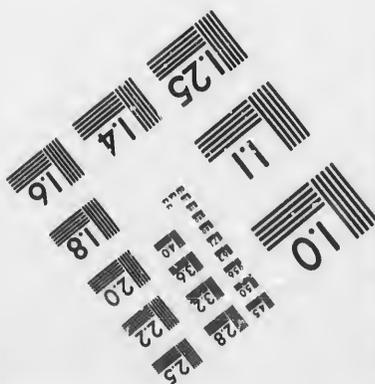
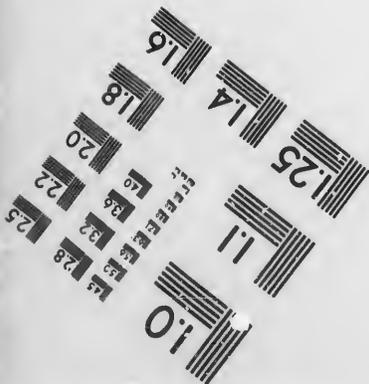
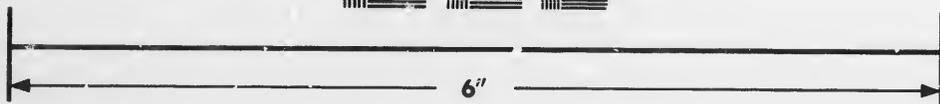
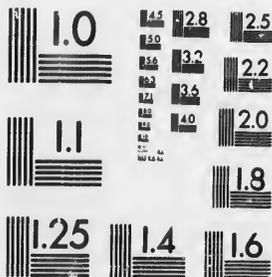


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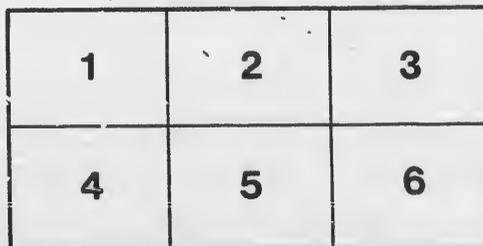
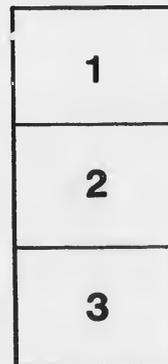
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DIALOGUES

Between Two Methodists,

ALGERNON NEWWAYS AND SAMUEL OLDPATHS,

IN WHICH, ATTENDANCE AT

CLASS MEETINGS

AS A CONDITION OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP, IS SHOWN TO BE BOTH WESLEYAN AND
SCRIPTURAL, AND THE RELATION OF CHILDREN TO THE VISIBLE CHURCH
OF CHRIST, IS EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED

BY REV. JOHN BORLAND,

Methodist Minister.

"Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is
the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."—Jeremiah.
"My son, fear thou the Lord, and—meddle not with them that are given to change."—Sol.

Toronto:

PRINTED BY JOHN. DONOGH.

1856.

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P R E F A C E .

The efforts which have recently been made to create a change in the Discipline of our Church, in reference to attendance on Class-Meetings as a Condition of Church Membership, are known not only to all within its pale, but even to many beyond it. The secession of the Rev. Dr. Ryerson from the Ministry, because unable to effect that change, and his publication of a pamphlet to explain his reasons for so important an action immediately after, were circumstances which many thought would produce a considerable excitement, and that to the extreme limits of the connexion. This however, has not been the case, and is probably owing, mainly, to the prudent course which the Conference pursued in abstaining, as far as practicable, from all exciting reference to the subject.

It has nevertheless been my conviction, that sooner or later an antidote to Dr. Ryerson's pamphlet should be supplied; and therefore, I rejoiced to learn that one was forthcoming from the pen of the Rev. H. Wilkinson, of London. His piety as a christian; his habits as a pastor; and his intelligence as a Minister, gave assurance that the service would be well performed by his hand. All this is the case so far as the main subject of the pamphlet is concerned, viz. Class-meetings a Wesleyan and Scriptural condition of church membership—but as

the view he gives of the relation of baptized children to the visible Church is not, so I think, strictly Wesleyan.—I have ventured to take up my pen, and thus address myself to the whole subject in debate. This I the more readily do, as my views where we both agree in opposition to Dr. Ryerson, have run in a somewhat different channel from his, and that I can supply them without any fear of travelling over the same line of argument.

The form of dialogue has been chosen in order that I might give the more simply and fully, not only the sentiments, but the very words of my opponents. Thus, while every justice is rendered to them and the arguments they employ, the reader will be the better able to judge between us, and make the truth his own.

DIALOGUE 1.

Class-Meetings a Condition of Church Membership.

Algernon Newways.—Good morning, Samuel, I am glad to meet you; I want to converse with you about matters which, of late, have very much occupied my mind.

Samuel Oldpaths.—Well, Algernon, I have some leisure at the present, and will gladly devote it to the conversation you desire. Pray, what are the matters which so much interest you?

A. N.—The principal one is, that our church should insist on attendance at Class-meetings, as a condition of membership. "I do not regard^d as Wesleyan, or having the sanction of Mr. Wesley, the making attendance at class-meeting an essential condition of membership in the church of Christ. Mr. Wesley declared that the sole object of his labours was, not to form a new sect, but to revive religion in the church and in the nation; that each class was a voluntary society in the church, but was no more a separate church organization than a Bible Society, a Temperance Society, or Young Men's Christian Association, is a separate organization."

S. O.—Friend Algernon—I look at you, and listen to your remarks, with mingled feelings of surprise and disappointment; nor can I well sup-

press the laugh at your talking about Bible and Temperance Societies, as though such existed in Mr. Wesley's day. You certainly are less acquainted with Mr. Wesley's writings than I thought you were, or than you ought to be, considering your standing in the church, and especially the confidence with which you refer to them. Are you aware that Mr. Wesley has delivered his judgment most explicitly on this very subject? As doubtless you are not, else you would not have made the statements which have just fallen from your lips, I will direct your attention to it. In volume II. p. 512 we read—"I met the society at five, and explained the nature and use of meeting in class; upon enquiry, I find we have now about five hundred members. But one hundred and fifteen of these do not pretend to meet at all; of these, therefore, I make no account." Vol XII. p. 407 in a letter to Mr. Benson, he writes—'Dear Joseph we must threaten no longer but perform. In November last, I told the London Society, 'our rule is, to meet a class once a week, not once in two or three, I now give you warning, I will give tickets to none in February but those that have done this.' I have stood to my word. Go you, and do likewise, wherever you visit the classes. Begin, if need be, at Newcastle and go on to Sunderland. Promises to meet are now out of date, *those that have not met seven times in the quarter exclude*, read their names in the society, and inform them all, you will the next quarter *exclude all that have not met twelve times*, that is, unless they were hindered by distance,

sickness, or by some unavoidable business." Vol. XIII. p.14. To Mr. Yewdall, Mr. W. writes:—"Those who will not meet in class cannot stay with us."

