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The children of the church,
and sealing ordinances

H. Henry Green

Nov 28th 1858.

THE

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CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH,

AND

SEALING ORDINANCES.



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THE AUTHOR.

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THE
CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH
AND SEALING ORDINANCES.

THERE are two classes who have no difficulty in determining the precise ecclesiastical *status* of the children of the Church. The Baptists cut the matter short by denying them any place whatever in the Church, until they obtain it by a personal profession of faith. They recognize no difference between the children of believers and others, except so far as their condition is likely to insure superior Christian instruction and training at the hands of pious parents. In all

other respects they are on the visible footing of unbelievers and their children. They belong to "those that are without" the precincts of the Church and the communion of saints. They are to be treated and dealt with accordingly. Like all worldlings, heathens, and pagans, until they experience a conscious, inward regenerating change, of which they give a credible account, and make a credible profession, they are to account themselves, and to be accounted and proceeded with, as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God in the world." All this at once flows from, and culminates in, the denial of baptism to infants, the seal of the covenant of grace and badge of membership in the Church.

If this extreme, espoused by a small section of Christendom, provides an easy disposal of all questions relative to the children of the Church, by placing them without its pale, the opposite extreme is no less summary and decisive in relieving those who adopt it, of all embarrassment in this regard. The whole ritual school, including Romanists and romanizing Protestants, not only hold that infants are to be baptized, but that they are regenerated by baptism. It matters not whether they say it regenerates by its own inherent mystical efficacy, or whether the Holy Spirit does the regenerating work coinstantaneously with its administration. On either hypothesis, the result is the same. The rite of baptism brings with it regeneration as an *opus operatum*. But whoever is regenerate and

baptized, is a member of the Church visible and invisible, to all intents and purposes. He is to be accounted and dealt with as such. He is fully bound to every duty, and entitled to every privilege in the house of God, of which his age and circumstances will admit.

Between these extremes, which, because they are extremes, thus meet in cutting the knot which they do not untie, ranges the vast body of Protestant and evangelical Christians, who practise infant baptism and count it a divine institution. Among these, all grades of opinion between the two extremes above noted may be found. Many have no determinate opinion on the subject, unless a vague impression that the baptism of infants is a lawful, beautiful and edifying rite, or that it is a token of Christian in-

struction being provided for the child, be reckoned such. Many who hold thus much, and hold it strenuously, are wholly at a loss as to the precise *status* of baptized children, the manner and extent in which baptism either signifies, seals, or procures any advantage which they would not possess without it. Under the influence of this theory, which underlies the Baptist system, a large proportion of the members of some Pedobaptist communions neglect or refuse the baptism of their children altogether.* Having lost the sense or faith of the things signified by the ordinance, either they will not take the trouble to go through with what they deem a useless ceremony, or they

* Recent statistics, published in our religious journals, have shown a wide and deplorable omission in this respect.

utterly ignore and repudiate it as worse than useless. Baptist proselytism must needs thrive on such aliment. This state of things is, in the long run, inevitable, where the doctrinal inculcations, or practical administration of Churches either imply the unimportance of infant baptism, or fail to show how far and wherein it is important. Such a system must, by its very incongruity, end in making those who are real, avowed Baptists, or produce a recoil which will lead men to look about for more solid and stable foundations. Occasionally one in the violence of his rebound from this insane rationalistic view, strikes upon ritualism or some vague mysticism not easily distinguished from it. Transcendental theology making Christ chiefly the embodiment and vehicle of a theanthropic life for the race, which

life is deposited in the Church, and communicated by it through the sacraments, often offers the buoyant medium of such a transit to mystic ritualism, and gilds it with a philosophic as well as churchly glare. But the vastly greater number, in fleeing from lifeless rationalism, do not thus overfly the gospel into equally lifeless formalism. Believing that there is most precious truth signified, and blessing sealed, by infant baptism, and that it is of God, they would not surrender it for worlds. Yet they cannot define its nature and effects fully to their own satisfaction, although they possess some dim and struggling conceptions of them. But when they attempt to articulate these conceptions in express statement or definition, they find it difficult to avoid representations which either emasculate it

down to rationalism, or ossify it into ritualism. We have met many evangelical clergymen in precisely this state of mind, full believers in the divine institution of infant baptism, yet craving more light as to its precise import and efficacy, and urging us to examine and discuss the subject. We have met with few who have reached a mode of apprehending the matter altogether satisfactory to themselves.

