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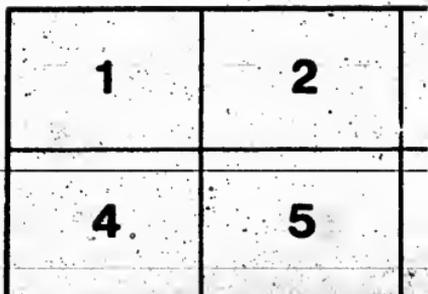
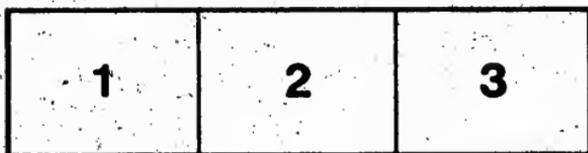
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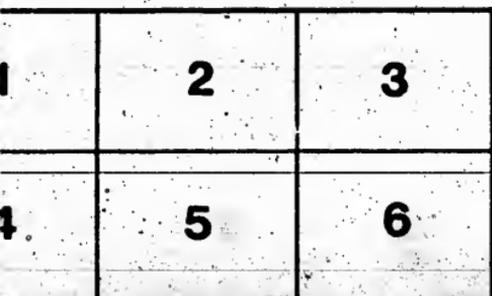
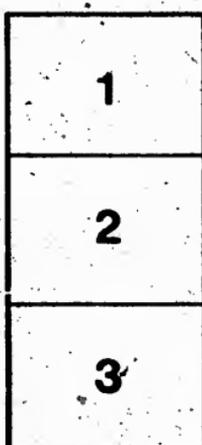
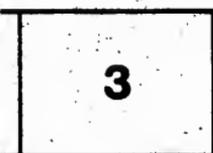
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# The Children of the Church.

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THOUGHTS

OF THE

Relation of Baptized Children to the Church,

AND THE

DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

WHICH IT INVOLVES,

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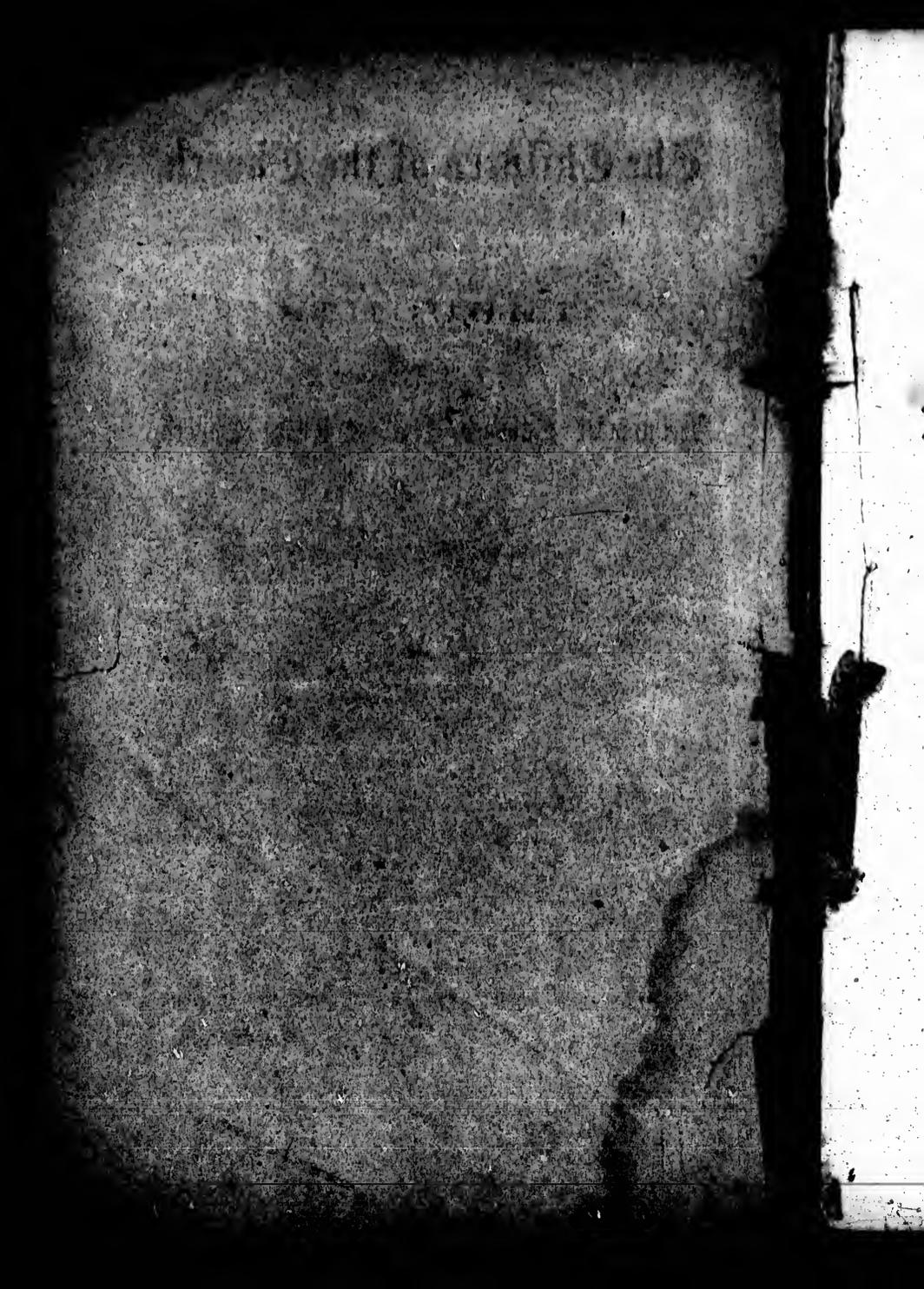
REV. H. M. DEWART.

"God made Childhood for Eternity."

TORONTO:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, AT THE "GUARDIAN" OFFICE, KING ST. EAST.  
1883

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### TO THE READER.

This little treatise is presented to the Christian public, with a hope that it may aid in promoting a deeper interest in the Christian nurture of "the children of the Church." It has not been written to support any special theory, or maintain any set of opinions, but with a sincere desire to "know the truth," and to present a scriptural view of this question of Relationship and Duty. To determine how all her available resources may be most successfully employed to secure the salvation of the young from the spiritual dangers which threaten them, is, in my opinion, the most important question demanding solution from the church of our day.

Whatever diversity of opinion may exist on speculative points, there is no room for difference respecting the necessity that exists for increased wisdom, earnestness, and self-denying effort to lead our youth in the morning of life, to a saving knowledge of Christ their Redeemer.

E. H. D.

HAMILTON, C. W., 1st May, 1861.



THE CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH :

THOUGHTS

ON THE

Relation of Baptized Children to the Church,

&c., &c.

*"Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."*—Eph. vi. 4.

No subject presents stronger claims to serious regard than the condition of the children of the Church, and their claims to christian nurture and faithful guardianship. The importance of possessing true and scriptural views of this question of relationship and duty can scarcely be over-estimated. Its discussion embraces the doctrine of human depravity—the unconditional benefits of the Atonement—the responsibility of the Church, and serious enquiry, respecting the most effectual means of saving the young, from the tendencies of a sinful nature, and the snares that are spread to lure them, "far from the paths of peace." In its doctrinal aspects it is also a subject of embarrassing delicacy. He that can approach it without feeling this has yet to learn the vastness of his theme; and has never fully realized the difficulties of a question, around which so many conflicting opinions surge in ceaseless collision. Whatever theological conclusion we adopt, we place ourselves in opposition to names justly revered for piety and learning. But in the discussion of such a question as this—though not unimpressed with the respect due to the opinions of others—no reverence for great names should silence a conviction.

of truth. The Bible must be our only standard of appeal. "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Why examine the subject at all, if we are unwilling to accept the conclusions to which a prayerful and dispassionate examination of the whole question conducts us? Why profess to search for truth, if we have determined to accept no other conclusion than one already adopted? Those who maintain that all that is comprehended in this question is fully settled in our connexional writers, assert more than can be easily proved. If so, whence arises the diversity of opinion that on this subject undeniably exists amongst us? Our standard theological writers are essentially sound, as far as they go, but there is a want of explicitness in their explications of the moral condition of infants, which has left a corresponding vagueness in the opinions of both ministers and people on an important subject, in which our theoretic views determine our sense of duty. Before proceeding to examine "the relation of baptized children to the Church," there are other questions underlying this, and interwoven with it, that materially affect our ultimate conclusion, which claim our attention. It is undeniable that our views of the nature and design of baptism—of the constitution of the Church—and the moral condition of infants before baptism, must determine our decision on the relation of children to the Church after baptism. If it be thought that the discussion of these topics is not necessarily involved in our theme, let it be remembered, that an exposition without this would be erecting a building without examining the foundation. This would imply the assumption, without examination or proof, of the points on which the solution mainly turns.

We will therefore first examine what the Holy Scriptures impartially interpreted, give us to understand, respecting the moral condition of infants, and their relation to the Atonement of Christ.

## I.

## DIFFERENT THEORIES RESPECTING THE MORAL CONDITION OF INFANTS.

Different views have been taken on this subject by theological writers, which of course have been modified, or mainly formed by the theological systems they had adopted. Some of these we will briefly review:

1. There is *the doctrine of natural purity*, which denies the depravity of human nature, and asserts its moral rectitude. Of course all who take this position on the general condition of men, will regard children as perfectly pure, until they are corrupted by evil example. This theory is contrary to the direct testimony of the Holy Scriptures, which declare man's natural condition to be one of depravity and unholiness, and his nature to be prone to evil. It of necessity ignores the work and office of the Holy Spirit in renewing and purifying the heart, which is explicitly revealed in the Bible. It is equally opposed to what we observe in the universal tendency to forget God, and sin against Him, which characterizes our race. This amply corroborates the Bible testimony respecting the sinfulness of man's nature. No power of example can account for the universal aversion to holiness, the wickedness and unbelief that are so inseparably interwoven with the history of our race, in every age and clime. The example of the wicked could present no temptation to a perfectly holy being. This theory increases our danger by hiding it from sight.