That Mr. Wesley did not design that his societies should ever assume a separate church organization is admitted; but that that separate organization was forced upon his society, by circumstances which he could not control, is well known, as it was clearly apprehended, and to some extent provided for, by Mr. Wesley himself. Yet you find no evidence, not the slightest, that he wished the condition of membership to be made less stringent; but the contrary, rather. The burden of proving the latter rests with you, my friend; and I assure you, your attempt at doing so would be the commencement of a very hopeless task. It is not without point in this controversy, that when Mr. Wesley counselled and directed in the formation of the Methodist church in the United States, he called for no alteration in the disciplinary usage for the *church* there, to that which he enforced in his *societies* at home. This one fact is fatal to your argument drawn from that source, and must therefore be abandoned.

A. N.—If, as I confess I must, retreat from my position, so far as Mr. Wesley is concerned, I still maintain that my objection is fully sustained by Holy Scripture, and "that no human authority has a right to impose any condition of membership in the Church of Christ, which is not enjoined by or may be concluded from the Holy Scripture." "I know of no Scriptural authority to exclude any

person from the Church of Christ on earth, except for that which would exclude him from the Kingdom of Glory, namely, *immoral conduct*."

S. O.—I confess every step you take in this subject increases my surprise; in the fullest measure of which I ask you, do you really believe that "*immoral conduct*" is the only thing that will keep a person out of the Kingdom of Glory? If so, and you are right, the Bible must be materially altered. Our Saviour, instead of saying, "Except a man be born again he cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God" should have substituted an avoidance of "*immoral conduct*" for that great spiritual change!! And when the Apostle, nay the Holy Spirit by the Apostle, assures us that without holiness we cannot see God, he was much mistaken, for all that is necessary thereto, is to avoid "*IMMORAL CONDUCT!!!*" My dear friend, if you talk at this rate, you may depend upon it, the religious world will feel convinced that they have given you credit for a larger acquaintance with the simplest elements of christianity than you seem to possess.

As to your proposition, and its application to the question under consideration, I must say, that it evinces the same crudeness of thought, and hastiness of conclusion. Have you not read such passages of Scripture as the following—"Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed

the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own Blood?" If so, has it not occurred to you that the elders, or rulers of a church, are under fearful responsibilities to feed, as well as to rule properly, the Church of God? But if they are compelled to feed and rule, are the members to be held by no obligation but that of their own good pleasure to attend and co-operate in their measures? The idea is preposterous. Again, in almost pointed allusion to such meetings as our Class-meetings, St. Paul exhorts:—" *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*" I repeat that the apostle may be supposed to point to assemblies of the Primitive Church, exactly similar to our Class-meetings—for surely they are times in which, in the best sense, we "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works," then, therefore, the inference is unavoidable, that to absent ourselves from such means, enforced as they are by the rules of the church for objects of salvation, and abundantly proved to be eminently conducive to that end, is to sin, and by a wilful perseverance therein to render ourselves obnoxious to expulsion; nor would the rulers of a church be guiltless in winking at such an offence. Indeed, the words immediately following the Scripture cited, show that the Apostle viewed the conduct of such absentees in a strong light, for he adds "*if we sin wilfully,*" as though he meant that such conduct was a cowardly

and sinful renunciation of our faith in Christ, and laid us open to a severe condemnation.

Class-meetings have a strong and irresistible claim on the high and prominent position we give them, for they originated in a remarkably providential way; they were found to be eminently serviceable in detecting irregularities, and promoting edification; and now after a lapse of more than a century, they are prized by the great bulk of the best and most spiritual of our membership. To surrender them, or break down their sanctions as handed to us from the great, wise, and good Wesley,—and through the hands of the Thompsons, the Mathers, the Pawsons, the Clarks, the Bramwells, ect., ect., of our church—would, apart even from their important use, be an act for recklessness and folly of which, I trust, we are not capable.

And who, my friend, would be pleased by the change you demand of us? Not one in a thousand of those who are making a proper use of Class-meetings and therefore know their value; but those, rather—and I make the assertion with nothing of a spirit of undue reflection—whose spirituality is fearfully below par, and who, therefore, do not wish to be dogged into subjects for which they have little or no relish. No! you will never, I trust, find our church so insane as to give up a condition of membership which has been found so important from its very commencement, for a change, which in the judgment of our best and wisest members, both in

the ministry and out of it, would work injuriously to our highest interests and objects.

A. W.—Although not able to meet all you say, friend Samuel, I nevertheless “am persuaded that every person who believes the doctrines, and observes the precepts and ordinances enjoined by our Lord and his Apostles, is eligible to membership in the Church of Christ; and cannot, on Scriptural or Wesleyan grounds, be excluded from its rights and privileges upon the mere ground of his or her being unable to reconeile it to their views to take a part in the conversations of Class-meetings.”

S. O.—You must excuse me Algernon, if I say, that there is much that is sophistical in your arguments and statements. Your position just now laid down contradicts itself. It amounts to just this—that persons may be, should be, members of the Church on observing the precepts and ordinances of the Lord and his Apostles; provided, however, that none of these precepts and ordinances are irreconcilable *with their views* of propriety and expediency. I have already given you an injunction from St. Paul to do the very thing which some do not wish to do, viz: that of assembling together for mutual edification in love; and yet, because their “*views*” are antagonistic to the counsels of Infinite Wisdom they are to act accordingly and be guiltless!

Again, it is a divine command that the members of the Church should “obey those that have the

rule over them; for they watch for their souls, as they that must give account." But if obedience is to depend upon a mere *whim* of their own,—for certainly an objection to attendance on class-meetings deserves no better term, as no serious and intelligent christian can object to meet with his fellow christians to converse and pray together on matters of the richest interest to every spiritually minded professor—then the Apostolic precept is of no avail.

Have you ever pondered the allusions to meetings of this nature by the prophet Malachi, and the impressive reference to them by Jehovah himself?—I will read it for your consideration:—“*Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; (as we do in class-meetings) and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name, And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*” Is there not here an allusion to meetings remarkably similar to our class-meetings? unquestionably there is; and because our church wisely appoints them, we must, according to your theory, leave it perfectly optional as to whether our members shall attend them or not,—which just amounts to this, that their maintenance shall rest upon a mere contingency; and if the members so please an invaluable means of grace may be continued, but otherwise, they shall be dropped. Is it not exceedingly probable that this very latitude,

claimed and acted upon, led to the disuse of such means in other branches of the church, both old and new, as from Malachi and St. Paul it is very clear they once existed? And, if so, it is an additional reason for adoring that providence which led Mr. Wesley to enforce attendance thereon even on the penalty of expulsion. Better that luke-warm professors should be expelled from the church than that so important a means of grace should be endangered, much less given up and abandoned.

That it should be optional with persons as to which section of the church they will join, or indeed any at all or not, I readily admit; but I never can agree with you that after joining a church they should be allowed perfect liberty as to whether or not they will conform to its rules:—rules prayerfully devised and divinely attested.

There are other views which tend to strengthen my convictions of the scriptural character of class-meetings, and of the importance of enforcing attendance thereon even at the penalty of expulsion. The first of these is the opportunity thus afforded to the ministers of the church for knowing the spiritual state of the members, and thus of ministering such instructions etc., as their cases may call for; but if no such means exist, or may, or may not be attended as the members shall please, an important end of ministerial obligation may be defeated; and which, according to your scheme, may be done with impunity.

• Another is, a church exists for mutual edification;

that the members may sympathize with each other in seasons of trouble;—strengthen each other in times of temptation;—and council and pray with each other in periods of difficulty;—but the state of each member must be known to some extent in order to do this;—yet how can this be done unless class-meetings, or something analogous to them are used? For these ends class-meetings have been found to be of essential service. But let us remove the necessity for attending them as you think we ought, and soon they would become neglected, and thus an important end of church organization would be lost. I confess that when I reflect upon your statement, that nothing but “*immoral conduct will exclude a person from the Kingdom of Glory,*” and couple it with this your effort to effect so serious a change in our rules, I look with grave suspicion on your spiritual condition and prospects.

A. N.—You are very considerate, I confess, but you must admit with me, that while “class-meetings notwithstanding occasional improprieties and abuses attending them, have been a valuable means in promoting the spirituality and usefulness of the Wesleyan Church;” yet, by enforcing attendance thereon, as a condition of membership, you deviate from the practice of the primitive church, for “the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and not class-meetings, was the binding characteristic institution upon its members;”—and, further, that you thus “repel thousands who seek your communion, and with one sweep ignore the membership of all the

baptized children of the body," sending away and keeping "away the conscientious and straightforward, who could not think of joining a religious community without intending *habitually* to observe all its rules," while "after all, it is *habitually* disregarded by a large portion of both preachers and people, and is made, as far as my observation goes, an instrument of gratifying individual hostility, rather than a means of promoting the religious and moral ends of christian discipline."

S. O.—This last, friend Algernon, is a large count, with several grave particulars; one of which, viz: that of ignoring the membership of baptized children, I will reserve for another opportunity.—The others I will now attend to in the order you present them.

First, then, the difference in our usage as to the condition of membership with that of the primitive church. But will you contend, or are you prepared to show, that "the celebration of the Lord's Supper" was the only condition which the primitive church had, or might have had, in perfect accordance with the spirit and design of the New Testament? Your statement to this end is not sufficient. I think it is easy to conceive that attendance on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in the absence of other evidences of attention to the institutions of christianity, would not have sufficed (nor ought it to have done) as a claim to church membership. There is one end which your reference to

this particular will answer, and that is to show that conditions of membership existed in the primitive church. They also exist in ours--and if a difference is found in the institution designed to act for this object, it is to be judged of, not because of any verbal rule given in Holy Scripture to that effect, but in its adaptation to promote the ends for which the church was instituted. On this we can confidently meet you: other churches have the very condition to which you refer; but with none of them, in point of vitality and success, need the Methodist church be ashamed of comparison.

It is not a little curious, that if the exact usage of the apostolic church is followed, as to the reasons for expulsion from its pale, *i. e.*, so far as the Scriptures give us light on the subject, none should be expelled but those who commit *incest*, or are holders of the *doctrines of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitanes*. But would you say that such are the only instances in which such a disciplinary process should be applied? It is not without weight, in reference to this Asiatic Church, that they are charged for not doing, in the instances referred to, what they had no *distinct command* for doing; showing most clearly that a church is not to wait for literal direction therein, but to gather its duty from the effects of conduct in its members on the great ends of their organization. Yes, it is plain that the great objects of the church are to be considered, and that which would militate against those objects is to be dealt with as its influence demands. To be indif-

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ferent herein would be to lay a church open to censure and rebuke. I lay it down as a principle with the utmost confidence, that a christian truly in earnest for eternal life will gladly avail himself, or herself, of such a means as class-meetings; and any who are not thus in earnest, are threatened with expulsion by the Head of the Church himself. "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*" Now, my friend, read and ponder this passage of Scripture; and if you do so fully, I will venture to predict that your objection to our rule, as being unscriptural, will vanish as mist from the influence of the rising sun.

You say that by our condition of membership we repel thousands from our communion who otherwise would readily join it. Then, it must be admitted, we are not as a church unduly anxious to swell our numbers, or, that a way is easily opened to us for doing so. Be this as it may, the charge you here present is a grave one, and should not rest lightly against us. But I apprehend the result would be like that of increasing the quantity of a liquid by diluting its quality. This would be increasing the size, but certainly not the value and efficiency of the church. Methodism has no reason to be ashamed of its principles as judged by the results which have flown from them in the labours of a century. The condition against which you except in us, exists not in other churches, while the

liberty you contend for is fully granted there; and yet, with none of them will Methodism suffer by comparison.

