

force of this accusation by alledging that the vows that were made for you in baptism were not your vows,—that you were no party to the transaction that then took place, and that, therefore, though you have not acted up to the engagements that were entered into on your behalf in that solemn covenant with God, you are not to blame, any more than a man can be blamed for refusing to fulfil an engagement, respecting which he has never been consulted, and to which he never gave his consent.

Now this plea I regard as by no means satisfactory, and that for various reasons. There is repeatedly and distinctly recognised in the Scriptures, a right on the part of the parent, to enter into covenant with God on behalf of his child, and that covenant we never find the child refusing to ratify. Did not Hannah, in praying that she might have a child, vow that she would give him to the Lord, all the days of his life? And when the request was granted, she devoted him, apparently with his free consent, to the service of Jehovah. And, to come to the case more immediately connected with our text, when Jephthah informed his daughter of the vow that he had made—that whatsoever should come forth from his house to meet him on his return, should be the Lord's,—did she offer any opposition to its performance, on the ground that she had not been consulted in the making of it? Far from it. She said unto him, as we are told in the verse immediately following the text, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth." Now if we suppose, as some do, that she was actually sacrificed, here is a case in which, if it was allowable in any, we might have expected that the child would have been permitted a negative upon the father's engagement; and yet we find her, at once, expressing her acquiescence, and declaring her readiness to fulfil all that had been undertaken. And even though we should suppose, as the most judicious commentators are inclined, to do, that the daughter of Jephthah was not sacrificed, but that, being ransomed by the substitution of an animal appointed for sacrifice, she spent the rest of her days in seclusion, still nothing but a deep sense of its being her incumbent duty to fulfil the engagement of her parent could have induced her to agree to this act of self-denial, which deprived her of all the endearments of kindred, and which besides rendered it impossible that the Messiah should spring from her family—an honor so earnestly coveted by every Jewish female.

Thus you perceive that the Scriptures recognize the right of the parent to enter into engagements on behalf of his children; and present us with many instances of such vows on the part of parents, in which the children invariably acquiesce, and which they never refuse to fulfil.

But if you should still persist in refusing to consider yourselves bound by the vow of another in your name, you cannot surely re-

fuse to acknowledge the obligation which yourselves have made. And I am enabled to say of a large number of you, that, not only were you devoted to the Lord by your parents in baptism, but that by seating yourselves at the table of the Lord, you have become a party to this engagement. You have, as it were, with your own hand, subscribed the bond which they had entered concerning you. By your own act, you have declared your determination to be on the Lord's side, and to love Him. Act consistently, then, with that determination. You have voluntarily embarked on that voyage which is to conduct you to the kingdom of Him whom you have chosen to be your Lord; but if you abandon the vessel ere the voyage is well begun, you can never reach those peaceful shores. You have come to the goal, and declared your resolution to run the Christian race, that you may obtain the prize of your high calling; but this glorious reward can never be yours, if, while others are stretching onwards in their heavenly career, you turn aside or loiter by the way. The Christian life is not a mere point in history, that has no extension; but a stretching onwards through the whole future existence. A man does not necessarily enter into the number of God's adopted children by the mere act of enrolling his name in the roll of some society of professing Christians on earth. "They only who are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God."

Let me exhort you then, my brethren, "hold fast the beginning of your profession stedfast unto the end." It is your duty to persevere in the service of God. I call upon you to do this, not only because you are creatures that His own hand has made, but because you are (if I may use the expression) His natural born subjects; but because, in addition, you have repeatedly vowed to be His. You have sworn allegiance to Him. You have solemnly and repeatedly devoted yourselves to the Lord, your souls and your bodies to a reasonable, a holy, and a living sacrifice to Him. And how have you performed your duties? How have you fulfilled your engagements? Are your affections set upon things above? or are they still grovelling among the vanities of time? Has the service of God been the main business of your lives? or have you been vainly endeavoring to serve at once God and Mammon? I trust there are many now hearing me who can answer these questions in a satisfactory manner. I trust I need not to a few who know not only what it is to vow unto God, but also to pay their vows. Let me encourage such to "continue steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" to press forward, "without fainting, towards the mark, for the prize of their high calling." Difficulties may occur, and dangers may threaten, and temptations may assail. But the promises of God are your encouragement. "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee."