

There are those who speak of the Church as if it were a voluntary association of adult believers only—a conception of the Church very defective in itself, and very injurious in its practical tendencies. The Church is a divine institution, and must follow ordinances of ancient authority and usage. Sound and well considered is the language of the Confession of Faith,—“The visible Church, which is Catholic or universal under the gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children.” Were this borne in mind, we should not hear our young people, who have been baptized and have grown up in the Presbyterian Church, talk of “joining the Church,” in the communion of the Lord’s Supper, as though they had been aliens and heathens until then!

Is it asked—what is meant by the church-membership of baptized children? There is meant the very same privilege in kind as the church-membership of adults, necessary regard being had to the diversities in mental and moral development. Children are not eligible to office, or entrusted with government in the Church, any more than they are in the State, while under age; yet they become by baptism members of the Church, as surely as they become by birth members of the State. Their privileges are those of connection with so mighty and august an institution as the Christian Church, and of spiritual instruction, nurture, and guidance in the church—the being taught all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded—the being fed as the lambs of that Good Shepherd, who, recognizing the Church-membership of little ones, said, not only “feed my sheep,” but also, “feed my lambs.”

To her youthful members the Church has a grave, tender, and motherly duty to perform. A roll, not merely of communicants at the Lord’s Table, but of baptized persons, ought to be kept:—and all who have not, because of immorality, apostacy, or worldliness, been struck from that roll, should be regarded as under ecclesiastical superintendence, and entitled to ecclesiastical recognition. During infancy, they should be watched over by their parents as a trust from the Lord, and should be remembered alike in the prayers of the family, and in the prayers of the Church. As they advance in years, they ought to be instructed and ‘catechised’ in the oracles of God—a duty which is partly performed in Sabbath Schools and Bible Classes, and the sermons to the young occasionally delivered from the pulpit. It is desirable, that at fitting seasons, the obligations involved in their baptism should be definitely presented to the minds and pressed on the consciences of Christian youth.

We are deeply impressed with the truth of the following sentences from an article on the “Children of the Church,” which recently appeared in the *Princeton Review*: “Were a just idea of the import of infant baptism intelligently and faithfully carried out in the practical regimen of families and churches, we believe the amount of baptized apostacy would be greatly diminished; that piety among parents and children would be not only more widely diffused, but more complete, elevated and symmetrical, as a vital force penetrating all the relations of life; that the spectacle of devout men, fearing God with all their house, would be as frequent as it is delightful; that the Church would be ensured perpetuity and increase, not merely by external conquest and aggregation, but by internal growth and evolution, in the multiplication of those happy families of which we could say,—‘There the Lord hath commanded his blessing, even life for evermore!’ Such a cheering faith is warranted by the promises of God, which are none the less true, though our unbelief fail to realize them.” *

* While the above article was passing through the press, we received from an esteemed Correspondent in Canada West, a paper on another department of the subject,—the argument for Infant Baptism, from the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant, and its appointed Seal. This will appear in our next Number.