2: Some maintain *that the soul is pure in itself, but that the defilement arises from its connection with the body*. They forget that moral impurity cannot belong to any merely corporeal organization. From this union of soul and body duties and dangers arise that else would not exist; but the sin or evil must exist in the mind. It is the possession of an unconstrained will that constitutes us responsible and moral beings. Those who receive

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this doctrine cannot of course attach much importance to baptism, for they cannot from such a stand point, understand the meaning of an ordinance, that symbolizes the essential impurity of the heart, and the necessity of cleansing and renewal by the Spirit of God. Parents who imbibe these sentiments must teach their children that their only danger is from the power of animal nature, and that self-mortification is the only way of holiness; and thus an unscriptural ascetism will be put in place of the work of the Spirit of God.

3. The Church of Rome, and a large section of the Episcopal Church of England, while acknowledging the inherent depravity of infants, teach, that *by baptism properly administered, they are born again*; for though being by nature born in sin and the children of wrath, they are hereby made the children of grace. This is contrary to general experience and observation, for there is no evidence that those baptized are the subjects of a saving change of nature, not given to others. It is without support in the Word of God, and opposed to its testimony. The sacred writers make a distinct difference between the outward sign and the inward grace signified. "The like figure," saith the Apostle Peter, "whereunto even baptism doth now save us, (*not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God*;) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (Pet. iii. 21.) If baptism be regeneration, or the means of converting it, how could St. Paul say that he was sent, "not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel?" (Cor. i. 17.) Or how could he thank God (1 Cor. i. 14,) that he baptized none but Crispus and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas;" and, in the same epistle, (1 Cor. iv. 15,) say, "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus have I begotten you through the Gospel?" Is not faith an essential condition of regeneration and justification? When we look into the New Testament and see the deep spirituality of this great

change, and the fruits of the spirit described as resulting from it, it cannot be denied that the substitution of baptism for scriptural regeneration must be the cause of keeping many from seeking to experience the renewal of their mind by the power of the Holy Ghost; and beyond all doubt the reception of this error has caused thousands to rest in a false security, without the life of God in the soul.

4. Calvinistic writers, in order to be consistent, have been compelled to deny the salvation of infants, (except they were elect.) But to relieve the harshness of consistency with their theoretic creed, it has been generally assumed that all who die in infancy are saved, being regenerated by special grace. Logical consistency is sacrificed, rather than do violence to parental affection and hope; or tarnish the justice of God our Creator, by representing Him as dooming to eternal suffering the innocent who had never transgressed His law.

The most common opinion among those who believe in total depravity, and also in the salvation of those who die in infancy, is substantially the same as the theory last stated, viz., *that God regenerates those who die in infancy, and thus gives them a meetness for heaven, and a claim to its happiness.* A late writer on this subject says, "But I assume that they who die in infancy are included in the plan of redemption; and that God, having purposed to take them out of the world, ere they reached the period of accountability, purposed also to prepare them for the change; and even when no evidence, from the nature of the case, be given, let them, (parents) hope for it; and if the child peradventure be snatched away by death, let them hope and believe that regeneration has prepared it for the glorious transition." (Dr. Waterbury). The general consolation given to parents is of the same hesitating character. To all this we have one important objection. We have no right to hope if we have no ground of hope, and no right to make assumptions

Y involving the deepest interests without proof. Either we have some scriptural warrant to believe that such children are saved, or we have not. If we have, let us give glory to the Divine mercy, and rejoice in the assurance of their safety. But if any take the contrary position, we cannot see what ground such persons have to hope or believe in a probable regeneration, which God may work in those who die. Either children who die in infancy are saved by virtue of an interest in the atonement of Christ and the covenant of redemption, which all infant children have, or they are not saved at all. And that they are thus saved there cannot be a reasonable doubt. We should, however, believe in the salvation of infants, not in spite of our theology, but a theology drawn from the Word of God, and consistent with itself, should be the foundation of such confidence. We have no reason to believe that God looks with more favour on the child appointed unto death, than on that appointed unto life. If men, in order to sustain man-made creeds will close their eyes on Bible truth, and shut their ears to the voice of reason, let them at least be silent, and not attempt to supply the place of the truths neglected, by unfounded speculation. In grave theological questions, we require proof, not hypothesis. Why should the true ground, upon which we have a warrant to believe, in the salvation of children dying in infancy, be ignored, and the deficiency supplied by conjectural theories?

This theory is unquestionably a reaction from the harsh and dark views of the moral condition of children, commonly presented by Calvinistic writers, and others who have followed them in their pictures of the depravity of man. These pictures were frequently untrue, inasmuch as they represented all unconverted men, not as they really were, but as they would have been, without the drawings of the Spirit, and the power of restraining grace. "Total depravity" has been so taught as to represent every individual unconverted as a mass of moral rottenness, without one pulse of

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life, and without one particle of moral ability or excellence in his nature, in order that the whole work of his resurrection from spiritual death might be ascribed to the irresistible energy of the Holy Spirit. The utter inability of man, and the irresistibility of the Spirit's influence, are evidently doctrines adjusted to each other, designed to harmonize in the creed, of which they form so prominent a part. Even Arminian writers have probably used some of these terms and phrases in a manner that neither the Word of God nor the experience of men would fully warrant. Though we believe that the doctrine of universal infant regeneration, taught by the late Mr. Mercein, and others, is untenable; yet we cannot receive with cordiality some of the views and expressions presented by divines of the most undoubted orthodoxy. When we hear the sufferings of infants pointed to us as evidences that they are guilty objects of Divine wrath, or hear it set forth that every child born into the world wears the image of the devil, we confess a decided preference for language and sentiments of a more scriptural character. We revere the memory of the great and good, whose work is now with God, "nevertheless we have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well that we take heed." And let it be remembered that we follow not those great men best by an unquestioning faith in every sentiment and proposition they wrote; but rather by searching for truth, with the same independent scrutiny that characterized their researches. We should love truth better than creeds—better than names—better than even reputation or life. Thus the martyrs spirits of the church have ever loved it.

We cannot admit that all unconverted men are so totally depraved that there is nothing in them to command approval, for we see as a matter of fact that a great difference exists between the best and the worst of the unconverted class. Nor yet that man has no moral ability previous to his conversion, for there can be no responsibility without ability; and we know that all men are

accountable to God. Looking upon innocent, artless children, such as once were folded to the Saviour's loving heart and blessed, we recoil from the belief that they are as guilty and devilish as they have been sometimes painted. There is no doubt that this error results from ignoring or denying the influence of the Holy Ghost, which is given to all for whom Christ died. But they who hold that the spirit is given only to the elect, and that all men are depraved by nature, cannot consistently acknowledge that there is any good in man before regeneration.

It was, we repeat, a rebound from these views of depravity, unmitigated by grace, that gave birth to the doctrine of Infant Regeneration, as recently taught, and the earnest appeals on behalf of the young which have been generally connected with it. It is very much to be regretted that these eloquent appeals and calls to duty, should be based upon a theory unsupported by reason and scripture. Surely it cannot be necessary to receive this doctrine, in order to feel our obligations to train up our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" Nor can it be shown that its reception is at all likely to produce a deeper sense of obligation to perform this duty. We object to this doctrine, because it is unsupported by the Word of God. Can we be expected to receive without question, as incontestable, a theory which its warmest advocates would not dare to say is directly taught in the Bible. The argument, "All who are in the Kingdom of God are regenerate; children are in the Kingdom of God, therefore they are regenerate," assumes the main point at issue, viz: that all who are in the Kingdom of God are regenerate. Holy angels are in the Kingdom of God, though they are not regenerated beings. Indeed neither of the premises in this syllogism are unquestioned. There are other conditions of salvation besides regeneration, which might with equally good logic, though with greater apparent absurdity, be predicated of children. And if in natural birth children were born again, certainly the terms "re-

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GENERATED," and "born *again*," have no appropriate application, in the sense in which they are used in the Scriptures. For if this is true, how can it be truthfully or appropriately said to all, "ye must be born again?" This doctrine is practically very close to Pelagianism, whatever the theoretic difference may be said to be; and far from its reception being a means of awakening a deeper interest in the condition of the young, and producing important practical benefits, it has a directly contrary tendency. For those who receive as true the doctrine that they were born again in infancy, are most certainly in danger of substituting this imaginary regeneration for a real spiritual change. In this respect it is precisely on a level with Baptismal Regeneration. And if those who believe in the necessity of experimental regeneration, through the deceitfulness of sin, or selfishness of heart are frequently deceived, and live without this essential change, how much more likely is this result to take place with those who are fortified in their self-righteous confidence by a false, but congenial theology? Our observations on the general subject of Infant Regeneration, will equally apply to the particular form of it which we have here examined.

## II.

### INTEREST OF CHILDREN IN THE ATONEMENT.

We come now to submit that view of the question, that to us appears to harmonize best with the truths of revelation, and the deductions of unbiased reason. In attempting formally to discuss the character of unconscious and irresponsible beings, it is difficult to find terms to express our meaning. We here enter on a region, where the light grows dim, and firm-footing fails. There are no theological terms to express their condition. The scriptures do not supply such. And it is scarcely possible to use a single term, in defining the moral condition of infants, not open to well founded objection. This difficulty which exists in the nature of the subject,

has not always been felt with sufficient weight, to guard those who have trodden this path before us, from confusion and misapplication of terms.

All children born into the world have a depraved nature. Through this mysterious taint of our moral nature, there is in all a tendency to forget God, to sin against his holiness, and to take pleasure in unrighteousness. We have already intimated, however, that we cannot accept as scriptural, those dark pictures of infant guilt and wickedness, which originated in the Calvinistic effort to vindicate the divine justice, in the imaginary punishment of infants; by making them sufficiently wicked to justify it. For though acknowledging the universal sinfulness of human nature, we must not, as is well observed by Rev. R. Watson, "regard the legal part of the transaction, which affected our first parents and their posterity, separately from the evangelical provision of mercy which was concurrent with it; and which including in like manner, them and their whole race."

Through this "provision," all children are in a gracious state. They have such an interest in the atonement of Christ, as places them in a state of justification and acceptance before God, and gives them a title to a saviour. We use the term "*justification*" in an accommodated sense, as they cannot be justified in the same sense, in which an actual transgressor, who repents and believes is justified. They have no sins to be forgiven. But by virtue of their interest in the covenant of grace, they stand in a relation to God, in which he deals with them, as with those who are justified by faith in Christ. And through this relationship to Christ their Saviour, all who die in infancy are saved, and brought home to heaven, as trophies of the grace of him who is "mighty to save." We have no right to assume, that such are special cases, made subjects of special regeneration, in view of their being called away from earth. The view here stated is amply sustained by an appeal to every source of proof bearing upon the question.

1. It is very clear both from the Old and New Testaments, that children are included in the covenant of grace, and the promise of a salvation through which all nations of the earth should be blessed; and they consequently share in the blessings, of the great salvation of the gospel.

2. The Holy Scriptures, and especially the words of the Saviour, explicitly confirm this assurance. "Even so," saith the Saviour "it is not the will of your Heavenly Father, that one of these little ones should perish." (Matt. xviii. 14). This is direct testimony, that salvation is God's will concerning them. Again, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold, the face of my Father which is in heaven," (Matt. xviii. 10). In this it is at least asserted, that they are special objects of Divine favor and guardian care. When *little* children were brought to him, that he should bless them; he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them; declaring that "of such is the kingdom of heaven;" words that no sophistry can so pervert, as to deny them, to be an acknowledgment to children, of an accepted relation to himself, as members of his spiritual family. Else how could he say, that he that receiveth a child in his name, receiveth himself? The apostle Paul distinctly declares, that "as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation; even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life, (Rom. v. 18). "This free gift is bestowed upon all men, *in order* to justification of life; it follows then that in the case of infants, this gift may be connected with the end for which it is given, as well as in the case of adults; or it would be given in vain, and in fact be in no sense whatever, a gift or benefit, as standing opposed in its results, to condemnation or death."—(Rev. R. Watson).

3. This view of infant childhood lucidly set forth in the word of God, is corroborated by reason; and harmonizes with our deepest

convictions of right. Infant children we know are innocent—are guiltless of actual transgression. They have never by violating the Divine law incurred its penalties; and their present condition is not caused by anything they have done, or may do. Every feeling of our unblessed nature, every idea of justice and righteousness, rises up in rebellion against the thought of a holy and just God, consigning to eternal, misery and death, those helpless and unoffending innocents. We feel that it cannot be. No sophistry of argument, no authority of creeds, can hush the shuddering repugnance, which such a thought wakes up in every rightly constituted mind. The universality and strength of this feeling is unmistakably seen, in the fact, that in spite of creeds and confessions of faith that would logically lead to a denial of the salvation of infants, who die, in infancy, (or at least many of them,) there have been few unwilling to sacrifice the consistency of their theology, rather than attribute such cruelty to God the Merciful and Just. If it be thought by any, that the suffering of infants is inconsistent with so high a moral relationship to God, as we have assigned them; it must be remembered, that all natural evil and suffering is not punishment for sin. This has been often unwarrantably assumed; but there are wise ends for which suffering may exist in the world, without existing as punishment. Those who maintain the dark view of the question we are opposing, endeavour to relieve their feelings, by removing the difficulty one step further back. They cannot think that God would punish innocent beings with suffering; but they declare that He imputes the sin of Adam to them, and accounts them guilty, that they may be suitable objects of punishment! If it would be cruel and unjust to punish them if innocent, it would be equally so, to impute guilt to them in order to expose them to suffering. Psalm li. 5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me," is frequently quoted, to prove that all infant children are in a state of death, without a saving interest in Christ. But it proves no such thing

except by a special interpretation, perverting its simple meaning. assuredly not in his own personal iniquity was he shapen, nor in his own personal sin was he conceived, when as yet he had no conscious being. In spite of all the efforts of minds, warped by prejudice, to save theological systems, at the expense of reason and truth, the character of our Creator, the God of Love, a "God of truth and without iniquity, just and right," is an unfulfilling pledge, that they who never transgressed, shall not be condemned with the transgressor. It is this gracious relation to Christ that entitles them to baptism, the token of their interest in the covenant of Redemption.

It has been already stated, that there is no scriptural support for the opinion that, children dying in infancy, are saved *because* they become subjects of special regeneration. The salvation of children is not a special provision, a sort of after thought in the scheme of Redemption; but a legitimate result of the great design of an atonement. And we would further state as our deliberate conviction, that the use of the term "regeneration," to describe the condition or experience of an unconscious being is unwarranted. It is never so used in the word of God; and undeniably much confusion has arisen, from this misapplication of it by theological writers. The earliest form of this doctrine of infant regeneration, which we find in the history of the Church, is baptismal regeneration. This was taught by some of the fathers of the early Christian Church; and was probably one of the first departures, from the simplicity of the gospel; though there is evidence, that they did not use the term in the strictly theological sense, in which it is now used. Yet doubtless this was the source from which the doctrine of infant regeneration arose. It is one of those errors, which Protestantism inherited from the Church of Rome. It is unsupported by the word of God, and does not harmonize with the deductions of unperverted reason. If proof of this position be demanded, we may consistently reply, that the nature of the case does not admit of

direct proof. If it be affirmed that infant regeneration is taught in the Bible, we deny the truth of this statement, and those who maintain it are bound to prove it. It is well known that those who maintain that "the atonement regenerates" all children, (one form of this doctrine,) have been frequently appealed to for proof of this assumption, but in vain. They are remarkably sparing of any attempt, to adduce either proof or argument in its defence. A writer in the *Methalist Quarterly Review* for Jan. 1859, even tells us, "it is above all logical proof." If any scriptural proof for infant regeneration in any form existed, those writers who so warmly maintain the view set forth by Mr. Morcein, would not be so tardy in presenting it to support their position.

But though we cannot, from the nature of the point at issue, directly disprove this assumed doctrine, yet we may present those considerations that have led us to reject it.

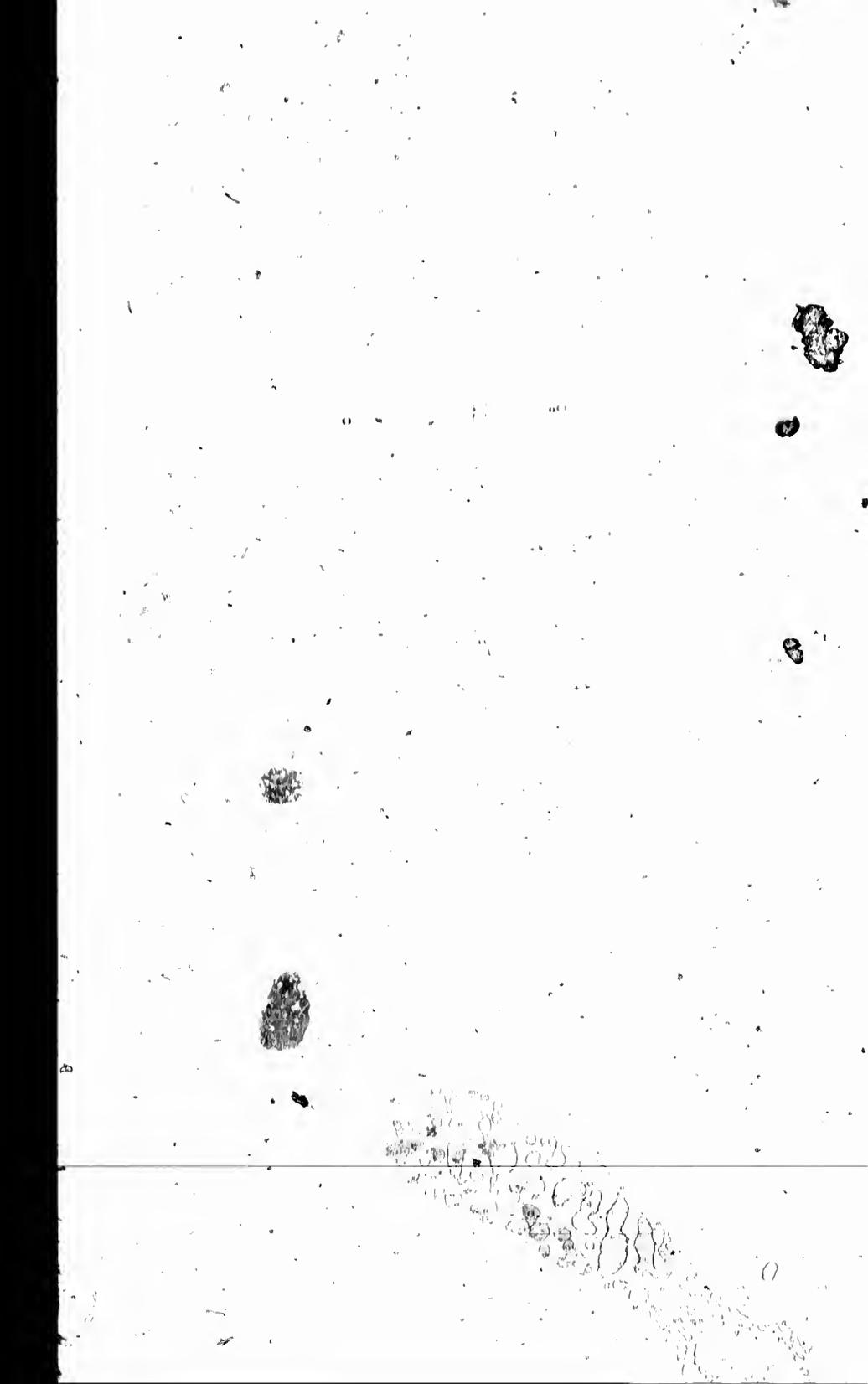
First, we reject it because infant regeneration is not taught in the Word of God. It will be readily conceded by all, that there is no portion of the Holy Scriptures teaches this directly; and if it be sustained at all, it must be as an inference from some passage in which it appears to be implied. In such researches for proof of an assumed position, there is need to guard carefully against wresting the Word of God, to make it say what we wish it to say; but what taken in a simple and obvious sense, it does not express.

