

PREACHING OVER THE HEADS OF THE LITTLE ONES.

It is no uncommon thing to hear ministers complained of for preaching over the heads of their people ; but how few think of taking up the gauntlet specially on behalf of the little ones ! I say specially, because I suppose that children are in a general way included in the people. And yet how many ministers in their preparation for the desk seem to lose sight of the lambs of the flock, or to forget that much that applies to babes in Christ is applicable also to children, and that for neither is "strong meat" good. And the more I think of the subject, the less I am inclined to wonder that during public worship there are so many impatient, restless little ones, with bright eyes wandering all over the church in search of amusement, and little hands busy with everything with which they ought not to be, and whose ingenuity in childish contrivances for passing the time which hangs so heavily on their active little hands is perfectly astonishing to their parents and friends. Nor am I surprised that many a little one, wearied out by the thwarting of all its wicked little plans, and by the countless whispered admonitions and warnings of its sagacious elders, should so often forget all its troubles in the sweet unconsciousness of sleep. And even the older children who, although not so openly inattentive, nor so frequently guilty of the grave impropriety of sleeping in church, too often, I am sorry to say, show by their countenances that their thoughts are wandering away to their play or their books, that in fact they are engaged in anything but the service of God. If children understood more that was said from the desk, and felt that they were real, immediate objects of interest to the preacher, there would be, instead of the restless inattention that I have been describing in children during service, earnest little up-turned faces, eagerly drinking in the words of the speaker. An incident which happened not long ago will perhaps illustrate the point better than anything I could write on the subject.

A little girl one Sabbath morning, on returning from church, where the desk had been filled by a stranger, in the absence of the stated minister, said to her mother,

"O mamma, I do wish Mr. H. was our minister."

"Why do you wish that, Nellie?" asked her mother.

"Because, mamma, I like him so much better than our minister ; he didn't preach a sermon at all, he only talked, and he said just as much to us children as he did to the big people ; and, mamma, I was not a bit tired or sleepy."

Now, I must not be supposed to be siding with or approving of inattention in children in church, but I must say, that I very often pity them, and wonder if the grown up people, who shake their heads so wisely at the little ones, would behave a bit better, if as well, if they were compelled to sit for an hour or three quarters hearing a discourse preached to them in a foreign tongue ; and what else are many of the sermons that Sabbath after Sabbath the children have to sit through, I cannot say listen to, but an unknown language to them ?

The art of interesting and adapting ourselves to children is a gift peculiar to some, and one which, I am proud to say, is possessed in no common degree by many of our ministers. But even where ministers have no special capacity in this way they might, by occasionally laying aside the ministerial dignity, with which some think it necessary to enshrine themselves, speak instead of preach to the children ; and how many of them would feel, like little Nellie, that the minister said just as much to them as to the big people, and that they had a part and place in their minister's heart.