On this point I will extend my remarks a little further; and for the sake of making myself better understood, employ a figure. An hospital, it is well known, exists for the treatment of sick people with the professed object of restoring them to health, and sending them out into the world fit for its duties. The credit of every hospital depends upon the success of its measures to this end. Aware of this, one has instituted certain means which have been eminently successful. But all at once a gentleman of exceedingly liberal principles rises up and demands that perfect liberty should be allowed the patients as to whether or not they will follow all the prescriptions of the doctors, or abide by every rule of the institution; and against one rule, particularly he takes exception, viz: that which *compels* each patient to appear at given periods to be examined in order that his state may be ascertained. Any compulsion here, he contends, is unreasonable and impolitic; for some frequently avoid it, and many more would gladly enter the hospital if no such ordeal was demanded. The faculty turn to him and say, Mr. Innovater, you talk without reason:-- Are you aware, for if you are not you assuredly ought to be, that an hospital exists not to merely swell the number of its inmates, or to gratify the whims of its patients, but by treating the sick rationally and scientifically, to cure them if possible. Our

course hitherto, has been most successful ; while the alteration you propose has no one quality to recommend it. Please to let us alone that we may pursue our course unhindered by your ill-judged intrusion. I will leave you to draw the necessary inference from this figure, may it serve to correct your judgment, and thus render you a service.

Your reference to the "conscientious and straight-forward" persons who, but for our ill-advised condition of membership would unite with us, is rendered more particularly attractive by your fling at others, whom you describe as "a large portion of both preachers and people," who you say disregard this rule. Man is a forward creature, and it is sometimes exceedingly difficult to induce, and even to compel him to attend to what is for his benefit. But allowing your statement all the latitude you desire, (which many refuse to do who are much more competent, from their position and employments to form a judgment herein than you can be,) it becomes a question, whether or not it would be judicious to substitute a *weaker* motive for obedience to an important duty when a *stronger* one has been found to be ineffective. Could we be assured that the number of these delinquents would be matched by the very "*conscientious and straight-forward*" persons you allude to, it would certainly be a reason for reflection ; but as I think these estimable beings exist only in your imagination, it would be exceedingly visionary to give up a tangible reality for a mental creation.

The closing remark of your last argument I wish to notice a moment ere we part. You say that the rule enforcing attendance on Class-meetings "is made as far as 'your' observation goes, an instrument for gratifying individual hostility, rather than a means of promoting the religious and moral ends of christian discipline." This is a serious charge, and rests mainly against the ministers of our body. But, Algernon, have you ever done any thing to drag such offenders against "the religious and moral ends of discipline" to judgment? You certainly have been unaccountably silent on this subject hitherto; a thing not to be accounted to your credit, when it is considered how distinct it has been to your observation, and how ample your means have been to demand and correct such mal-practices. But, you must allow me to say, that with many I believe, this has been introduced as a kind of make-weight to your argument--a something coined for the occasion. A very unworthy act I must say. This assertion will influence those only who do not understand our disciplinary usages in such cases; for those who do, know well that our church has guards sufficiently numerous and well appointed to protect its members from any such tyranny. Let me advise you never again to resort to this kind of invective, to help even a bad argument, for you may depend upon it, it can only injure him who has the temerity to use it.

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DIALOGUE II.

The relation of baptized children to the visible Church of Christ, explained and vindicated

Algernon Newways.—Good morning, Samuel; I have desired to renew our conversation on the subject which occupied our attention when we were last together. I hope your leisure as well as your inclination will admit of a resumption of it now.

Samuel Oldpaths.—My leisure and inclination are at one in this case; and if you please, we will go at once into the point reserved for future consideration. It was as to whether or not, by making attendance on class-meeting a condition of membership, the Methodist Church did not ignore the membership of all children baptized by their ministers.

A. N.—Yes, that is my avowal, and I think that as an inference it is unavoidable.

S. O.—Your inference is just as logical as is that of the Baptist, who, from the commission of the Saviour to his Apostles, concludes against the baptism of children. The case is as follows:—"Go ye into all the world," said Christ, "and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Now, exclaims the Baptist, children cannot believe, therefore they should not be baptized. But if so, and the inference is just, the

appalling conclusion is inevitable, children cannot believe, therefore they cannot be saved,—they must be damned! If the conclusion in the former case is just, the latter one is even more so, for a much greater stress is laid upon faith for salvation than for baptism. We therefore are satisfied that this scripture does not apply to children at all, but to adults exclusively. All adults must believe in order to baptism and salvation; and to them, only, were the Apostles commissioned to preach; but as *infant* children are incapable of believing, their right to baptism and interest in salvation are to be judged by other considerations.

A. N.—I apprehend your meaning. You would have me to believe, that as children are incapable of attending class-meetings, so their claim to church membership must rest on other grounds. I admit the force of your remark; but I wish to know from you when you would require children to attend class-meetings; and in the event of their not doing so, cease to regard them as members? Or, would you repudiate the church membership of children although they did not meet in class when arrived at a suitable age for doing so, if their character was otherwise moral and irreproachable?

S. O.—You are correct in your apprehension of my remarks on baptism. I mean class-meetings for those who can attend and ought to profit by them, and therefore certainly not for very young children. But I must require of children attendance on class-meetings when arrived at a proper age to discrimin-

ate their nature, and profit by their use, on pain of expulsion from the church. Thus you see that I regard something more than moral conduct as a qualification for church membership even in these. I think there ought to be instituted in our church a means after the nature of class-meetings for the young, by which their spiritual interests might be cultivated in a way better adapted to their circumstances, than any now in use by us.

A. N.—With all you have now said I cannot agree; for, “while I maintain that each child in the land has a right to such an education as will fit him for his duties as a citizen of the state, and that the obligations of the state correspond to the rights of the child, so, I maintain, upon still stronger and higher grounds, that each child baptized by the church is thereby enfranchised with the rights and privileges of citizenship in it, until he forfeits them by personal misconduct and exclusion, and that the obligations of the church correspond to the rights of the child.”