The catholic doctrine on this subject, as shown in the creeds of christendom, is, that the children of believers are members of the Church, and are to receive baptism as the badge of such membership, and seal of the duties and privileges pertaining to it. But great diversities of opinion and practice prevail in reference to the kind of membership in-

volved, and the doctrinal and practical consequences which thence result. There are some firm Pedobaptists, however, who adopt the principle, that the children of believers, as such, are not members of the visible Church, or in covenant with God, until they become so by their own personal and professed faith and repentance. They are on the footing of other children in this respect. They hold, that infant baptism imports merely the dedication of the child to God by the parent. It is thus a seal of the membership and covenant interest of the parents, but not of the child.* Our observation has convinced us that this is the highest conception of it

* This view is elaborately defended in "Inquiry into the end and design of Baptism," by the Rev. Cyprian Strong, one of the leading ministers of Connecticut, in the last century.

entertained by great numbers. Whether they have taken pains to examine the subject enough to form any distinct speculative principles, or even conceptions, in regard to it or not, all their procedures, with respect to baptized children, (their own or others,) prove that they discern in the rite nothing more than a solemn token of parental desire that the child may be the Lord's. This theory of the position of the children of God's people too is, for substance, that of the Baptists. The only difference respects the administration of the rite itself, not the actual *status* of the children who receive it. It results in a substantial adoption of Baptist views and practice, with regard to the children of the Church. Although it finds little countenance in the symbols, or standard theology, or even the prac-

tice of evangelical christendom, as a whole, yet it controls the practice of large masses of evangelical Christians in our country. Hence, it is necessary to signalize it. Herein we are persuaded our Christianity suffers loss. Many are beginning to feel and deplore this deficiency, who yet hardly know what to substitute for it, without swinging to the contrary extreme. Peculiar circumstances, to which we may yet advert, have contributed to this state of things in large sections of the American Church. But, whatever be its cause, it calls for a discussion of the subject, in the light of first principles.

Passing from this barren theory, the catholic doctrine, that the children of Christians are Church members, which alone furnishes a solid basis for the rite of

infant baptism, has been adopted by various parties in a *non-natural* sense. These diverse conceptions are shown in the different views taken of their claims to the special instructions and oversight of the Church, during the period of their growth and nurture, the conditions of their admission to the Lord's Supper, and their relation to the discipline of the Church, when come to the age of discretion; and, especially, as inclusive of all else, of the attitude in which they presumptively stand, whether as among or outside of God's people, and if among them, of the way and conditions whereby that connection is supposed to terminate.

Many hold that they are members only *quasi*, or in such a sense that the Church owes them no duties nor privileges, above the unbaptized. They are not

under its inspection, government, or care, in any proper sense, till they profess to have experienced that conscious change, which opens the door of full Church privilege alike to the baptized and unbaptized. Although they are born, in a sort, members, and as such have the seal of baptism, yet this is a token and pledge of nothing but of that Christian instruction and training, which all pious parents are bound to impart. We are sure it is no exaggeration, when we say, that in a considerable portion of our evangelical Churches, there is no recognition, no consciousness of any relation being held by baptized children, prior to conscious and professed conversion, other than that of *outsiders* to the Church, in common with the whole world lying in wickedness—at least that portion of the world which, hav-

ing the light of the gospel, heeds it not. Hence, as they grow up, until by conscious conversion they come out of the world, in which this theory puts them, all trace and recognition of their Church relation disappear. Whenever they see their way clear to profess their faith, and come to the Lord's table, it is regarded as joining the Church, just as if they had never belonged to it. No difference is put between them and the unbaptized, in the apprehensions, the procedures, the whole practical life of the Church; except that the latter, in joining its fellowship, receive the initiatory rite, which they have never received before. One great evil of this inadequate system is, that while it makes infant baptism a seal of Christian teaching and training to be given to the child, it always, in some

degree, and often wholly, prevents such instruction and nurture, or frustrates their efficacy. The doctrine in question, withal, is contradicted by every representation which the Bible gives of the nature and significance of baptism; and by all the scriptural covenants, promises, and averments of every kind, on which pedobaptism is based. For these covenants and promises are, that God will be their God, and that his word shall not depart out of their mouth. These children are pronounced "children of the covenant," "holy." This does not ensure that they all are or will be inwardly holy. But it does imply a connection with the people of God, such as subsists between the church visible and invisible, and that such of them as fail to make God their God, are false to their position as children of the covenant. The mere

outward Jew, who had no circumcision of the heart, was false to his own position. For his outward circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith. Rom. ii. 28, 29; iv. 11. So baptism is a sign and seal of the grace of life; and the baptized unbeliever violates the requirements of his baptism, as the unbelieving professor violates the requirements of his profession.

