

## The Record.

TORONTO, APRIL, 1859.

### THE LAMBS OF THE FLOCK.

"Feed my lambs" is a commission, the obligation of which is universally admitted, from a regard alike to the authority of Him, who enjoined it on his disciples, and the recognized importance of leading the young to an early acquaintance with the truths of God's word. But although generally admitted, how seldom is the commission faithfully and diligently carried out. We do not mean to say that ministers of the gospel generally are careless in regard to the lambs of their flocks. They may feel deeply interested in them. They may in their pastoral visitations take notice of them. They may draw around them the warm and guileless affections of the young. But how seldom do we find ministers in their regular pulpit ministrations aiming specially at the instruction and benefit of their young hearers. We once heard of a little girl who asked her mother if she did not think that the minister forgot, when preaching, that he had little children listening to him. We suspect that in general, ministers do not think much when in the pulpit, or when preparing for the pulpit, that they may have many children among their hearers. Indeed one effect of the ordinary state of things is that children are often left at home, instead of being brought to Church. They may be brought to the sabbath school, but that is considered sufficient. Let us here say, that, while we regard sabbath schools as most valuable institutions, which have done much to bring about a revived state of religion in most christian countries, and which will, we doubt not, by the blessing of God do still more to extend the influence of real christianity, we are of opinion that they have been regarded too exclusively as the means of instructing the young and leading them to the saviour. This is not the fault of the sabbath school system, but it is the fault partly of the parents, and partly of pastors. It is the fault partly of parents, who have too generally devolved on sabbath school teachers the duty which God has laid on themselves, and have allowed the old and time-hallowed practice of domestic catechising and instruction to fall into disuse. How many families also are there, where the parents are the professed followers of Christ, in which we find, 'no gathering of the children around the parents knees, with open Bibles and helping catechism, with a father's or a mother's exposition and illustrations.' The evil to which we have referred, we mean the looking upon sabbath schools as the only medium of religious instruction to the young, may be also partly traced to ministers, who in their ordinary ministrations seldom seek to provide milk for the babes, as well as strong meat for those who are able to hear it.

The importance of this subject is now attracting the attention of many ministers, and of others interested in the spiritual training of the young. A short time ago several letters appeared in the Edinburgh Witness on this subject. One of these, signed a *mother*, contained the following sentences.

"For sixteen years have I listened to the "strong meat" sermons of my present able pastor, but not one word has he ever *spoken to children*, and often have I been saddened by my little ones asking, 'Why does the minister never speak to us?'

On one occasion during these sixteen years, a stranger—a heavenly looking minister, with snow-white hair—from a distance, occupied the pulpit on an afternoon. After discoursing with great earnestness for a length of time, he paused, and in the most tender and affectionate manner said,—"Now, I am going to tell the children what I have been preaching about." Immediately all were perfectly still. Every eye, old as well as young, were drawn towards the kindly countenance of the speaker, and he *did speak to children*. Many *old eyes* were moistened, and I know that the "milk" by which the children were fed proved most palatable to grown-up people also. Two hours at a sitting, bondage though it be, may *break in* children to church-going, but may it not have something to do in making it a mere *habit*, and in rearing up the "sermon proof" spirit that is amongst us? I would not for a moment allow myself to think that ministers are "ashamed" to address themselves to mere children, seeing that their Divine Master has no such feeling; but many, I believe, *think* they have not the "knack" of doing so. Were such only to try it by using the same language which they do *at home*, when speaking to the young ones about a Saviour's love and other kindred subjects, they will perhaps be surprised to find that they have been hiding a talent which might prove a precious word to the lambs of the flock."

In the late number of that able Journal, the Editor says:

"We have received a number of letters on this subject (*preaching to the young*) from parties in Edinburgh, and other parts of the country, drawn forth by those which have already appeared in our columns. The subject appears now to have engaged public attention, and as it would be impossible for us to find room for all the communications we have received, we can only generally indicate the views of our correspondents. The writers all agree as to the importance of the subject, and trust that, now that it has been mooted, ministers will take it into consideration. More than one correspondent suggests that a short portion of the sermon should be regularly set aside for the young, so that "they might not only receive a present blessing, but that the valuable habit might be formed of intelligent listening," and that again it might, with the Divine blessing, be said "of many of our little ones, 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast per-

fect praise.'" Another correspondent who signs himself a "Father," in urging this, says he "understands that Dr. Candlish does some thing of this kind in his own congregation." A correspondent who writes from Greenock "would fain hope that the practice of addressing the young from the pulpit" is more frequent than the writers of the communications which we have already inserted are aware of; and, to strengthen this view, says, "my minister or a brother preaches quarterly to the young of the congregation and Sabbath schools; and, at the beginning of each month, he catechizes the classes on the lessons of the intervening Sabbaths; further, the lesson for the evening is read and commented upon every Sabbath from the pulpit. The quarterly sermon was preached the Sabbath before last, when an incident in the present American revivals was given:—A little girl, converted to Jesus, became a witness for Him, and a successful missionary, an aged sinner being the first whom she led to the Lamb: thus fulfilling Acts i. 8, and Psalm viii. 2. We read that children are sharers in the blessing in America. We are looking and longing for the cloud coming round to ourselves. Let us pray and hope that some of the first drops may fall upon the young."

A correspondent who signs himself "An Elder," states, that from his own personal observation, he is satisfied that for a few years past parents were becoming more and more alive to the importance of a portion of the discourse on the Sabbath "being so simply explained, as to be level with the capacities of children," and that some months ago he had pressed the subject on the consideration "of his own pastor, who was giving it his most anxious consideration." "Some ministers (he says) adopt the plan of preaching a monthly sermon to children, which is worthy of all imitation, but which, it humbly appears to me, ought not to supersede what is now proposed." This correspondent further writes,—"We live in a day when the treatment of the young has become a matter of far more wise and earnest consideration than it ever was before; and surely one of the highest and noblest efforts for their good will be attained when the ministers of Scotland shall, in downright earnest attempt to give our children some of that spiritual food which, as a body, they so fully and faithfully bestow upon the grown-up members of their congregations. Were this done extensively over the length and breadth of the country, it is impossible to reckon the extent of the benefits that would accrue to our population. Who are they who, in six or eight years from this date, will form the youth and hope of the land, but those very children over whom ministers are now preaching?"

We know too, that in this country not a few ministers give attention to this mode of feeding 'the lambs.' Some preach quarterly or oftener, specially to the young. Perhaps it would be better, as some of the correspondents of the Witness says, to endeavour to address