Infant regeneration is almost always assumed, to meet a necessity, created by the previous adoption of opinions which require it. Alas! how wretchedly has the Word of God, in all ages, been misused and distorted, by those who came to it with a theory or a prejudice, for which to find proof, instead of coming in faith to drink instruction and receive their doctrines from this blessed fountain of wisdom and light! It is often a matter of astonishment, when we with law from the clangor of human opinions, and sit in independent examination of the Divine word, how little support we find for

doctrines that have agitated the Church for ages, and have been held as sacredly, as if enjoined by Divine command. It is Luther's experience often recurring. In the contention with Tetzel, he examined the Bible, to gain light respecting indulgences; but found that even the Pope was not once spoken of.

The text upon which the whole doctrine of the necessity of Infant Regeneration is based, is John iii. 3., "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." This text and the connexion, most emphatically declare the necessity of regeneration, in order to eternal life in all who are capable of experiencing this great change. But assuredly it cannot be applied to those, who are in their very nature incapable of experiencing what is implied by regeneration; without a gross violation of every allowable rule of Scripture interpretation.

It should be remembered by all who explain these words of the Saviour, in this unwarrantably comprehensive sense, that there are other conditions of salvation laid down in the Bible, expressed in language equally explicit and comprehensive, which no one finds any difficulty in considering inapplicable to children. The same great Teacher declares, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish," (Luke xiii. 5.) "He that believeth not shall be damned," (Mark xvi. 16). "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple," (Luke xiv. 27). "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him" (John iii. 36). Now, would not the same rule of interpretation, lead all who believe in the salvation of infants, to the conclusion that they "repent," "believe on the Son," and "take up the cross and follow Christ," as well as that they are born again? A conclusion so evidently absurd, that few will have the hardihood to accept and maintain it. And if all these declarations can be consistently understood as referring to adults, and not including infants, what objection can there be, to receiving the words of the Saviour to Nicodemus, in the same way? It is



especially unfortunate, for those who are so determinate in maintaining that children are included in this text, that the Lord Jesus was here addressing a man of mature age, whose answer shows that he understood the Saviour as speaking of adults; and yet that there is nothing in the reply of the Saviour, and his further explanation of the subject that would at all favour the application of his words to infants. But rather the contrary, for in this very conversation, in which he more fully expounds his meaning in the opening words, he declares explicitly, that faith in himself is an essential condition of eternal life. "He that believeth not the Son *shall not see life*," is Christ's own exposition of his opening words to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he *cannot see the Kingdom of God*." But not only is there no proof of this doctrine in the Holy Scriptures; but there is very strong counter evidence, in the fact that regeneration, or renewal, is throughout the New Testament, spoken of solely in reference to adults, as *their* privilege and experience, the result of their faith, and the cause of their joy; and never in any instance, spoken of as the privilege or experience of infants. No language that by any fair interpretation could possibly convey such a meaning has been pointed out.

SECONDLY, we object to this doctrine, *because the regeneration of unconscious beings is irrational and impossible*. There is no scriptural definition of Regeneration which can be predicated of infants. Regeneration is defined by most evangelic Protestants as a renovation by the power of the Holy Ghost, consequent upon repentance and faith, involving a change of feelings, of disposition, and affections towards God, whereby the conscience is enlightened, and the will brought into harmony with the will of God. Such a change none but a being possessing self-consciousness and intelligent volition can experience. All shrink from asserting that repentance, faith, and love, form a part of infantile experience; but is not regeneration a change involving

experiences equally impossible? Nor will it suffice to say, that with God all things are possible, and that infants may have an experience which we cannot understand; unless it be shown that God himself has revealed the fact of this apparent impossibility; and that this imaginary infant experience is identical with regeneration.

Many theological terms are applied to infants with unwarranted and confusing laxness; for unless these terms mean something distinctly different from what they mean when applied to adults, they cannot be used with fitness or propriety. It is too commonly forgotten that infants are not moral agents—beings capable of praise or blame, and that it is only in a limited and accommodated sense that a moral character can be ascribed to them. The want of a clear recognition of this marked difference between responsible and irresponsible beings, has wrapped this whole subject in confusion; for only moral agents, possessing power of choice, are capable of experiencing spiritual regeneration.

THIRDLY, *we oppose this doctrine because we believe it to be of human origin, and dangerous in its tendencies.* If it is not taught in the Word of God it must be of human origin. Let it be admitted in any form, and it may become a refuge of lies to keep souls back from the experience of the "grace that sure salvation brings." Whether it be baptismal regeneration, or the special regeneration of those who die in infancy,—the general regeneration of all infants, or the assumption commonly held, that God, in answer to the prayer of parents, regenerates their offspring before they arrive at the age of accountability, we consider all these forms of the doctrine unscriptural and dangerous in their tendency. The reception of any of these theories extracts the spiritual force, and blunts the point of the Saviour's declaration, "Ye must be born again." If it be assumed that children are *sometimes* regenerated in irresponsible infancy, how much good or evil must appear in the life after the age of accountability, in

order to decide whether the child has been renewed or not? This becomes a very delicate question, and if left to be solved by blindly fond parents, or still worse, by a heart naturally inclined to think of itself more highly than it ought to think, may not an imaginary former regeneration be fatally substituted for the renewing of the Holy Ghost? Unconscious regeneration is a dangerous and misleading doctrine in every form. By such a neglect the great salvation it may be said, "if God renews the helpless infant without the performance of the required conditions," and if regeneration is in its nature something that may be experienced without the consent of the will, the exercise of faith, or even a consciousness of the change having taken place, may I not hope that He will have pity on me, when struggling in the agonies of death, in a state of inability and unconsciousness, and rather than allow me to perish, regenerate my heart, without repentance or faith on my part? The doctrine of a regeneration, of which the subject is unconscious, has alas been preached even from many Protestant pulpits, to the undoing of souls! It has strengthened the fetters of self-righteous neglect; and by it thousands have been cradled into the slumbers of spiritual death; dreaming of a regenerated relation to God, while they are yet the slaves of sin, in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. What can be more delusive and soul-destroying than the reception of such a diluted and perverted Christianity? And do we not increase the tendency to this dangerous error, by maintaining the doctrine of infant regeneration, in which it most probably originated?

It may be necessary to answer some queries which may be suggested by the view of the subject here taken. Those who think we have taken too high ground in describing the interest of children in "the redemption that is in Christ," may ask, "if infants are in a position giving them a claim to heaven, why do they require regeneration in after life? If they grow up in the same

\* See J. Caird's Sermons.

state, will not this be unnecessary?" We answer, because regeneration is the conscious union of the soul with God, the commencement of the life of active holiness in the heart, and must in the very nature of things take place after the individual has become conscious of his relation to God and the obligations it involves. Besides infants cannot grow up *in the same state* in which they are during infancy, unless they continue in such mental imbecility as to render them irresponsible. It is simply impossible for a child to grow up to mature age in the same moral condition in which he was during infancy. That condition is special and temporary. For as soon as he becomes accountable to God for his actions, that particular state ceases, and a new relationship to God is formed, that of a moral responsible agent; and his future weal or woe is then committed to his own keeping, and made to depend upon the use he makes of the opportunities and abilities God bestows. In all periods of life, our responsibility is determined by the degree of light, ability and opportunity we possess. In childhood the sense of obligation breaks upon the soul as gently as the dawn of the opening day, till in the light of an expanded intellect, the full weight of responsibility is revealed. The commencement of the life of practical holiness, denoted by regeneration, may take place at any time, after the period of conscious responsibility has begun. That through the Divine blessing, on parental teaching and example, a child may grow up a Christian, cannot be questioned, without assuming that God has made it unavoidably necessary that every child shall spend at least a part of his life in the service of Satan, and be exposed to all the danger such service involves. A position that few will accept. Why may not the first responsible acts of life be good, rather than evil? This does not preclude regeneration. The agency of the Holy Ghost is as fully acknowledged in admitting the possibility of children growing up pious, as in any theory that denies it. That some persons of undoubted piety, who have been religiously educated, could not remember any point of time, in which they were con-

scious of a great spiritual change, only proves the absence of any direct cognizance of such a transition. In the subjects of spiritual influence, there may be a general consciousness of results, without any introspective recognition of their experience, as answering to that implied in any theological expression. To say nothing of children, cases of adults are very common, where, notwithstanding convincing evidence of a real spiritual change, the individual himself has not attempted to classify his experiences; and can only say, "one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And if the sense of responsibility opens gradually, rather than at any fixed point of time, by what authority do we limit the ability of the Omnipotent to adapt his influences to the expanding capacity of intelligent childhood? "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all." If the love of God is shed abroad in the youthful heart, counteracting sinful tendencies, and giving a disposition and ability to trust, love, and obey God, this is regeneration; whether it be so named, or whether it correspond in all circumstances with adult regeneration, or not. It is equally consonant with sound philosophy and experience, that the commencement of the life of holiness should not be so sharply outlined in the case of children as in that of adults. No oppressive burden of guilt for remembered transgression weighs on the youthful conscience, and no power of long prevailing habits has to be broken up. There is often a great difference in minor points in the experience of persons of different mental character and education. But the work is equally genuine, if in both cases the result is to enlighten the conscience and attune the heart to love and serve God sincerely. Nor should it be forgotten that infant baptism loses its significance, if the possibility of training up children in the way of righteousness is denied.

