

## Children and the Church.

BY REV. W. H. WARREN, M. A.

The relation of little children to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is a matter of infinite importance to all intelligent Christians. No subject deserves more careful or earnest study. The fact that different religious bodies entertain divergent views and adopt dissimilar practices with relation to this question, only forces upon us the necessity of inquiring the more thoroughly into the matter for ourselves and of pursuing that course which our conscientious convictions as to the doctrines of God's Word compel us to follow.

Our belief as a denomination with respect to the spiritual status of young children is not generally as clearly understood as we could desire. We, therefore, claim the privilege of explaining our position, partly for the benefit of young people of our own faith and partly to remove misapprehension from the minds of our friends belonging to other persuasions. As our purpose is not controversial but explanatory we feel assured that in trying to speak the truth in love our remarks will be heard in the same kindly spirit in which they are made.

In attempting to make plain what we regard as the true relation in which children stand toward the church, it becomes necessary for us, in the first place, to define clearly what we understand to be the scriptural ideal of a church. In the well chosen words of the New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith, we believe that "a visible church of Christ, is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by his laws, and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by his word."

To become members of such a church obviously implies the exercise of intelligence and personal choice on the part of each individual. It implies, moreover, the existence of essential qualifications, such as repentance, faith and the spirit of obedience. In our view, the New Testament recognizes no other membership than this; nor do we find ourselves able to conceive of any other membership as being morally possible. An adult who has never had the gift of reason cannot, we think, be made, in any reasonable sense, a church member. On the same grounds a child not yet conscious of good or evil, and having no conception of Christ, of religion, or of the nature of a church, cannot possibly become a member of any visible church.

With this view, many other religious bodies practically concur, as appears in their practice of postponing the admission of children into the fellowship of the church until some evidence of personal understanding and piety are manifested.

If, then, our little ones, who have not yet reached the years of moral responsibility, cannot become members of the Christian church because of their inability either to understand what is meant by such a relation or to comply intelligently with the requirements of the gospel, it seems very clear to us that the ordinance of baptism, which is a personal act of self-dedication, and which was designed to initiate the candidate at once into the fellowship of believers, cannot be required of the child, and cannot be performed either by him or for him. Infants cannot believe, and therefore belief is not demanded of them. They cannot of their own choice be baptized, and for this reason baptism is not enjoined upon them. They cannot intelligently unite with the church, and hence such an act is not required of them.

The obviousness of these conclusions seems so plain to us that we find it difficult to understand how any intelligent mind can fail to accept them. But we are pressed to explain what we consider to be the spiritual condition of these irresponsible little children. Are they all lost? Is their case hopeless? Can we do nothing to save them? Such are the burning questions many of our friends anxiously desire us to answer. But let us pause a moment. It is not very easily discerned that questions like these have led superstitious parents and religious leaders of earlier ages to resort to many questionable methods of procedure in trying to do something in the way of saving their children from perdition? Like Uzzah they unwisely lift their hand to steady the ark of the Lord, contrary to the instructions of his holy law, as though the Lord's affairs were in danger of falling into ruin. Our Heavenly Father takes much better care of our little ones than we are capable of doing, and until he authorizes us to perform some rite over them, to secure their spiritual safety, we should reverently withhold our hands from his sacred ark.

If we had any serious doubts about the salvation of children who die before reaching the years of discretion, little comfort would be afforded to us by the administration of outward rites, as a means of changing their moral natures and fitting them for heaven.

We should much prefer to trust simply in the infinite

love of Jesus, and in the cleansing efficacy of his precious blood. The Master's tender affection for the little ones; his hope-inspiring assurance "for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," spoken over the innocent heads of unbaptized children, remove all anxiety from our minds regarding their eternal welfare under such loving guardianship. We shrink with horror from the doctrine set forth by those who teach either directly or by implication that irresponsible children who die unbaptized, are forever lost. A highly esteemed body of religious workers, affirm in their text-book of faith and practice that "it is certain by God's Word that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual transgression, are undoubtedly saved." The implication here is obviously that unbaptized children are lost! Their little forms are even denied a resting place in burial precincts set apart for the faithful. Other religious sects, whilst shrinking back from this fearful view, still cherish the idea that some indefinite sacramental efficacy attaches to the baptismal rite, holding that if the ceremony does no special good, it at least does no real harm.