S. O.—I think, my friend, that while your argument is very specious, your figure is quite as damaging to your cause as any one opposed to your views could wish. The child, you say, has a right to such an education as will fit him for his duties as a citizen of the state; so I say, and so our church believes; hence she has devised means to this end—such as Sabbath Schools, pastoral visitations and catechetical instruction, that thus educated in the science of salvation, the child may become fitted for his duties as

an adult member of the church. But if, when he has arrived at the age which enables persons to discriminate and to choose things that are for personal benefit and general usefulness in the church, he positively and repeatedly refuses to engage in them, then, by serious and "personal misconduct" he merits and receives "exclusion." The cases are quite parallel,—yea, the resemblance between your figure and our church's practice is so close that one wonders you did not perceive it. And let me tell you, my friend, with all affectionate faithfulness and candour, that with singular inconsistency, you seem to have lost sight of more than one important element in our church's polity, the proper influence of which would have given a very different turn to your arguments and objections.

A. N.—Well, Samuel, as you take the foundation from beneath my present superstructure I will abandon it, and if you please will take up another phase of the subject suggested by a pamphlet (by the Rev. H. Wilkinson) I have recently read. After all, I think that "the stereotyped terms and sentiments of much that is written in reference to the relationship of children to the church, and the efficiency of baptism in connection with that relationship" should be rejected. "There is much in the phraseology adopted, as well as in the ideas attempted to be conveyed, that I *never* fully received, and that, in fact, to my mind, never became intelligible; and I fancy, for that very good reason, that

'Nonsense can ne'er be understood.'

S. O.—This is strong language assuredly, and must be treated according to the particulars to which it refers. If you mean the absurdities of popery or puseyism herein, I will agree with you, but if to such sentiments as those maintained by Wesley, Benson, Clarke, Watson, and others of our Church, and as well by the greatest lights of the church of Christ in all its periods, then I most seriously and earnestly dissent from you. But pray be somewhat more explicit that I may understand your reference.

A. N.—Well then, if I were asked. “*Are children members of the church of Christ upon earth?*” I would answer “without controversy they are. It is incontrovertibly established by the plainest teachings of the Book of God, that infants and little children are, thanks to Jesus Christ! *in a gracious state.* See Matt. xviii : 2. 5 : Rom. v : 12, 20. Matt. xix. 14. How full the affirmation!—of such are the Kingdom of Heaven.” “The next inquiry is, *Are children members of the visible church?* I answer, No—*emphatically, No.*”

S. O.—Excuse me if I say, I do not think your statement sufficiently clear. Children, you say, are “members of the church of Christ upon earth,”—“are in a gracious state”,--and that “of such are the Kingdom of Heaven”—yet you assert they are not “members of the visible church;” then, pray, what is their relation to the visible church of Christ?

A. N.—“There is doubtless existent, what is intended by the visible and the invisible, or more

properly speaking, the *spiritual* church. The Scriptures speak of visible and organized bodies ; as the seven churches in Asia ; and many other distinct organizations, as so many portions of the visible church. In like manner the whole of these portions, taken together, constitute the *universal* church. This is the visible church of God upon earth ; but it is not, in the *highest* sense, the church of God. In the sight of God, doubtless, many of its members possess but a nominal connexion with the mystical Body of Christ. In the first and strictest sense, the church of Christ is the whole of the company of the 'saved,' of the justified, of such as are really in spiritual union with the Saviour. The 'Body of Christ,' to which the title of *Church* pre-eminently belongs, includes only an accepted and approved and holy membership. This is eminently the 'Body,' the 'House,' and the 'Spouse' of Christ ; and to it belongs the unity, the oneness, the purity the safety, the permanence, and the final glorious triumph, so often and variously the glowing theme of the Holy Scriptures. Now, of this church children *are* members ; and *all* children are members of it by virtue of their interest in the covenant of Universal Redemption ; as they are in a state of gracious acceptance and salvation ; and of consequence, 'heirs of eternal life'. In *no other* than this highest sense are infants members of the church. Of no other church relationship do they stand in need, as children. Of no other church relationship are they capable. Mystify we may, and write and talk confusedly we may, as hundreds do in reference to this matter ; but, affirm it who may,

the thing is simply impossible that infants *can* be members of the church in any other sense."

S. O.—I confess, Algernon, your earnestness of spirit and vigor of expression have very much increased since you read the pamphlet to which you recently referred; yet I cannot say that in every instance your positions are better established or your arguments more conclusive. You say that children are members of the invisible or spiritual church, but that they are not, cannot be, nor need they be, members of the visible church. You institute, very properly, a distinction between those who are but *nominally* members of the church, and others who are so *really* and *spiritually*; but allow me to ask you, does it form a part of God's plan, so far as the scriptures guide us on the subject, that there should be a spiritual portion of the church of Christ upon earth, separate from, and having no connection with the visible church? You have said, and truly, that children are, as are all like them, and only such, of "*the Kingdom of Heaven*," But what authority can you plead for assuming that in that kingdom are two separate, totally and necessarily distinct portions,—not one of nominal and the other of real christians, but both of spiritual members: members in the highest scriptural sense? Not even between the nominal and the real (adult) christian is there authority from the Holy Scriptures for a line of distinction such as you draw; but between spiritual members, members in the highest sense, to institute a line, so that the one can not, need not pass

to the other, is to go not only beyond any statement of scripture, but I must add, even contrary to its very letter and spirit. Are not the words taken from St. Mark's Gospel, and used by our ministers whenever they perform the rite of baptism, fully in point here? "And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked them that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

From this passage of Scripture is it not clear beyond contradiction, that while children have a gracious connection with Christ, are spiritually members of his Kingdom, and susceptible of receiving his blessings, that that relation was declared as a visible as well as a spiritual one? The mode in which they were brought to Christ was public; their mode of reception was public; the bestowment of blessings upon them was public; and the use which Christ made of the act by which the children were brought to him, was to illustrate important principles of his visible church or Kingdom, of which He declared children were members. The authority of the Saviour in this instance must be regarded as directly opposed to your idea of denying children a place in the visible church of Christ. Again—

We read not only of the churches in Asia, as you have intimated, but also of churches in *houses*, see Romans 16 : 5, 1 Cor. 16 : 19, Col. 4 : 15, Phil. 2: and the law of the kingdom of God—the *visible* church, as bearing upon this latter application of the term church, and in reference to children, is, “children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.—honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.” Then as to fathers—“and, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Here are laws belonging to the kingdom of God, and relating to members *in* that kingdom; but could these laws be carried out in the one case or in the other, but as individuals referred to are members of the visible church? assuredly not: and if parents are bound to train their children according to the laws of Christ's Kingdom, and children are capable of such treatment, need such treatment, and should have it; then in this instance, as in that in which they were brought to Christ for his blessing, are they seen to be members of the visible church. And further, if children are bound to “obey” their “parents in the Lord”, and to “honour” their “father and mother”; and that as early as they are capable of doing either the one or the other, then to say that they *are* not, *cannot* be, nor *need* they be, members of Christ's *visible* church, is to say that which is not

scripturally true : and being false must be “ contrary to reason”, and ought to be to “ common sense.”