Or it may be asked, "if all children are in a gracious state, why are there no evidences of this in after life?" With regard to sinful dispositions manifested in early life, this is satisfactorily accounted for, by the admitted depravity of their nature. Nor is this ten-

absence of any subjects of spirituality, of results, of experience, as an admission. To say that, where, not a gradual change, but a sudden change; as I was blind, it opens gradually, and authority do we influence to the There are diversities in all." heart, counter-act, and ability to do, whether it be so, in accordance with adult, and sound philosophy, the life of holiness, of children as in, for remembered, and no power of, is often a great, persons of different, is equally genuine, conscience and, Nor should it, since, if the possibility of holiness is denied. gracious state, why, in regard to sinfulness, is not accounted? Nor is this ten-

gency of their nature, inconsistent with what has been stated, of the safety of those dying in infancy, and their gracious relation to Christ; for their nature is not their fault, and consequently not a just ground of condemnation. In the case of persons savingly regenerated by the Divine Spirit, and possessing a satisfying assurance of their acceptance with God, *their* nature is not so changed and destroyed, that all tendency to sin is completely removed. For this would imply that there was no further need of the sanctifying Spirit, to subdue unholy tendencies, and to enable us to resist temptation. Yet this liability to sin is consistent with a saving interest in Christ. Nor should it be forgotten, that the moral condition at any one time is no sure evidence of what the moral condition of the same being may have been at some other time. Satan was once in heaven. And if those who have been converted "fall from their own steadfastness," they too need "to repent and do their first works," and be *re*-converted in order to possess the Divine favor. But it is not true that there are no signs of gracious influence visible in the young, as they emerge from infancy to intelligent childhood; else how could the Saviour say, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Now, conversion which includes regeneration is here urged upon us in order that we may become like little children. As that resemblance cannot be physical or intellectual it must be in moral qualities. The period of youth is by all acknowledged as a time in which consecration to God is more easy than in after life. The conversion of a young person does not excite so much surprise, nor does the new life commenced contrast so strongly with the former life as in the case of an adult. In young children "it is a transition from a lower to a higher state of grace. If children are so perfectly graceless as some appear to think; why is the honesty, sincerity and humility of childhood proverbial? Would he not be accounted a rare Christian, who, with a matured intellect, possessed the guileless sincerity, innocency of evil, harmlessness, humility, and trusting faith, of a

little child? No untainted purity of nature is advocated; yet we think that those who can see nothing in young children but the image of the devil, and the surging of hellish passions, must see them through a different medium from Ilm who pressed them lovingly to His holy breast, and said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

That the condition of infants has points of similarity to the state of regenerated adults is freely admitted; but that they are identical states cannot be maintained. Any theory of the moral condition of infants that does not recognize that condition as a peculiar state, not to be described by the ordinary terms by which adult experience is designated, cannot be true to fact. By admitting this distinction all is harmonious. We avoid the danger of substituting an imaginary for a real experience; and by acknowledging the gracious interest of all children in Christ, we are brought under the influence of powerful motives to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In the question of how the Omnipotent may refine and expand the undeveloped intellects of those who die in infancy, to qualify them for enjoyments of which they are now incapable, we enter a region of conjecture and speculation. Where God has not spoken, it becomes us to be silent. We only know that Infinite Goodness, Holiness, and Justice, are pledged to their safety. "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

### III

#### THE RELATION OF BAPTIZED CHILDREN TO THE CHURCH.

It has been already remarked, that our views of the relation of baptized children to the church, will be modified by our opinions of the nature and design of baptism. In order to rightly appreciate the import of this sacrament, it must be contemplated in a two-fold aspect; both in relation to the church, and to the subjects of baptism. With regard to the Church, it is on her part an initiation of the subject of baptism into covenant relation to God

—a sign and seal on God's part of the spiritual blessings He has promised to them that obey him; a special mark of separation from the unbelieving world, and of belonging to Christ. On the part of the individual baptized, it is an acknowledgment of the need of regeneration, a sign of faith in Christ, the visible seal of a covenant to renounce sin and be the Lord's. That baptized children are members of the visible church of Christ must be conceded by all who admit the initiatory character of Christian baptism; and this is most clearly implied in the commission given by our Lord to his disciples, (Matt. xxviii. 19.) "Go ye therefore teach all nations, baptizing them in (into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The only objection demanding attention is that which denies the right of infant children to this ordinance. This right, however, is most clearly sustained, nor need we here enter at length upon this controverted question.

1. The right of children to this ordinance appears most conclusively from their gracious relation to Christ, to which we have referred in the preceding pages. And if, (as has been shown,) they are sharers in the blessings of redemption, inheritors of the promises, partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light, "can any man forbid water that they should not be baptized," in the name of the Lord Jesus? If they already belong to Christ, why should they be denied the token of their relation to Him? As Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised; so baptism is the recognition on the part of the Church of the gracious interest which infants already have in Christ.

2. There is no objection urged against infant baptism but has equal force against infant circumcision. Circumcision occupied the same position in the Church before Christ, that baptism does in the Church posterior to Christ. It was the initiatory seal of the covenant which God made with Abraham, (which clearly in-

eluded the blessings of salvation through Christ;) and the public means of introducing the Israelites into covenant relation to God. Now the Apostle Paul declares, that this covenant, of which circumcision was the seal, contained the promise of spiritual blessings, and included, not merely the Israelites, but all who should in the future belong to Christ. (See Rom. iv., 13, 14, and Gal. iii., 7, 8, 9.) This is argued at length in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, and this is the conclusion, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This covenant included infant children with their parents; and if God himself has not excluded them, they must still be embraced in it, for it is a perpetual covenant. - And from this perpetuity of the covenant, the unity of the Church under both dispensations is evident. This St. Paul distinctly declares in Rom. xi., 16, 17. "In this passage it is clear that the Church is considered as an olive tree, of which Abraham is the root, and the Jewish members the natural branches; that some of these branches were broken off; that the Gentile members were originally the branches of a wild olive, which, being cut as scions, were grafted in among the remaining natural branches; that is the existing Jewish members; and that the Gentiles thus became joint partakers with them, of the root and fatness of the olive tree. In no manner of which we can conceive, could St. Paul have more decisively declared the unity of the church, under these two dispensations." (Dr. Dwight.) That the Gentiles were made one with the Jews, by being received into the same Church with them, also appears from Eph. ii. 14, "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." If, then, the covenant is one, and the Church is one, under both dispensations; and if by the appointment of God, infants were entitled to membership under the dispensation of the law, by what authority is this privilege curtailed and denied under the Gospel dispensation? For if any change might be looked for, an enlargement of privi-

lege and an elevation of position, would more naturally be expected.

3. More direct evidence of their claim to membership is not wanting in the Holy Scriptures. St. Paul, (1 Cor. vii. 14.) speaking of the case in which one of the parents only was a believer, says, "Else were your children unclean, (*ακαθαρτος*) but now are they holy, (*Αγιος*.) Now this statement refers to relationship; and fairly interpreted, implies that the children, (even when only one parent was a believer) were not to be treated as heathen or unclean, but have a right to induction into covenant relation to God. Whether the phrase, "*of such is the Kingdom of God*," be understood to relate to an earthly or a heavenly Kingdom, it cannot be so explained as to deny the right of children to membership in his church; though it most probably means the Kingdom of God on earth. Again when the Saviour says—Luke ix. 48, "Whosoever receiveth this child *in my name*, receiveth me," does he not evidently mean the same thing, as in Mark ix. 41,—"*Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water in my name, because ye belong to Christ*, verily I say unto you he shall not lose his reward. Here the words, "*because ye belong to Christ*," are evidently explanatory of the preceding words, "*in my name*." But in what sense could children belong to Christ, that would be consistent with denying them the token of a covenant relationship to Him, as members of his church? From all this it is unquestionable, that they who have been baptized into his name, do sustain this relationship to Him. Some are very jealous of admitting that infants belong to the *visible* church, while in other words they substantially acknowledge it.

But it is still important to enquire in what sense baptized children are members of the Church of Christ. In the discussion of this subject from the ambiguous use of the term *Church*, much confusion has arisen. There are several senses in which it is used.

As,

1. All who belong to Christ, in a spiritual sense, throughout the

world. This is sometimes called the invisible church; because God only knows who belong to "the general assembly of the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven."

2. The whole assembly of professing believers in Christ, and of those who have been baptized into His name, sometimes called the visible church.

3. Sometimes it is used to mean an association of congregations, united under one form of faith and government. Or,

4. A congregation of Christians in any locality, united in the same faith, discipline, and forms of worship.

All children in infancy are members of the Church, in the first of the preceding senses, *i. e.*, they are members of Christ's family, embraced in the covenant of Redemption. This we think has been fully demonstrated in the preceding pages.