From this view we are compelled most seriously to dissent. To go through the form of doing over our unconscious little ones what God requires of themselves, voluntarily and personally, after they have reached the years of responsibility, is to interfere directly with the Divine methods of saving souls, thus imperiling the spiritual welfare of our offspring, and practically preventing them, in riper years, from following of their own accord in the footsteps of Christ.

When our children have come to the years of spiritual discernment, when they give evidence of exercising faith in Jesus Christ, when they desire sincerely to consecrate their young lives to his service, then, and not till then, can they, with any propriety, receive the ordinance of baptism. Baptism then will mean something to them. It will mean, in figure their death to a former life of sin, and their resurrection to a new life of faith and obedience. It will mean figuratively that they have been cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ. It will mean that they now profess to be children of God solemnly pledged to live henceforth for his glory. That sacred hour of personal and public consecration will be gratefully remembered by them as long as life shall last, and afterwards in a higher and holier state of existence.

Neither reason nor the revealed will of God authorizes us to adopt a practice which destroys the very possibility of these voluntary acts of obedience, and these sweet personal experiences in the matter of self-consecration. To say that there is no harm in the untimely administration of a sacred ordinance of our great Master, jars upon our religious feelings.

The harm resulting from this cause seems to us exceedingly great. Upon the minds of some, it makes the erroneous impression that the young are regenerated in this way, and made heirs of eternal life. Our Bibles have taught us, on the contrary, to believe firmly that no rite, of whatever character, possesses the least power on earth to effect a moral change in either old or young. The dangerous theory of sacramental efficacy is, we trust, being rapidly supplanted by the safer theory that the blood of Christ alone cleanses us from sin.

In our view the salvation of children does not depend upon either churches or ordinances. This view relieves us from the necessity of assuming as some have done that children are born Christians, and therefore proper subjects for baptism. It relieves us also from the necessity of adopting the distressing theory of "falling from grace" in order to explain how it comes to pass that there are so many wicked people in the world where all were supposed to be born Christians. It relieves us from the inexplicable plan of trying to save our children by performing over them a rite on the strength of some other person's faith; and it spares us the painful duty of abandoning all hope in the salvation of those who have been so unfortunate as to be born of unbelieving parents, and die in infancy, denied the privilege of sharing in the benefits of an ordinance assumed to have power to regenerate. Thank God, the salvation of our little children does not depend upon any such adventitious circumstances as these! Hell is surely not peopled with irresponsible children who have been guilty of no other crime than that of having been brought into existence by ungodly parents, or of having died before careless guardians had attended the matter of performing some religious rite for them!

In the absence of explicit scriptural statements as to how our Heavenly Father fits children who die in infancy for a better home, and as to what place they fill in that unseen world, we do not feel obligated to interpose any crude conjectures. Yet we see much meaning in the comprehensive words of our Redeemer, "To whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required." In the light of this divine utterance we may form a fair idea of the child's spiritual condition in the sight of God. The irresponsible child has nothing given to him as yet, so

far as moral obligation is concerned, and therefore nothing in that respect is required of him. True he inherits from sinful parents, tendencies to human weakness and sin, tendencies which, if he be spared to maturer years, will undoubtedly develop into overt acts of disobedience. But, so long as he remains irresponsible, he is guilty of no actual transgression. For the inherited tendencies Christ has made complete and unconditional atonement, so that the child, dying in that innocent state, is saved by the sacrificial grace of Jesus. He is saved, therefore not because he was born a Christian, nor because he was made an heir of heaven by some outward rite, but in view of the cleansing virtue of the blood of Christ, which has been forfeited by any voluntary act of rejection or disobedience on the part of the child.

The point where our real solicitude respecting the spiritual welfare of our children commences, is where their young minds begin to form the first conceptions of right and wrong, of good and evil. Remembering the variety and insidiousness of the temptations thrown daily around them in a sinful world, we recognize the pressing need of constant watchcare over them. In their childish ignorance and helplessness they must be tenderly cared for. They must be diligently instructed in the great first principles of moral and religious truth; taught that their human hearts are weak and sinful, that there is a holy God, a heaven of happiness, and a realm of woe; that they need to be saved from the awful consequences of sin; that Jesus Christ is our only Saviour; that they must seek him in humble penitence and faith; and that it is their privilege and duty to become his faithful followers, uniting with his church, and cheerfully observing his statutes and ordinances. In our homes, in our Sunday-schools, and in our pulpits we must endeavor to make these things plain to our young people, earnestly laboring and praying for their conversion and consecration to God. In this way they will be led to give their young hearts intelligently and voluntarily to Christ. Faith will mean something when they themselves manifest it in their lives. Baptism will have a beautiful significance when it expresses their own act of dedication to their Saviour. Church membership will be an inspiring reality to them, when they receive the cordial hand of fellowship and feel the glow of pure love toward God and his people.