A. N.—Notwithstanding your strong remonstrance I must maintain the position I have laid down, and in further supporting my views thereon, “I quote in place here the following sensible remarks from Dr. Wood, of Andover, U. S. ‘It can never be consistent to regard infant children as members of the church, in the peculiar sense in which adult believers are members ; *for of this relation they are manifestly incapable.* Nor can it be implied that baptized children can ever become members of the church in this sense, on *any lower terms* than those which are presented to others.—They can be permitted to sustain this peculiar relation only on the condition of their exhibiting the character of real piety. Still it is clear that baptized children bear a real and very endearing relation to the church. And although they are not at present capable of being members of the church (the visible church), they will at length, *unless their own wickedness prevent*, become active and faithful members. Such is the design of the economy under which they are placed ; and such we may hope will through the divine mercy, ordinarily be the happy result.’ Dr. W. adds—‘Thus the relation of baptized children to the church is not an imaginary or unintelligible relation, but one which is real and obvious ; securing to them a special prospect of ob-

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taining its spiritual and eternal blessings.' This is the true and Scriptural relationship of children, of all children, to the church of God—a relationship including every necessary good, and exactly suited to their present unconscious state and manifest incapacity. Where the authority, then, contrary to reason and common sense, for regarding infants members of an active, repenting, believing, self-denying, working church? Where? nowhere but in the mere imaginings of men."

S. O.—Really, Algernon, your valorous earnestness amuses me, you certainly have risen to "the heroics," and but that the subject is of so important a nature I should scarcely restrain myself from a little merriment at your expense. Your attitude is at once so warlike and defiant that were it not for the bulwark which the multitude of worthies in our own church and as well in the various churches of Christ from the days of the Apostles to the present supply me, surmounted above and sustained beneath as I believe they all are by both Scripture and reason, I do not know how I could face you. But surveying these, and the firmness of their foundation I am emboldened to say, I think you have been unfortunate in quoting from even so high an authority as Dr. Wood. A Congregationalist, and therefore a Calvinist, could scarcely have written otherwise. To have given what I consider the scriptural, and therefore the truthful view of the subject, would have loosened so many joints of this Calvinistic system as to have endangered, if not to have

destroyed the whole superstructure. We may well ask for evidence from other quarters and especially, as all the Dr. has hitherto given (as quoted by you) is *mere* assertion.

Still the Dr's. evidence is scarcely as much in your favor as you seem to imagine. He says "it can never be consistent to regard infant children as members of the church, *in the peculiar sense* in which adult believers are members; *for of this relation they are manifestly incapable.*" The Dr. is perfectly right here;—who has imagined that infant children could "be members of the church in the *peculiar sense* in which adult believers are members?" Who? None but those bereft of their senses. *They* are members because they can be "active, repenting, believing, self-denying, working members; but inasmuch as infants can do none of these things—that they "*are manifestly incapable,*"—therefore, they cannot be members "*in the peculiar sense* in which adult believers are members." But are they therefore *in no sense* members of the *visible* church? Dr. W. has not said—no.

Further, the Dr. says, "They can be admitted to sustain this peculiar relation only on condition of their exhibiting the character of real piety." That is, the church must be satisfied that they are the possessors of *real piety*. Well then, as you can assure the Dr. that children "*are in a gracious state,*" are "saved," "justified," "in spiritual union with the saviour,"—are of "the body of Christ," are actually

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of the "House" of Christ—the "spouse of Christ"—to whom "belongs the unity, the oneness, the purity, the safety, the permanence, and the final glorious triumph, so often and variously the glowing theme of the Holy Scriptures," you can truthfully assure him that any objections he may have against the formal recognition of children (infants) as members of the *visible church* on the supposed absence of real piety must be withdrawn, and his theory thrown to the four winds of heaven:—and your support from that source--*nil*. But allow me to tell you, my friend, there are several fallacies lying at the foundation of what you seek to maintain, and I will now take the liberty of placing them before you. The first is that you assume that other than the ordinary and divinely constituted channel, the *visible church of Christ*, exists for the conveyance of grace to the world, the young even as the old. We should bear in mind, that while Christ is the Head and only source of grace, the church, *the visible church*, is the only appointed medium for its communication. God works by means; those means are his church so far as human instrumentality is concerned. One important means is instruction, but the church conveys this instruction and that to those who are, or ought to be, and might be, among its visible (certainly not invisible,) members. Another means is discipline, (and the former would scarcely be perserved in if the latter were rejected) but the church constructs and enforces that discipline.

How fully is this witnessed in our Sabbath School organizations, and might be even more so by other important means. The third is divine influence; but this is given ordinarily, in and through the means the visible church employs, and by the connexion of each and all therewith. With extraordinary, or exceptional cases or instances, we can have nothing to do in a discussion of this nature; the question is, what is the rule? for it is by this that we are to regulate our judgment and actions. How painfully does the world, in its condition of ignorance and wretchedness, illustrate this principle against the church! From this position it is evident that as children may receive instruction, may be brought under scriptural discipline, and may be subjects of divine influence, (all of which they need as much as any adult, and for which ample provision has been made in the Gospel) either in connexion with churches such as those in Asia, or of those in a house of which St. Paul speaks; and as all this is (must be) carried on with a visible agency and process, so must they be regarded as connected with that visible agency and process, and consequently members of the *visible* church of Christ upon earth. And "where the authority, then, for regarding" them otherwise than as such members."