By Baptism they are introduced into the visible Church, in the sense of the term, expressed in the second of the preceding definitions. Their being members in the former sense of the term, is the ground of their claim to become members in the latter sense. They cannot, however, be said to be members of any branch of the Church, as the Methodist Church, or the Presbyterian Church, in the sense in which adult believers are members of these churches. These churches are composed of the local churches, united in a common faith and discipline. Consequently the claim of any person to belong to any church designated, will depend upon his relation to some local branch of that church. For an individual cannot be said to be a member of the Methodist, Presbyterian, or any other church, unless he has been received as a member of some local branch of such church. And baptism is not the mode of reception into church fellowship with such congregations of believers; but rather baptism into the general church is a pre-requisite to admission into any local church. This is confirmed by the fact that even in the case of adults baptized in any

church, their baptism alone does not constitute them members of the church in which they are baptised. The practice of all evangelical churches in receiving members from other churches, without re-baptizing them, proves that this view of the subject is generally received in the churches. If any object to making a distinction between the sense in which children and adults are members of the Church, we reply—we make not this distinction. It exists in the very nature of their different conditions.

And any exposition of this subject, that does not recognize the difference, will prove contradictory to admitted truth, and inconsistent with itself. Should it be asked, what constitutes any person a member of any particular church? we answer his voluntary agreement to unite in its fellowship, and to conform to its discipline. And as no complete plan of church organization is laid down in the New Testament, it is evident that any general branch of the church of Christ, has a right to determine the particular rules and observances to be observed by those who unite in its fellowship; provided always that such rules harmonize with the teachings, the examples, and the spirit of the New Testament. As far as the Holy Scriptures afford direction in matters of discipline and usage, we should follow them closely; and in arrangement of matters in which we have no direct instruction, we should carefully conform to the spirit of their teaching. To deny this right to the Church on the ground that we have no right to erect any condition of membership, but that directly taught in the Word of God, and to speak of baptism as the only way of reception, is really to forget, that every duty enjoined by the Church is a condition of membership. A duty may be directly inferred from the teaching of Divine truth, and yet not expressly laid down as a condition of membership. Duties are frequently enjoined in general terms in the Scriptures, and the particular manner of performance is often necessarily arranged by the Church. St. Paul exhorts the Hebrews to not forsake the assembling of themselves

together, and this duty is obligatory upon all, though no special form of worship is anywhere prescribed. And the objection sometimes urged against class-meeting in the Methodist Church, on the ground that it is not expressly enjoined in the word of God, may with equal force be urged against every form of worship; for there is not in any church a form of public worship that can claim to be expressly enjoined in the Scriptures, though attendance on public worship has the force of a condition of membership in all. But would members of the different churches be justifiable in absenting themselves from the public services of their respective churches on this ground? Certainly not. No body of Christians can unite together in worship and fellowship without some conditions, restrictions, and duties arising from this relationship. And even in those churches that professedly take baptism as the only form of uniting with the church, and who in theory make no appreciable distinction between the sense in which children and adults are members, practically confess a distinction by requiring an agreement to observe rules enjoined, as soon as they are capable of such observance. In the Romish and English Episcopal churches there is the ceremony of Confirmation, and the Communion of the Eucharist, by which those who were baptized in infancy become actual members in these communions. Hence we see that no mere acknowledgment, on the part of any church of a different relationship sustained by infants, can really constitute such relationship. To forget this is to deceive ourselves by substituting a name for the reality. They are incapable of performing the conditions of responsible membership; and are therefore, during infancy, unconditional members of the general visible Church of God.

In a sense analagous to this was the Ethiopian eunuch a member of the Church. He was by baptism initiated into the visible church, yet he was not a member of any local church, nor was this the ground of his claim to membership. But chil-

dren, in addition to this, are placed under the special watch care of the church in which they are baptized. The Church claims them for Christ, and the parents promise to bring them up for Christ. They are placed beneath the sheltering wings of the Church as candidates for that higher membership, that consists in the personal assumption of the duties and responsibilities enjoined upon all believing followers of Christ.

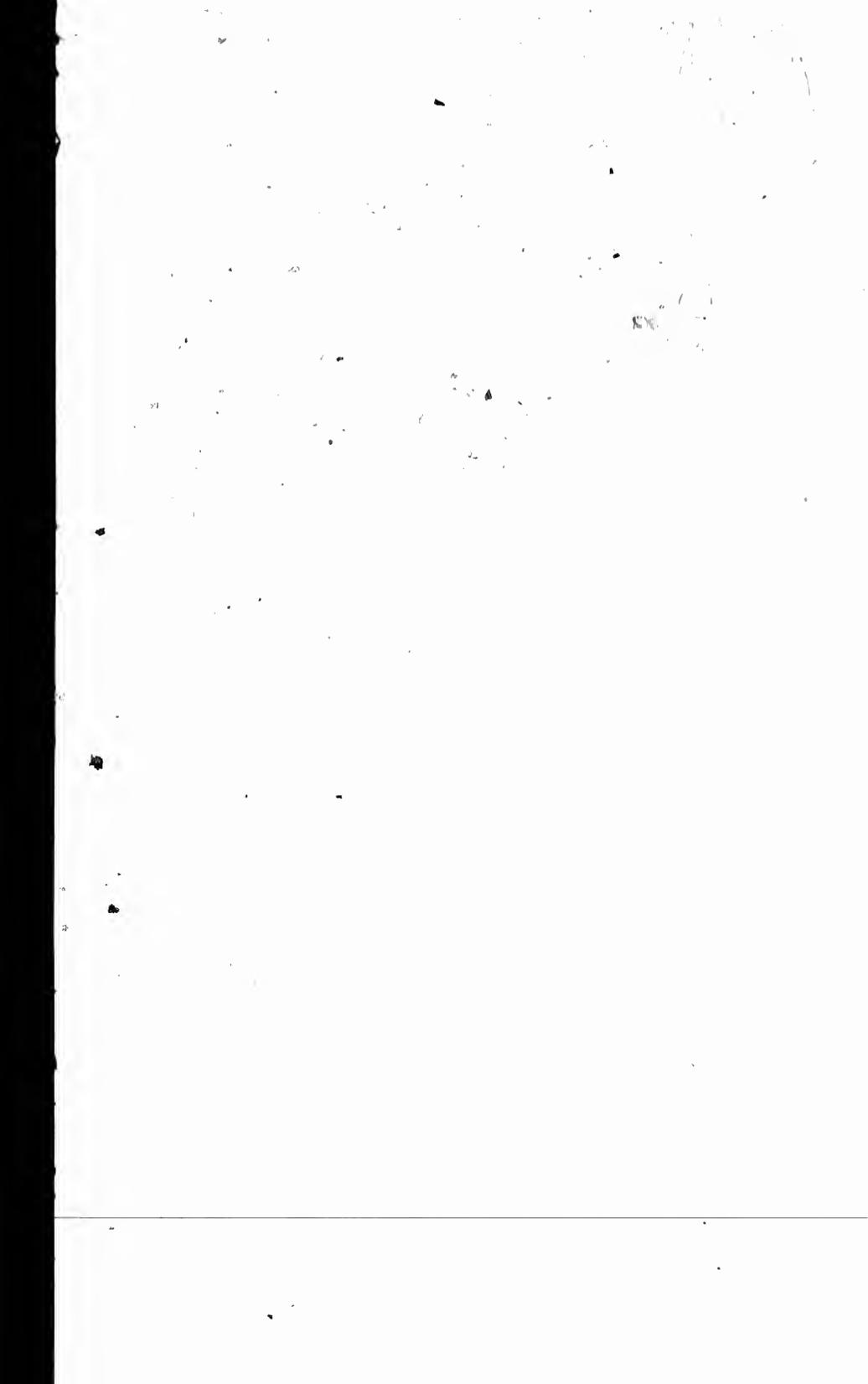
## IV.

THE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE CHURCH TO HER  
BAPTIZED CHILDREN.

Let us now consider the practical aspects of this great question. The duty and obligations of the Church to the young, and the best means of securing their spiritual welfare is a question of the highest magnitude and interest.

It is impossible to look at this great trust and reflect upon the responsibilities it involves, and the consequences at issue, without being overwhelmed with a sense of its importance; and also pained and oppressed by the unquestionable evidences of neglect and comparative indifference that appear on the part of those to whom this great work is committed.

The sad consequences of past unfaithfulness and neglect are written in the unavailing regrets of wounded parental hearts—in the cramped and enfeebled Christianity which the Church has too frequently presented—and in the blood of thousands of lost souls, gone down to perdition, who shall confront us in judgment with the charge of apathy and inconsistency. We think they err who charge the blood of all those lost in christianized communities upon the apathy of the Church. Many are lost, in spite of the most earnest and affectionate efforts for their salvation. Their blood is upon their own heads. We cannot assent to the unmitigated charges of cruel neglect and spiritual disfranchisement of the young that have been of late so frequently thundered against the



Church. Nor do we believe in the glowing pictures of a restored humanity, to result at once from an acknowledgment of infant claims and a higher regard to their spiritual interests. Many of these speculations are highly imaginative and impractical, and generally ignore the sinful tendencies of a depraved nature. But notwithstanding these concessions, we feel assured that no one can calmly and attentively examine the whole question without arriving at the painful conviction, that almost incalculable numbers have been lost to the Church and to heaven, whom a more careful education, a deeper concern for their salvation, or more faithful and persevering effort on the part of the church might have saved. Thousands more are still exposed to the same dangers. It is a fearful spectacle to look out upon the millions of young hearts, happy and innocent, hurrying on to the vortex of busy life, now under the overshadowing influences of the church, who may yet, through neglect of their claims, share the same sad fate, and go down to tenant the habitations of despair. What language shall we use, or what arguments shall we bring, in discussing this theme, to awaken an attention commensurate with its importance? O for a trumpet voice that would strike its wailing notes of warning to the depths of every Christian heart, and rouse the Church of God to put forth all her energies in the great work of snatching from the power of sin and winning to Christ this vast rising army of young immortals while yet there is hope, before "the evil days come," when through the deceitfulness of sin the things that belong to their peace shall be hid from their eyes! It is one of the most encouraging signs of the times that already an awakened zeal in reference to this subject is making itself felt in the Church; but with a more comprehensive appreciation of the work to be done in this department, and a willingness to do it faithfully, what blessed results might consistently be expected!

