended in the terms of the covenant. Their title to a place in the covenant, and in God's sanctuary was as valid as that of Abraham or Moses. It is noteworthy that there is no distinction drawn between male and female children; and it would be an arbitrary and unwarranted use of the term, "little ones," to restrict it to the male children. It is quite clear that female children were included in the covenant, though we may be ignorant of the door by which they entered. If the term "little ones" embraced only a part of the children; then, by the same principles of interpretation, the terms "men," and "women" must embrace only a part of the men and women. The case however would seem to be placed beyond dispute by the words of the prophet Joel II. 16. 17. "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts, &c.

A question of interest arises here; what was the exact character of the relation in which the children stood to the Church? Did they derive any benefits from being within the covenant? An eminent Baptist writer, Dr. Carson, who denies "infant Church membership," asserts that "the infants of Abraham himself, were not saved by the covenant God made with him, when they died in infancy." This extraordinary assertion he attempts to make good by saying that Abraham was the spiritual father of such only as believed; and that the covenant constituted no spiritual connection between him and his infant seed. Such are the quagmires into which men fall who depart from the firm ground of Scripture. Now, suppose no spiritual relation did subsist between Abraham and his infant seed; it does not follow that they were not saved by Abraham's covenant. The Patriarch and his infant seed both possessed the seal of the covenant without