Another fallacy your theory stands charged with is, that none can be members of the visible church unless they are capable of being "active, repenting, believing, self-denying, working members." You ask with considerable emphasis, "where the author-

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ity, then, contrary to reason and common sense" for believing any other can be? Now to this I answer, many reasons are found in Scripture for things very "contrary to common sense." *Common sense* is frequently found a wonderfully stupid and perverse thing. It crucified Christ, persecuted his followers and has performed a great many silly and disgraceful antics in all ages of the world; therefore, it is not always—nay seldom safe—to appeal to it. And then as to "*reason*," it depends very much upon that which directs it, for its being regarded as a safe guide or standard of appeal. It must be acknowledged that all adult believers cannot be always *active* members of the visible church, for there are times when they are constrained to be quite *passive*, and it is evident that when such is the case they cannot be "*working*," any more than they can be "*active*" members; but must they then for the time, cease to be recognized as members of the *visible* church, and rest contented until their powers of activity return, if they ever do, they must simply be *visible* members of the *invisible* church?

Surely the Scriptural statements which define the Church, or Kingdom of God, are sufficiently plain, see Matt. xiii. 24, 47, and xxv. 1, 13, Rom. ii. 28, 29, &c., as to show, in despite of what the Church may do to prevent it, that within are the nominal and real, or spiritual; the wise and the unwise; and that its provisions are so adapted to human circumstances, that when its members can believe and deny themselves, they are required to do so;

but that when such acts are impossible on their part, either from youth or infirmities and afflictions, common to christians, then he who seeketh not to "reap where he has not sown," gives according to their necessities and the riches of his own glory, and not according to *their* acts or deeds. The principle by which you refuse children admission into the visible church of Christ, would, in its various forms of application, restrict its bounderies much more than you appear to be aware.

A. N.—Notwithstanding all you say, friend Samuel, I am bound to object most strenuously to the idea that "baptism admits," that "baptism enfranchises," that baptism "makes" little children members of the visible church. Now all this is the merest assumption, it is not only unproven, but utterly incapable of proof. The obvious and solid truth is, that Baptism admits into, or makes of the church, infants and little children, in no sense whatever. Not of the *visible* church, since as *incapables*, infants *cannot* be made members of it. You could just as naturally talk of making them members of parliament."

S. O.—It would be a sufficient answer to all this to use your own words and say, "all this is merest assumption; it is not only unproven, but utterly incapable of proof." They are not incapable of receiving blessings flowing through the prayers and supplications of the church; neither are they utterly incapable of co-operating with that church in re-

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ceiving its instructions in order to their spiritual and everlasting welfare; nor are they incapable of doing that, and visibly and audibly,—by which God is glorified;—for “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings the Lord *has* ordained strength.” The proof of the contrary is with you, which I apprehend you will not attempt. I am strongly inclined to believe that your error on this great subject is to be found in an attempt to judge of the design and import of baptism to children through the lax practices of the church in reference to baptized children, than a determination to estimate it at its full and scriptural value, when with propriety you might insist on the Church’s practice being rendered strictly conformable thereto. For allow me to ask you, does not baptism admit adults, even though previously converted into the visible church, and *thus* make them members? And if so does it not *enfranchise* them with its rights and privileges? Of course it does. And if I have shown that the incapability you assert to children of being members of the visible church is an error, then it follows that we may consider them, even as adults, as being by baptism admitted into the visible church, and enfranchised with its rights without approaching an absurdity great as that of attempting “to make them members of parliament.”

A. N.—“Circumcision was a ‘sign’ put upon Abraham and his seed showing them to be a peculiar people, under peculiar obligations to God, and entitled them to peculiar blessings. It was a seal

of the merciful covenant which actually included them, and all covenant good for them. Just so Baptism, now, with respect to our children. It is the sign, and not the *means*, of spiritual mercies. But it is inquired, 'did circumcision *make* children members of the visible church among the Jews?' and I answer "not at all, in the sense of making them members, enfranchising, initiating and admitting them into the visible church."

S. O.—Allow me to ask you, has God instituted any duty, which, when rightly performed, will not be found to be a "*means of spiritual mercies?*" How much more than *one* of the only *two* sacraments of his gospel church—his kingdom upon earth! The facts which your reference to Abraham elicit are, that circumcision was the sign and seal of the benefits to which he and his seed were called as the visible church of God upon earth; they were thus *seen* "to be a peculiar people, under peculiar obligations to God, and entitled to peculiar blessings." That young and old were regarded members of this visible church is shown from the following statement: "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised." "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you"—"And my covenant" (its sign) "shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, *th* soul shall be cut off from his people" (the visible church with all its rights a

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privileges) "he" (not his father merely) "hath broken my covenant."

A. N.—By admitting your statement, I cannot say that I am bound to your conclusion; for I believe "If a Jew neglected to circumcise his child, this important badge of God's chosen nation would be wanting, and, in effect, the child would be cut off from Israel, as a violator of the covenant, by despising the seal of it; not *personal*, however, but the parent for him; yet would the child be still accepted of God in the covenant of grace, and constitute a part of the congregation of Israel." "And as the covenant of grace is one and the same in all ages, as not a stake is removed, not a cord is broken, children are still entitled to the sign of God's people—baptism by water;—the neglect of the parent to secure for them that enjoined sign, will place them in circumstances of *deprivation*, so far as the future benefits of the ordinance are concerned; but certainly such neglect on the part of another affects not the children for evil in the sight of God."

S. O.—It excites in me not a little curiosity to know how you would make it appear that a soul might be "cut off from his people," and yet "constitute a part of the congregation of Israel;" how he could be placed in "circumstances of deprivation," and yet not be affected "for evil in the sight of God;" in what sense a person may suffer "*deprivation*," "so far as the future benefits of the ordinance are concerned," by "the neglect of the parent to secure

for him that enjoined sign," and yet make it inconsistent with the economy of grace for him to suffer a "deprivation" of those benefits now. These, I think, you must admit to be contradictions which it is important to your argument to reconcile. That the neglect or contumacy of the parent to secure circumcision then, or baptism now, for the child, would not denude it of its acceptance with God through Christ, or of its inheritance in heaven, were it to die in infancy, all will admit; yet must it be regarded as a reprehensible omission to neglect to formally introduce a child into a higher and peculiar relation through a significant and expressive rite, divinely instituted, and by which relation it is invested with pre-eminent privileges. Circumcision was the formal recognition of the covenant, rendered indispensable by God on pain of excision from the congregation of his people, and, with such act, a *deprivation*, present as well as future, of those blessings peculiar to that covenant, and by which his people were to be distinguished. The covenant being the same under each dispensation, it follows, that what a neglect of circumcision then led to, a neglect of baptism now must also entail. Again—

See that adult dweller in Mesopotamia; he lives under the patriarchal dispensation; he is moral and upright, and, according to the light he possesses, he "fears God and works righteousness." Will not he be accepted of God? But does he stand equal to the pious Jew, who, under his dispensation, has walked in covenant relation with God; or will he

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rise to the same status of glory? Assuredly not: no more than will the latter, either in time or eternity, reach the position of a real Christian.