Portions of this work and responsibility are committed to different sections of the Church. Christian parents, ministers, private members, and the Church in her services, ordinances, and

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means of instruction, have each important parts of this work assigned them.

1. To begin with *parental duty*. There is here evidences of sad neglect. During the tender years of infancy, when the young spirit is opening to receive the moulding influence of early education, the spiritual interests of the child are nearly solely committed to the parent.

God has assigned them this position and relation of protectors and instructors to their children, and the duties which arise from this heaven-appointed relationship cannot be left unperformed without guilt to the parent and danger to the child. No mere generalizing about what the church, in her corporate capacity, should do, will meet the case, if the sentinels stationed at this point by the great Master himself prove false to their solemn trust. Every Christian parent must awake to a true conception of his responsible position as the guardian of eternal interests. The Church cannot do the work of parents, and during the early years of childhood must work chiefly through parental agency. *Every Christian family should be a miniature Church*, in which the parents should regard themselves as holding an important trust for the faithful performance of the duties of which they are directly accountable to God. It is truly deplorable that in many professedly Christian families, during early education, the moral and religious well-being of children is largely lost sight of; and while physical wants are carefully supplied, and temporal interests anxiously considered, the spiritual exigencies of immortal natures are too frequently forgotten. Since in so many instances parents fail to form a true estimate of the vastness of the work assigned them, it becomes an important subject of enquiry to learn from what causes do this neglect and indifference arise. It cannot, like most other evils, be always directly traced to a want of piety. There are many instances where the piety of the parents is decided, and yet the children are not wisely nor faithfully trained up in the

nurture and admonition of the Lord. Very often this arises from some wrong opinion, which, though received without much thought, may have silently exerted a highly injurious influence on their practical conduct in regard to their children.

(1.) There is a very common opinion, whether it be expressed in words or not, that because of the depravity of human nature, there is a sort of moral necessity that children should grow up in sin and take their course in the wrong way, until by some good providence they are arrested in their career and converted to God.

Though this is the common history of the Children of the Church, it is by no means necessary that it should be so. Christian parent, God has provided better things than these for your offspring. Your children may, while yet retaining the dew of their youth, receive the renewing grace of God, and consecrate themselves to his service. How many encouraging examples of early piety does the past history of the Church supply? Why should parents act in this matter as if ignorant of this privilege, or sceptical of its attainability? While we recognize the sinful tendencies of a tainted nature, we should not forget the gracious provisions of the Gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Though the seeds of depravity are in the young heart, their condition is not without a remedy. There is a great difference in the degree in which a child is depraved, and that in which an adult, steeped in habits of wickedness, in whom the seeds of depravity have brought forth the fruits of death, is depraved. There is also a great difference in the difficulties to be overcome, in order to holiness, in the one case compared with the other. Evil habits commonly acquire a fearful ascendancy over men, and even after their conversion, like the Egyptian taskmasters, they follow hard after them. A garden may be easily saved from the overgrowth of noxious weeds, if they are rooted out when they first appear; but if allowed to go unchecked till they choke and overgrow the tender plants of promise, the evil becomes almost irremediable. So

is it with the garden of the heart ; early attention may prevent unavailing regrets.

(2.) Another common but pernicious mistake is, that the little trifles of early childhood have no important influence upon the character. Nothing can be more false than this, Observation invariably shows that early habits take deep root, and very materially affect the character in after life. Parental love may find many excuses for indulging the whims of a beloved child, while habits are being formed that may one day cause them tears of regret. Few things are more painful to one who knows the importance of early training, than to see a parent try many things to satisfy a child in a fit of causeless ill temper, while the child, flattered by the attention it receives, only becomes more ungovernably petulant. The limited influence and capacity of a child may make these things appear insignificant. But they are not trifling to the child. They are the great events of its young life, moulding the character and determining largely the future history. Things that to parents may seem harmless or even interesting in a child of three or four years, will often be intolerable in the same child at ten or twelve. And those who do not begin early to train the tendrils of the soul and prevent wrong habits, generally have occasion in after life to complain of the difficulty of governing their children. Many begin too late. The same amount of attention often bestowed in vain, if given at the proper time, would produce very different results. There is no time to be lost without danger.

(3.) Closely allied to this last error is the equally common and dangerous one, that it is of little use to give children religious instruction until they are old enough to comprehend it thoroughly and judge for themselves. This course is highly pernicious, for "If good we plant not, vice will fill the place, and rankest weeds the richest soil deface" On the contrary, they should be fed with the "milk of the word," as their young minds open to receive it.

The simplest truths of the Divine Word should at first be taught, and the doctrines and principles of the Christian system gradually unfolded to their view, always with such practical application as may lead them to feel that they are under obligation to God, and accountable for their actions. The matter of their personal religious interests should not be left to an occasional chance word, but should be earnestly and tenderly pressed upon their attention, in such a way as to convince them that these things were regarded by parents as important realities. Those who are early instructed in the Holy Scriptures are likely to present a healthier and broader piety in after-life, and are less likely to yield when exposed to temptation, because they have the admonitions of an enlightened conscience. They see the reasons of duty, and feel the weight of its obligations. Remember, Christian parents, that during the early years of childhood every other instrumentality is but auxiliary to yours. Constantly direct your prayers to the Father of mercies for light and strength in this work of love and duty. Begin early—bend their wills in infancy. And as soon as they are capable, teach them the knowledge of God; and prayerfully instruct them in the duties they owe to Him, to themselves, and to their fellow-beings. Remind them of their consecration to Christ in baptism, and of the obligations it involves. Carefully and firmly shelter them from all corrupting influences, whether of books or of companions. And remember that mere restraint is not sufficient, that the expanding mind must be fed, and the faculties engaged and developed in pursuits uniting interest with mental profit. Lead them to the Sabbath-School, and by your presence and efforts there prove that you sincerely believe in the importance of religious instruction. Watch over them as candidates for heaven; and as soon as their felt obligations of duty, and need of pastoral oversight warrant it, introduce them into the Church to which you belong, that they may commemorate the dying love of Christ, and by publicly enlisting in the army of the living God,

increase their obligations to fight faithfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil. If you would be instrumental in saving your children, you must walk before them in consistent holiness yourselves. Speak to them by the silent eloquence of a holy life. The want of this has caused many to go astray. No external influence is more powerful with the young than example. No instructions will have power for good, unless consistency of life evinces the sincerity of the instructor. Inconsistency weakens and destroys moral influence. When in a Christian family some weighty interest is decided with reference to its worldly bearings, apparently without a thought of the religious interests involved, is there not a practical denial of the supreme importance of eternal things that must exert an evil influence on youthful minds, and deprive the best admonitions of their weight and power? Such conduct on the part of parents fosters doubts of their sincerity in the minds of their children. Do not merely pray for and desire the salvation of your children, but LIVE FOR IT, and God will give you the desire of your heart. Often when parents sleep in death, does the remembrance of their sincere piety lead a wanderer back to God. Christian nurture is a means of grace of Divine appointment on which we have a right to expect God's blessing, to make it the means of leading them to a saving knowledge of Christ.

2. On the part of the Church there is an acknowledged delinquency. That children should be baptized by our ministers, and then neglected through all their future lives, without any recognition of their claims to the pastoral care of the Church, is surely something that ought not so to be. And yet this is undeniably, almost universally the case. Not that the Church is wholly neglectful of the young within the range of her influence; they are objects of her efforts in common with others; but there is no acknowledgment in practice that those who have been baptized at her altars have special claims to sympathy and care. Our own branch of the Church, in common with others, has not yet suffi-

ciently felt her obligations to her children. The efforts in this department of the work have been by no means proportioned to the vastness of the issues at stake. Though—during the earlier years of life—children are chiefly under parental guardianship, yet, as they emerge from this tender age to intelligent childhood, it becomes the imperative duty of the Church to extend her guardian wings over those whom she has already baptized into the name of Christ. There should be a constant and practical recognition of their claims to this regard. Every baptized child should be early taught that his parents have dedicated him to Christ, and that the Church claims him for Christ, and that during childhood he is a candidate for her communion and privileges. A regular form of reception to Church-fellowship should be added to our liturgy. The want of this has been long felt. This formal reception would then stand out before the young as a privilege that they would share as soon as they became of suitable age, if nothing in their own character prevented it. And this consciousness of being on trial for membership, together with the disgrace attaching to those who rendered themselves unworthy of admission to the Church, would naturally tend to produce greater seriousness and circumspection of conduct among the young who had been instructed in their duty and position. By such an arrangement both the Church and her children would be led to see more clearly their respective obligations. In our form of baptism for infants, the unreasonable promises of god-fathers and god-mothers in the English Church service are properly omitted; but some Scriptural form of covenant, on the part of the parent, to bring up the child in the faith of the Gospel, and to impart suitable instruction, is highly desirable, and would supply an existing deficiency. It must be confessed that Methodism is less complete and methodical in her provisions for the young than in almost any other respect. Though correct in theory, practically, there is serious defectiveness.