Another theory, adopted to reconcile the actual church-membership of baptized children, with the negation of the special obligations and privileges pertaining thereto, is that held by Dr. Dwight and some other New England divines. It is in substance this, that they are members of the Church universal, but not of any particular organized Church. This results from the cardinal principle of Congregationalism, that there is no organic Church state

except in particular congregations, and that the formal cause of it in them, is the voluntary confederation of the members. Infants being incapable of such voluntary covenanting, of course, cannot be members of any organized Church. Hence they cannot, more than other children, be under Church inspection and discipline. Many, however, who adopted substantially this view, held that by virtue of their membership in the Church universal, they have at mature age a right to certain Church privileges, (such as the baptism of their children,) from which the unbaptized, otherwise like them, must be debarred. The scriptural principle plainly is, that all Christians, as members of the body of Christ, and of one another, are bound to have a care of, and to be subject one to another in the Lord; that

to this end, they should be so organized that all may discharge their obligations of love and fidelity to each, and each may be subject to all: that, irrespective of any formal stipulation, the members of the Church universal should also be members of the particular congregation of believers in which they stately worship, so as to be subject to the government, and entitled to the privileges of the Church as therein respectively administered and enjoyed; and hence, that for all purposes of this kind, baptized children are members of the same particular Churches as their parents. This last principle was expressly adopted by the great Congregational Synod of Boston in 1662.

For a long period a large proportion of the New England Churches, with the

sanction and recommendation of this Synod, maintained and acted upon the principle that persons baptized in infancy, and free from scandal, on making a profession of faith and good intentions, which still was taken to be short of a profession of saving faith and repentance, were to have the privilege of baptism for their children. This was styled, in the phrase of the day, the *Half-way Covenant*. Others, of whom Mr. Stoddard, of Northampton, maternal grandfather of Edwards, was the most distinguished champion and representative, held that such a partial confession or covenant, (one too which men regarding themselves as unconverted and graceless, but yet sincere, might properly make,) entitled to the Lord's Supper. It was a part of their theory that this Sacrament is a con-

verting as well as a sanctifying ordinance. This is the scheme which Edwards assailed and demolished in his celebrated treatise on the "Qualifications for Communion." It was not an unnatural excrescence from the half-way covenant system introduced by the Synod, although in direct contradiction of one of its propositions. For the effect of recognizing it as proper for those to "give themselves and their children to God"* in express

* The propositions of the Synod were as follows :—
 "1. They that, according to Scripture, are members of the visible Church, are the subjects of baptism. 2. The members of the visible Church according to Scripture, are confederate believers, in particular Churches, and their infant seed, *i. e.* children in minority, whose next parents, one or both, are in covenant. 3. The infant seed of confederate visible believers are members of the same Church with their parents, and when grown up are personally under the watch, discipline and government of

public covenant, who were confessedly unfit for the Lord's Supper, was to make the great mass feel sufficiently secure and hopeful, while shrinking from the higher responsibilities and engagements implied in receiving this sacrament. The consequence was, that in most Churches under this regimen, there were few members in full communion. The impulse was therefore strong to devise a theory

that Church. 4. These adult persons are not therefore to be admitted to full communion, (the Lord's Supper,) because they are and continue members, without such further qualifications as the word of God requireth thereunto. 5. Church-members who were admitted in minority, understanding the doctrine of faith, and publicly professing their assent thereto, not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the covenant before the Church, wherein they give up themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the government of Christ in the Church, their children are to be baptized."

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to meet this state of things, and enlarge the number of communicants.* The theory and practice of these Churches seem to have veered between the propositions of the Synod and the doctrine of Stoddard, until the whole half-way covenant system, which had been gradually dying out, became extinct in the early

* Stoddard's doctrine is thus stated by himself : " That which I am to prove is, that some unsanctified men have a right before God to the Lord's Supper." *Appeal to the Learned*, p. 20, as quoted by Edwards, *Works*, New York edition, vol. 4. p. 486. On the same page, he quotes Plake, another prominent champion of this school, as saying : " That faith which is the condition of the promise, is not the condition *in foro Dei* of a title to the seal." The meaning of this is clear. Faith is not necessary to the proper participation of the Lord's Supper. Hence those may properly be admitted to it, who in their own judgment and the charitable judgment of the Church, are destitute of piety.

part of this century; having received its mortal blow in the treatise of Edwards, to which we have adverted.

The grand error of the system initiated by the Synod does not fully appear on the face of the propositions propounded by its authority. Certainly, baptized parents, duly enlightened, who could conscientiously make the professions and covenants required in the fifth proposition, ought to be adjudged, *in foro ecclesiae*, entitled to baptism for their children. The error lay in the application of it, which was both intended and adopted. It was avowedly designed for the use of persons confessedly unfit for the Lord's Supper, and consciously destitute of Christian piety. But it is in reality, if intelligently made, as the proposition supposes, a profession of religion. This

practice was called "owning the covenant," *i. e.*, taking in person, for themselves, the covenants made for them by their parents in infancy. In the Church records, it was often stated, that those who did it, "recognized their baptismal obligations"—a close approach to the practice of confirmation.