The one has one talent of privilege, the other two, and the latter five; while the principle of reward is—"For unto every one that hath shall given, and he shall have abundance." But that which is true of individuals in different dispensations, is true also of individuals under the same dispensation. He who, according to providential or parental disability, is not possessed, nor can he be, of equal light and privilege with others, but nevertheless improves what he has, is now, and will be in final judgment accepted of God. Whereas, he whose lot is of a superior caste, and is faithful, and again a third, who is even more favoured, so that he lives in the full endowments of gospel light and privilege, will rise both here and hereafter in proportion to their talents and faithfulness in improving them. Therefore as they have differed in privileges, so they will differ in the rewards which are graciously bestowed; and let no man's eye be evil because God is good, and acts according to his own supreme right and infinite wisdom; for "Just and right is he."

In full accordance with the principles involved in the preceding remarks ought the baptism of children to be viewed. A child to whom baptism is denied, under the supposition that it has no inheritance in the kingdom of God until it can believe, and thus claim it by a personal act of its own, is as one that has received but one talent in our present

dispensation ; a second may be viewed as receiving two, who is baptized, and thus formally recognized as a member of the Christian dispensation, but of whom it is denied that baptism has *made* it anything, or invested it with any right, or given it any *present* interest in Christ, or the officers of his *visible* Church ; inasmuch so, that any advantage to be derived from the act of baptism is reversionary, and to be looked for only when the person can become "an active, repenting, believing, self-denying member of a working church." But a third is baptized; brought for the sacrament by parents and to a church, who all regard it as a sign of the needed cleansing and renewing influence of the Holy Spirit ; also as a *seal* of the covenant of redemption by which is guaranteed to the person receiving it, the provision of gospel mercy in its fulness, to be applied as needed and sought for, in believing prayer by it, or for it. A donation of the covenant grace is believingly asked for in the performance of the rite ; and subsequently, instruction and prayer, with suitable discipline, are employed for the training of the child both by the parents and the church, the latter feeling as the former that additional obligations were created in the ordinance administered to the child, and in which they both were interested parties. But can all this take place in reference to this last child and no results mark its condition which would raise it above the other two ? Surely this should not be imagined. And while such a course of duty may be pursued, ought it not to be so ? Let no professing Christian indulge the idea, much less

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act upon it, that whether a child be baptized or not, its spiritual condition is not affected for evil in the sight of the Lord; for these words of Jehovah to Abraham have a startling meaning, and that as bearing upon the child itself:—“*And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*” But if the child were circumcised, and thus became a member of the congregation of Israel, then it would as a necessary consequence, be regarded as a member of that visible church, and become personally, and at once interested in every promise, by which every duty could be discharged, and every privilege secured becoming the peculiar people and witnessing church of the Lord.

A. N.—I must still contend that “Baptism is the sign” that children and believers are Christ’s, not the *way* to Christ.

S. O.—That is true of children who, because of their unconditional interest in Christ, according to the purposes of infinite love, must not be left in peril of eternal death because of the neglect of others, and in which neglect they have no voluntary connection. It is also true in all exceptional cases of adult believers, such as Cornelius, who was blessed with a communication of the Holy Spirit before he was, or could have been, baptized by the Apostle. God can make what exceptions to his own rule He pleases, but the rule and not the exception is that

on which an argument should be based. If this principle is admitted, then the Apostle Peter's direction to the inquirers on the day of Pentecost is in point here, and baptism is seen in the very light you repudiate. "Men and brethren what shall we do?" inquired the earnest throng. The reply was—"Repent and be *baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Here then, baptism is distinctly seen as a "*way* to Christ;" and what follows as distinctly intimates, that the same act performed for our children, if it does not so unite them to Christ as to effect their safety from death were they to die in infancy, yet that it obtains for them that *measure* of the spirit's influence peculiar to the Gospel dispensation, into which by the act of baptism it was formally introduced; for the Apostle adds, "the promise," that is of the Holy Spirit, "is unto you, *and to your children.*"

A. N.—If what you demand were admitted, viz. "that the baptized children of our people are members of *our* church, then of course the same is true of all the other churches of the Saints; the idea accords with Romish and Puseyitish views, exactly. It only remains for us to adopt it practically, and Methodism will soon become as perfect and as spiritual as they are."

S. O.—Excuse me my friend, "It remains for us to adopt it practically", as with our views of the relation of children to the church of Christ, we are bound to do; and instead of drifting towards Roman-

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ism or Puseyism, we shall move straight forward to the full dimensions of a Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would surprise me much to learn that so little difference existed between Methodism and Romanism, or its pitiful mimic puseyism, that a practical treatment of children as members of our church through baptism, would break the barrier, and let us into one or other of them. No, no, my friend, this is what some will call a "*Ruse de guerre*," a move more in name than in reality to deter us from pursuing a road you would not we should travel in. Between Methodism and Romanism there exists an impassable gulf, and you may depend upon it, that if the thing you feared was in any measure an attempt at bridging that gulf, I would render but little assistance in that direction. But let us do our duty to the young as well as to the old, undeterred by bug-bears from whatever quarter they may come.

It is evident that our Church in England is awaking to the importance of a more thorough action here,—hence the institution by them of Catechumen Classes for children. Still, I think an improvement even on their plan, is both easy and desirable. If meetings similar to our class-meetings, adapted to the age and condition of our children were instituted, and which all should be required to attend weekly, as in the former case, when instruction, with singing and prayer could be entered upon, I apprehend a more efficient means would be employed for the training of our children than any yet in use. By this means a

thorough oversight could be maintained, and as well as an opportunity of transferring them to the regular classes when their spirit and conduct would justify such an act. Thus we might preserve our youth to the church, secure our church from the evils of unscriptural membership, and not less from the grave charge of inconsistency, viz. of receiving our children formally into our church by baptism, and then, comparatively at least, treating them with neglect.



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