No man could have a deeper sense of the importance of the religious education of the young than Mr. Wesley. His excellent Practical Instructions to Preachers on this subject amply demonstrate this. And yet there is no impartial student of early Methodist history but will be forced to acknowledge, that the tenacity with which that great and good man, clung to the Established Church, was a direct cause of this defect in our provisions for the care of the children of the Church. It may be admitted that Mr. Wesley's attachment to the Church of England was in some respects beneficial, but most unquestionably there were respects in which it was not beneficial to early Methodism. Methodism in England was for many years fettered, and its influence weakened, by denying to its early ministers the right to administer the sacraments. This of course left the baptism of the children of the early Methodist Society still in the hands of the clergy of the Establishment, and whatever obligations the performance of that rite created, devolved on the clergy and Established Church, and not on the preachers of Methodism. This denied to the early Methodist Church the right and responsibility of consecrating her children in baptism, and claiming them as candidates for her communion. No instructions, as to the duty of the preachers to watch over the young, could make them feel the obligations they would have felt had they sustained a different relation to them. They were preachers, not pastors. And afterward, when this evil was remedied, it was not so easy to make a practical change. All this arose from Mr. Wesley's unwillingness to adopt such a Church organization as would imply perfect independence of the Established Church,—although Methodism was practically an independent Church for many years before his death. Whether our existing arrangements be regarded as defective or not, one thing is clear, that better provision must be made for the religious education of the young, if we would save them. This may be done either by elevating our Sabbath Schools to a higher and

more efficient position, as a means of direct spiritual instruction, or by organizing some other arrangement for supplying this great want of our time. The Sabbath-School under an improved condition might become vastly more efficient in the spiritual nurture of the young, especially if the ministers and senior members of the Church would make its claims a regular part of their stated work. But if this be thought insufficient, then let all our baptized children be arranged in Catechumen Classes, according to their ages, as probationers for membership in the Church, expected to meet in Class, and assume the responsibilities of actual members, as soon as their age and character will warrant their reception. And let such members as are best experienced in the things of God, be appointed as instructors, and the whole kept under the faithful watch and care of the Church. Through the Ministry, also, more frequent and direct instruction should be given in relation to this point. Parents should be frequently reminded of their duty and obligations. And the public services of the Church should be occasionally, or if possible statedly, adapted to the capacities of the young. Why should the whole public service of the minister be given to adults, while hundreds of youthful hearers are becoming stunted in spiritual growth for want of suitable instruction? Here is an ample field to cultivate that will richly repay the labourer's toil. Here, then, are many important respects in which we may improve. By greater simplicity and adaptation to the young in her teaching—by a clearer exposition of parental duty—by placing the obligations of parents, in baptizing their children, in a clearer and stronger light—by more spiritual instruction in the Sabbath-School—by a direct recognition of the claims of baptized children to the pastoral oversight of the Church—by a better organized system of religious instruction—and by a formal and solemn reception of approved candidates for membership, the Church may greatly extend her influence, and save thousands from being lost to her communion, who otherwise would swell the numbers in the way of

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death. 'We have merely space to suggest these desirable improvements, without dwelling on the particular arrangements by which they are to be effected.' Every member of the Church of Christ; whose heart has been warmed by heavenly love; should feel that he has a duty to perform to all the young, who come within the range of his influence. And on all opportune occasions every lover of the Saviour should be ready to caution, instruct, and encourage every child to whom he has access; remembering the words of the blessed Redeemer, that he that receiveth a little child in His name receiveth himself. Christian reader, remember every little child belongs to the Saviour, and that no act of kindly interest in his welfare, performed by you, shall lose its reward. O, if the whole Church was thus converted into one earnest band of loving watchers, how different would the result be to what we witness under the present system of cold indifference to the young! No wonder that children get low ideas about the importance of salvation, when old professors so seldom manifest any tender interest about their souls. Our obligations to labour faithfully for the spiritual welfare of the children of the Church are urged upon us by the most weighty considerations.

1. *Childhood is a great and gracious provision for the salvation of the young.* A season of blessed opportunity, which, if neglected, can never be recalled. It has been well remarked, by the late Mr. Mercein, that "It would be strange if God did not arrange the circumstances under which an immortal being commenced existence, chiefly with reference to its spiritual interests." Conclusive evidence of this is not wanting. Who can contemplate the days of childish innocence without interest! Thoughts of our own childhood bring regretful memories

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\*Since this was written we have read Dr. Tyng's "Forty Years' Experience in Sabbath-Schools," from which it appears that he has realized what others have only dreamed of. We heartily commend this book to Ministers and Sabbath-School Teachers, as in many respects the best book ever written on this profoundly important subject.

of its innocency and happiness, forever fled. And who can look upon the bright, happy countenances of yet untainted children, without emotions of anxiety about the future interests and destiny of those young immortals budding into life? Is it not painfully sad and suggestive that this sunny spring of life should be so often overcast by clouds of suffering and guilt? How frequently does this happen, and how little do Christians lay it to heart! And yet there is no want of evidence that God intended this season of opportunity as one in which the young spirit might commence its heaven-ward pilgrimage. "God made childhood for eternity." Childhood presents itself to us like an unblotted page, on which the holiest lessons may be inscribed; or which may, alas! become blotted and polluted by error, folly, and wickedness. Here are united almost all the conditions we could desire to success. A guileless honesty and simplicity that make the workings of the young heart stand transparently unveiled to our scrutiny,—a docile spirit, thirsting for truth and knowledge like a gentle flower-bud yearning for the light,—a lowly humility that, without deception, confesses its ignorance and a trustful faith in the teachings of instructors. Such is childhood, turning its young eye upon us for help, love, and guardianship; asking us to improve the season of golden opportunity; making its appeal to our hearts with silent eloquence, which the torpor of insensibility alone prevents being irresistible. Here is a brief interval of time in which we are permitted to act,—a crisis of eternal interest in the history of every individual, which if allowed to pass away without improvement shall never return. It is a precious gift of God, for which we must account at last.

2. Another consideration which impressively urges us to improve the special opportunities which childhood presents, is, *the changes that will soon take place* if the seeds of truth are not deposited in season in the young heart—if the grace of God controverts not the tendencies of nature, the heart where trusting faith now

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rests may soon be tenanted by doubt, mistrust, and unbelief. The unbiased candor which now renders decision comparatively easy will be succeeded by a perverted judgment, and a blinded heart. The humble and willing reception of the truth, which now invites instruction, shall be followed by pride and vain self-confidence. And the spirit that now feels comparatively little bias, may soon be the slave of passions that will darken, deprave, and fetter the soul. Only the experience of the grace of God in the heart can prevent these sad changes wreathing their baleful shadows around every youthful brow. How anxious then should we be to improve faithfully the precious season God has mercifully given! In the case of those converted in advanced life, how often has a life spent in the service of sin, left its impress so deep upon the habits and views, that they make only sickly and dwarfed Christians. Is not the feebleness of the church greatly owing to this? We want a generation of Christians, trained from infancy under the influence of sublime Bible truth, that will not be unwilling to take up the cross and deny themselves, and perform with all their hearts the full measure of duty and work which God has assigned to every Christian. But this desirable result can only be obtained by the earnest co-operation of the whole church.

3. We are also impelled to action *by the dangers to which the young are exposed*, from which nothing but early piety can save them. They are in danger from the deceitfulness of unsanctified hearts—from the fiery darts of the wicked one—from the ungodly spirit of the world who forget God and live for earth alone—from the allurements and attractions of pleasurable follies, and from the seductions of intemperance, impurity and vice in all its soul destroying forms. Surely "Dangers stand thick through all the ground" to ensnare and destroy the unwary. What a host of monsters are ready to rush upon the young as soon as they leave the sheltered bowers of childhood and go forth into the busy world! *Pride*, to inflame the soul with its consuming fires! *Avarice*, to chain down to

earth and freeze every generous impulse of sympathy and benevolence; *pleasure*, that smiles blandly to lure the unwary, while the poison of moral death lurks beneath that hollow promise of happiness, and doubting *unbelief*, that soothes the pangs of a stifled conscience with a rejection of the voice of infinite love, only to lure on its infatuated victims to a deeper alienation and a blacker despair. All these lurk along the path of life to effect the work of destruction; and should not the knowledge of foes so dreadful, and dangers so alarming nerve us to unwearied activity in arming the young with the whole armor of God, that they may be prepared to fight and win on the great battle-field on which they are entering? Christian parent, your children are launching upon life's ocean voyage. How shall they go? Shall it be provided with necessary supplies, a true compass and a trustworthy chronometer? Or shall it be without compass or helm to be swept before the winds and waves of temptation till wrecked on some fatal reef; the sad result of your indifference to their spiritual interests in the spring time of life? Immortal interests are committed to your keeping, endeavor to perform the work assigned you with prayerful anxiety, looking from the things that are seen and temporal to those that are unseen and eternal.

4. And is not the church of God urged to more consistent earnestness in her efforts to save the young *by the losses she has sustained by past neglect*. What a sad catalogue of crime and sorrow has resulted from the neglect of early spiritual culture! disobedience to parents—forgetfulness of God—loss of character and power of usefulness—death without hope and the eternal loss of the soul, have been witnessed under circumstances that gave ground to conclude that if all who in the name of Christ had faithfully done their duty, it might not so have been with many now forever undone.

The law of progress in our own church has been conquest rather than growth. How much ministerial time and toilsome effort has been expended, (often with little success) in endeavoring to bring

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back from the service of sin those who once were keenly susceptible of religious influence, and whom, we have reason to believe, might have been saved by wise and timely effort from the degrading bondage into which they have sunk! We have no desire to see the aggressive energy of our beloved church decline; but rather pray, "that it may abound more and more;" yet we cannot resist the conviction, that there is a possibility of presenting a more symmetrical union of spiritual growth from within, with external conquest and aggression than we have hitherto done.

In conclusion, let us never forget that God hath clearly committed to us, in solemn trust, this duty of the instruction and guardianship of the young; and he who judgeth righteously shall call us to an account of our stewardship when he comes to render unto every man according to his works. And if, through pride, or selfishness, or conformity to the world we are false to our trust, we may in that day be classed with those who shall hear with dismay the voice of the Judge saying, **INASMUCH AS YE DID IT NOT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN, YE DID IT NOT TO ME."**