The practical consequences of this admission to one or both sacraments, of the ungodly, when accounted and accounting themselves such, was that the great bulk of the people, on becoming parents, "owned the covenant," in order to have their children baptized. This they did mostly without making any pretensions to piety. Where the Stoddardean theory prevailed, many of them also went to the Lord's table with no pretence of any higher qualification, unless this step

might be understood to imply some earnestness in seeking conversion. This *quasi* profession, and membership, with the privilege of baptism for their children, satisfied the consciences of most, while it was more grateful to their wicked hearts, than the obligations of complete church-standing. Thus vital, experimental piety constantly decayed; a dead formalism supervened. A decent morality, and respectful regard for Christianity, were in many cases the great results expected and achieved among the mass of the congregation. Such persons were seldom competent or disposed to give their children a faithful Christian training. Ecclesiastical discipline was paralyzed. This standard of morality was itself vague, fluctuating, elastic to every demand of expediency. The system

tended to a ceaseless degeneracy. It was hard to say what shortcomings in parents should debar their children from the boon of baptism. At length the "owning of the covenant" became a mere form, which the heedless, and sometimes the profane, did not scruple to go through; thus making solemn vows which they profanely violated, in order to obtain holy rites which they openly desecrated. This system contained the seeds of its own dissolution. It must either end in the extinction of religion, or be uprooted by its revival. The latter was the fortunate issue.

And yet, as every error is but truth exaggerated, belittled, distorted, or in some way torn from its proper relations, supplements, or expletives, so that truth is apt to be lost or disparaged in the pro-

cess of recovery from such error Extremes often meet; and they often beget their opposites. The present case is no exception. The abolition of the abuses of the doctrine of infant Church-membership has been accomplished in a manner and in circumstances which have led to the forgetting, ignoring, or disowning of that precious truth itself, and the loss of not a little of the sanctifying influence and fruits of holiness that cluster upon it. The consciousness and recognition of the Church-membership of baptized children have widely disappeared from the doctrinal and practical life of those Churches—a fact deplored by some, and denied by none of authority among them. The strongest form in which it has been held, to any extent, within any recent period, is that already indicated as the

doctrine of Dr. Dwight, viz., that baptized children belong to the Church universal, but not to any particular Church. This weakens or destroys its practical power. The result is, that baptized children are, to all practical intents, viewed and led to view themselves as not of the Church, but of the world, until they enter the fold of Christ as other converts from the world do.

We have dwelt the longer on the historical development of doctrine on this subject in the Congregational body, because it has had an influence in shaping the principles and practice of evangelical Christians throughout our land. For as the body of Christ is one, and all its members are actuated by one life, despite all divisions and conflicts, these members will interpenetrate each other with a re-

ciprocal energy. Each will be felt by all, and all by each. As between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, this has been peculiarly the fact, because, until a very recent period, they were regarded as substantially one communion, whose chief difference was geographical.*

* In illustration and proof of this remark, we quote from a tract, in defence of Pedobaptism, published in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1829, and found in Dr. Sprague's Collection of pamphlets in the Princeton Theological Library. The author says, in a preliminary note, "*To avoid circumlocution, and to comply with the popular usage in New England, I intend, by the term Presbyterians to designate both Presbyterians and Congregationalists. These denominations are, in fact, both one, the difference between them being not in articles of belief, but in a few customs, and every attack which is made upon one being identified with that upon the other. The oneness is constituted also by the complete understanding and correspondence which exist between them.*" So recently did New England, and even New Haven

This was all the more so, in reference to the present subject, because the first controversy that agitated and finally sundered the infant Presbyterian body of this country, had a marked reference to this very point; and because the great awakening of that era, with the mighty truths and errors which it called into life and activity, alike contributed to shape the faith and practice of Presbyterians and Congregationalists on the subject. One question, between the parties in the Presbyterian Church, was, What evidence of faith and holiness ought the

Congregationalists feel at one with Presbyterians, and call themselves by their name. It is otherwise now. The causes and consequences of the original unity, and the present comparative weakening of the bonds between the two bodies, deserve profound study, but are aside of our present inquiry.