The church now becomes an ideal home to them. Here they find their true friends, and here is placed before them a sphere of usefulness in which they are enabled to develop their gifts and graces in praising God and in doing good. Thus the appropriate function of the church respecting our children, is simply to be their guardian, their instructor, their pattern and their home. They are not born into this home, after the flesh, as Jewish children were born into the temporal rights and privileges of the Israelitish commonwealth; they must be born again, through the influence of the Divine Spirit, in order to be made members of the family of Christ. All our painstaking and prolonged efforts for their salvation will be amply compensated when we see these dear children, renewed in heart and life, coming forward to unite with us as happy converts and zealous workers. How delightful to see them intelligently and of their own accord, taking their places in the family of believers and to hear their cheerful voices testifying to the goodness and love of God!

This brief statement, it is hoped, fairly represents the views held by our denomination respecting the subject of infant salvation and of the relation of children to the church of Christ. We trust, it will remove from the minds of our friends any suspicion that we are indifferent with regard to the spiritual welfare of our offspring. We simply claim that we follow strictly the instructions of the New Testament in dealing with the spiritual concerns of our little ones, trusting fully in the wisdom and love of our divine Master, to take care of those matters in relation to which he has given us no specific instructions.

## "Thou Knowest that I Love Thee."

John 21:17.

Jesus, Jesus! holy Master, everything Thine eye can't see,  
And Thou knowest all my feeling turns in rapture unto  
Thee;  
Past and present and all future in Thy hands I safely  
leave,  
For Thy love has sweetly taught me Thou alone canst  
ne'er deceive.

On the sad shore of transgression as I wandered from  
Thy side,  
I received the blest incoming of Thy mercy's ample tide,  
And upon its wave of rapture, like the glassy sea above,  
Now I glide with heaven before me, o'er the ocean of  
Thy love.

Oh! to live for Thee, my Jesus, is my most aspiring  
thought,  
Oh! to follow Thee, dear Saviour, with all blessedness is  
fraught.

Every day in such a service bring a new and pure delight.  
Brings a larger understanding and a clearer, truer flight.

Though the world may judge me wrongly, though my  
friends may change to foes,  
Though I learn the hardest lesson in the school of mortal  
woes,

Every tear becomes a jewel, every pain a sacred joy,  
For I know I love Thee Jesus, nothing can my bliss  
destroy.

Lockeport, July 7th.

ADDISON F. BROWNE.

St. George,  
for the meet  
Rev. A. H. I  
place, who  
people of hi  
It is a good  
united.

The South  
session with  
11 o'clock.

and called n  
body in pray

pleted the A  
election of off  
G. R. White

Moderator; J  
Ass't Clerk; J  
mittee of A  
committee w

committees w  
ments reporte

9.30, p. m. 2  
half dev

with prayer by  
The afterno

reading of the  
and were of t

ladies of the  
churches of th

excellent mee  
fuller and the

fuller report  
devoted to th

Hughes read th  
in which tende

late Rev. I. R  
spoken to by R

at Wolfville a  
and of his high

gentleman—wh  
by Deacon Joh

pastor and an e  
the attention

were a number  
for several year

to be done with  
the subject was

recommend con  
report next year

resolution of co  
severe affliction

pass in the deat  
O. Gates, which

McIntyre, Prin  
tender and to

standing vote.  
the Association

Prayer was offer  
Saturday, 7.30

ducted by the  
the regular busi

the absence of t  
The report of t

was presented b  
spoken to by R

the table until  
tian Education

session the Com  
the chairman, R

the importance  
Institutions at

development of  
Academy for th

the St. Martins  
terms to the resi

years presided o  
of his successor

Reference was

Mont. McDonald

him from time to

from disaster, and

brother and so dis

from reproach th

The report was

ton Collegiate Ac

this school, as co

advantages offer

collegiate life, o

was a most import

proper, of the H

munity, which th

in any organic se

our young people