Church to require of candidates for admission to the Lord's Supper? or, rather, What ought it to account and treat as credible evidence of piety, which, if presented by any, duly qualified otherwise, should give them access to sealing ordinances, or the sacred office, as the case may be? It was, indeed, often stated and argued, in the heat of controversy, as if it were something else:—by the Old Side, as if their antagonists contended that none but the regenerate, and those who could certainly be known, and know themselves as such, had a right to the Sacraments, not only *in foro conscientiæ et Dei*, but also *in foro ecclesiæ*; and by the New Side, as if their adversaries held that the unregenerate and ungodly, as such, were entitled to the Lord's Supper. Doubtless, in the violence and con-

fusion of debate, disputants, on the respective sides, often said what gave colour to the representations of their adversaries. But after a careful survey of the retractions and qualifications made on both sides, we are persuaded that the Old Side were opposing that method of examination, which proceeds on the theory, that the Church can judge the heart, and find certain evidence as to who are, and who are not regenerate, while they would, by no means, say that the Lord's table was designed for the ungodly and unbelieving; and that the New Side opposed the idea, that unbelievers were qualified for the holy communion, and insisted that real believers could and should furnish some credible evidence of a saving work in their souls. Doubtless, too, in a low state of Christian life, there had previ-

ously been a tendency to attenuate the requisites to a credible profession, and to dwell too little on the necessity of a spiritual and experimental work in the soul, which the Old Side were too slow to recognize and correct. The reaction from this swung to the contrary extreme of laying too great stress upon the narration of inward experiences, and viewing this as the great criterion.*

* The seventh specification, in the charges brought by the Old Side against the New, at the meeting of the Synod in 1741, when the disruption was effected, was "Their, or some of them, preaching and maintaining, that all true converts are as certain of their gracious state, as a person can be of what he knows by his outward senses, and are able to give a narrative of the time and manner of their conversion, or else they conclude them to be in a natural or graceless state; and that a gracious person can judge of another's gracious state otherwise than by his profession and life." This charge

This relation of experiences was so marked a feature in the great revival of 1740, that some have gone the length

the New Side repelled as a calumnious caricature. Nevertheless, that some plausible pretext had been given for it, in the course of the awakening, appears from the abundant testimonies of Edwards, to the injurious effect of this principle, and the practice founded on it, upon the revival itself. Gilbert Tennent, likewise, and other prominent leaders in the work, felt afterwards called upon to utter earnest protestations and warnings against it. Tracy ("Great Awakening," p. 74) has, we think, exaggerated, when he says, "The fundamental question between the parties (Old and New Side Presbyterians) was, whether regeneration is a change, attended and followed by an experience, by which the convert and others can judge of its reality; and, of course, whether those who have no such experience are to be counted as unregenerate, and, therefore, excluded from the communion of the Church, and deemed unfit for ministers." This statement of the issue accords with the author's theory of the revival.

of making this principle the secret of its origin and power.* It was carried to

* "This doctrine of the new-birth as an ascertainable change, was not generally prevalent in any communion when the revival commenced ; it was urged as of fundamental importance by the leading promoters of the revival ; it took strong hold of those whom the revival affected ; it naturally led to such questions as the revival brought up and caused to be discussed ; its perversions naturally grew into, or associated with, such errors as the revival promoted. * * * It must be possible for those who are qualified, to judge whether a man has made those discoveries of religious truth, and felt those emotions, which are essential to religious experience. *

"The history of the 'Great Awakening' (of 1740) is the history of this idea, making its way through some communities where it had fallen into comparative neglect, and through others where it was nearly or quite unknown ; overturning theories, and habits, and forms of organization inconsistent with it, * * * and leading to habits of thought and practical arrangements in harmony with it."—*The Great Awakening*, by Joseph Tracy. Boston, 1845 : pp. 9, 12, 13.

such a pitch of extravagance, that the great Edwards was constrained to publish repeated and solemn protests against its abuses. And yet his protestations prove that, if not he, many of his coadjutors were providentially in an attitude which led them for a time to magnify the importance, not of manifestations and avowals of such views as are Christian, and flow from regeneration; but also of such accounts or other indications of its upspring and progress in the soul, as *imply the consciousness of a radical change within some definite and definable period*; that these thus became, and have since continued to be, in the popular mind, to a great extent, the test of piety; while the value, if not the possibility, of true Christian feeling, inwrought by the Holy Ghost, and developed gradually by

Christian nurture, so as sometimes to preclude distinct statements of any time before which it was not, or of the manner and order of its progress in the soul, was then, and, with too many has been since, unduly ignored, and altogether underrated. This was the natural consequence of their revulsion from the great abuses of the principle in question, which they were called to reform.* Yet, although

* Mr. Tracy ("Great Awakening," p. 14) only reflects a fashion which originated in times he describes, when he bestows the epithet *Arminianism* upon "the idea of a gradual, imperceptible, and unascertainable regeneration." It is of no consequence whether this idea be it right or wrong, belongs to Arminianism or not. Everything depends on the meaning, or rather, the intended application of these terms. If by "unascertainable," be meant that the renewed soul will not let its light shine, and that we are not to know it by its fruits of holiness in profession and life, then such a scheme is

such was the drift, tendency, and effect of the teachings and procedures which

false, whether Arminian or not. But if it be meant to imply, that we can search or know the hearts, or be sure who are regenerate, this is the prerogative of God. *De occultis Ecclesia non judicat.* It judges only of a credible profession ; and it can erect no standard of credible profession, which will keep out all tares, without also excluding the wheat. If by "gradual" be meant, that regeneration itself is not instantaneous, that there is not a moment before which the subject of it is not, after which he is, a child of God ; this also is to be utterly repudiated. But if it be meant that the development of it in consciousness, may be so gradual as to be, in its successive stages, even "imperceptible," then Mr. Tracy himself concedes it. He says, page 11, "In some, the process occupies several years ; in others, it is so rapid that some of the steps are seen only in their results ; in others still, it is repeatedly interrupted and resumed. Varieties are caused by the varieties of intellectual character and style of thought," &c. Among the most holy and orthodox men, whom we have ever known, are those who assured us that they remembered not the time when they did

shaped this awakening, in the issue none ever insisted more strenuously than

not fear God, or when they experienced any marked conscious revolution in their feelings toward him. In one sense, this regeneration, in such cases, is neither gradual, imperceptible, nor unascertainable. In another, and that probably the sense intended, to some extent at least, by Mr. Tracy and others, it is the subject of all these attributes. To limit the Holy One of Israel, who worketh when, where, and how he will, to that mode of renewing the soul, which involves a marked and known era of conscious change, is far enough from Calvinism and from Scripture, whatever may be its relations to Arminianism. Surely, God sanctifies some from the womb. He makes others, from a child, know the holy Scriptures in a saving sense. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he ordains praise. Edwards, whom Mr. Tracy classes on his side, and whose circumstances doubtless led him to emphasise the class of truths weighing on this side of the scale, rather than another class which balance, modify, and interpret them, says, "The Scripture gives us ground to think that some infants have the habit of saving grace, and that they have a new nature given them." —*Reply to Williams*, vol. 4, p. 578.

Edwards and Tennent, that the only proper evidence of a work of the Spirit, is the fruits of the Spirit in all holy dispositions and conduct; and that when these are apparent, or credibly professed, there is credible proof of regeneration, whether the history of any experience can be recited or not; and that all the raptures which can be portrayed by the tongues of men or angels are worthless without them. This truth they vindicated and reiterated, with an emphasis and solemnity worthy of its importance, especially in their later treatises, after the mischiefs of the opposite error had been fully developed. Still, it is apparent that this great revival, while it resulted in a great and blessed increase of true piety; while it uplifted the cause of spiritual and experimental religion, not

only from depression, but even from a certain undue disparagement, in the mind of the Church ; while it removed the fungous misgrowths which sloth and unbelief had educes from the church-membership of baptized children ; also, in many quarters, unsettled the faith of the Church in that pregnant truth, and its logical and practical relations. The fruit has appeared in the distinguishing features of our American Christianity for better and for worse ; in a remarkable vigour of aggressive evangelism upon those that are without, and in too often putting without the fold the lambs of the flock, so far, alas ! that immense numbers of them are lost, past recovery, upon the dark mountains of sin ! The latter we ought to correct ; the former we should hold fast, and let none take our crown. These things ought

we to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Hence, too, our theology has tasked, and often exhausted itself on topics subjective, relative to regeneration and conversion, while it has been more meagre in reference to the objective, divine, and heavenly truths, which are the aliment of faith and love. The number is legion, who vaunt it as the super-eminent glory of American theology, that it has made the discovery of the sinner's full ability to turn to God. Thus they flatter themselves that the way has been made clear, as it never has been elsewhere, for alienated children, and all other aliens from Christ's house, to enter it. After all, he who comes to Christ, must be born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John i. 12. And herein he

will be true to his own covenants. It is in Zion that the children of the Church are born to newness of life. Since He has promised to be their God, it is in training them as if they were his; as if it were alone congruous with their position to walk as his children in faith, love, hope, and all holy obedience, that we are to look for that inworking Spirit, and outworking holiness, commensurate with their years, which shall seal them as sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. This is what we believe to be the blessed significance and intent of infant baptism. This is what we have at heart in writing these pages; instead of having our children with the seal of God's covenant on their foreheads practically cast out, before they cast themselves out, to be classed, and thence class themselves,

in form and feeling, with the ungodly and profane—a course from which, we believe they, and the cause of religion with them, suffer irreparable loss.

Our own faith on this subject is expressed with great precision in the standards of our Church, which themselves exhibit the truth in the premises intact and inviolate, however any of her members may have come short of the duty and privilege thus held forth. And whatever our shortcomings, we believe the tone of opinion and practice among us, is above the average standard among Christian bodies most nearly allied to us. We rejoice that they are beginning to give attention to the subject, and hope that all will contribute to meet a common want. The half-way covenants and mere external covenants, with their af-

filiated theories and practice, which infested the New England Churches, and prepared the way for extreme reaction, never obtained a foothold in our communion. They doubtless originated in the effort to keep the body of communicants, who constituted the independent ruling power, pure, and at the same time to keep their children and children's children within the precincts of the Church. It is indeed true, that the practice of baptizing the children of non-communicants has in time past been more or less prevalent in our Churches, and in the Reformed Churches of Europe. This, however, has not been done on the basis of any pseudo-covenant or profession which they have made in the capacity of unbelievers giving themselves or their children to God; not on any basis, which, admit-

ting children to baptism, excludes those who offer them from the Lord's table; but either on the ground that their parents being by baptism in the Church and free from scandal, presumptively in the judgment of a discreet charity have faith, in its principle and initial actings, such as would justify baptism for their children, and for themselves if they were unbaptized, though not sufficiently developed as yet to enable them to come with due preparation or confidence to the Lord's Supper; or that some pious person or persons adopt them *quoad hoc*, and undertake to secure their pious nurture.* The practice, however, of baptizing any

*The early defenders of the New England Synod's propositions, also based the grant of baptism to non-communicants, (or their children,) on this distinction between initial and developed faith.

but the natural and adopted children of communicants, and such as are reared and trained in their families, is, so far as we know, now obsolete among us. However the practice may have been strained at particular times and places, the prevailing principle has doubtless been, that he who is entitled to the one sacrament for himself or his offspring, is entitled to the other, till he displays some clear disqualification for it in heresy or scandal,—*Eadem est ratio utriusque sacramenti*, each being a seal of the same covenant of grace.* Those who, giving evidence of piety to others, distrust themselves, who dare not withhold the seal of

* This substantially, so far as we have been able to discover, has been the common mode of defending this practice among those evangelical Protestants, who have sanctioned it. Of course, on this, as on all other subjects, exceptional cases may be found.

the covenant from their children, and yet dare not come to the Lord's table, lest they eat and drink damnation to themselves, are in most communions occasionally allowed the former privilege, even before they feel warranted to accept the latter; not because different qualifications in *kind* are requisite for the two sacraments, but because the Lord's Supper requires not mere faith, but faith developing and proving itself in self-examination and discerning of the Lord's body. 1 Cor. xi. 28, 29.

The doctrine of our own Church on this whole subject is shown in the following extracts from the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and the Directory for Worship :

1. "The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole

number of the elect, that have been or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

2. "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel, (not confined to one nation as before under the law,) consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." *Confession of Faith*, chap. 25.

3. "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible

difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world, and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ according to his word." *Confession*, chap. 27.

4. "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life; which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his Church to the end of the world.

5. "Not only those that do actually profess faith in, and obedience unto Christ; but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.

6. "Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed to it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

7. "The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's will, in his appointed time." *Confession of Faith*, chap. 28.

8. "The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appoint-

ment, his death is showed forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace." *Shorter Catechism*, Quest. 96.

9. "They that receive the Lord's Supper, are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants, of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance, love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong, of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience, and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation and fervent prayer.

10. "One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and, in God's account, hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desirous to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity; in which case, (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians,) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labour to have his doubts resolved; and so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened." *Larger Catechism*, Quest. 171-2.

11. "Children born within the pale of the visible Church, and dedicated to God

in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the Church; and are to be taught to read, and repeat the Catechism, the apostles' creed and the Lord's prayer. They are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And, when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed, it is their duty and privilege to come to the Lord's Supper.

12. "The years of discretion in young Christians cannot be precisely fixed. This must be left to the prudence of the eldership. The officers of the Church are the judges of the qualifications of those to be admitted to sealing ordinances; and of the time when it is proper to admit young Christians to them.

13. "Those who are to be admitted to sealing ordinances, shall be examined as to their knowledge and piety.

14. "The ignorant and the scandalous are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper;" and the minister is directed publicly to "warn the profane, the ignorant, and scandalous, and those that secretly indulge themselves in any known sin, not to approach the holy table. On the other hand, he shall invite to this holy table, such as, sensible of their lost and helpless state by sin, depend upon the atonement of Christ for pardon and acceptance with God; such as, being instructed in the gospel doctrine, have a competent knowledge to discern the Lord's body, and such as desire to renounce their sins, and are determined to lead a holy and godly life." *Directory*, chaps. 8, 9.

To preclude misconstruction in any quarter, we observe, at the outset, that these articles deny all intrinsic efficacy to the sacraments, as such. They avail nothing to those who do not exercise faith in the things of which they are the signs and seals. They are profitable to such, only in so far as their faith is quickened and strengthened by beholding the sensible emblems which make the "word visible;" and the seals whereby God ratifies to us his exceeding great and precious promises. They no way contravene, they strenuously uphold, that great Protestant principle, that we get no more from any sacrament than we take by faith.* Further, they teach

* Cæterum, ex hoc sacramento, quemadmodum ex aliis omnibus, nihil assequimur nisi quantum fide accipiamus.
CALVIN, *de Baptismo*.

that the grace thus signed and sealed by the sacraments is not tied to them, either as to the persons on whom, or the time when, it is bestowed; that there may be true believers who receive the grace without its sacramental seals, while many unbelievers receive the outward rite without the thing signified; baptized with water, but not with the Holy Ghost; eating and drinking the bread and wine, and at the same time eating and drinking condemnation to themselves. And further still, with regard to baptism, even in cases where the gift sealed is bestowed, it may be before or after the administration of the rite. All which is plainly taught in the word of God.

Keeping this in view, it is next to be observed, that our standards assert that

the children of believers are members of the visible Church—not *quasi*, but absolutely. This does not imply that they are therefore to perform functions or enjoy privileges in the Church, proper only to riper years and intelligent piety. But it does imply that they are entitled to every privilege of receiving Christian recognition, inspection, government, instruction and guidance, and bound to every office of obedience and love to Christ and his people, which are appropriate to their age and circumstances, as members of the Church. Children are none the less members of civil society, entitled to its care and protection, and bound to serve it loyally, according to their circumstances, although not as yet qualified to vote, or eligible to office. Less than this the language of our Directory cannot import,

with regard to the *status* of baptized children in the visible Church.

What then is the visible Church, and what the ground of membership in it? We accept the answer which our Confession gives to these questions. But what does this fairly imply? Surely, that the true Church of God is made up of those whom he hath purchased with his own blood; and that those who apparently, or to the eye of a judicious charity, are of this number, are visibly, or for all purposes of human judgment and action, of this Church—*i. e.* are the Church visible. Now in what way do they thus become visibly, or for all purposes of human recognition and treatment, of the number of Christ's redeemed people, the household of faith? In two ways: 1. In the case of all capable of it, by a credible "profession of

the true religion." Without professing it in some form, they cannot appear to possess it. And if this profession of religion be accompanied by heresies or scandals which render the profession of it unworthy of belief, then it does not render those who make it, visible Christians, or visibly members of the Church of God. 2. Those incapable of such profession, may be visibly members of the Church, by virtue of God's revealed covenant or promise to be their God. This is precisely the case with infants and the ground of their baptism. But in either case, membership in the visible church is founded on *presumptive* membership in the invisible, which, as we have seen, "consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, or are, or *shall be* gathered into one under Christ, the head thereof." Charnock

says: "Baptism supposes faith in the adult, and in the parent, the promise of faith for the child." And Dr. Watts says: "In my opinion, so far as they (infants) are in any way members of the *visible* Church, it is upon *supposition* of their being (with their parents) members of the *invisible* Church of God." *

Our standards surely set forth nothing less than this: they direct that baptized children be taught and trained to believe, feel, act, and live as becomes those who are the Lord's; not merely that it is wrong and perilous to be and do otherwise, which is true of all, whether within or without the Church, but that such a course is inconsistent with their position

* Both the foregoing quotations are taken from a letter of Rev. Mr. Foxcroft to Edwards, in the works of the latter. Vol. iv. page 450. New York edition.

as members of the Church, placed in it by the mercy of God, and bound to his service by vows made for them by their parents, whose duty and privilege it was, thus to act for them and give them a place among the people of God, until they become competent in their own persons, and of their own choice, either to retain or renounce it. The case is precisely analogous to that of adult professors and non-professors. All are bound to obey Christ on pain of perdition. But who does not admit a specialty in the professor's obligation, and a flagrant breach of the proprieties of his position, if he be recreant to it?*

* "All baptized persons are members of the Church. Their duty, therefore, to acknowledge Christ before the world, rests on yet clearer grounds. It is true, we do not ascribe a regenerating grace to their baptism; but we do not go to the other extreme of making this precious

The Directory still more clearly implies the same presumption in regard to the

ordinance a nullity. Those who have been baptized, stand in a relation to the Church different from that of the world at large. They have been designated as disciples or learners, and where the parental obligations have been discharged, have been trained in religious knowledge. Such children of the Church should often consider the privileges and benefits sealed in this ordinance. They should be humbled for their sins, and for falling short of, or walking contrary to, the grace of baptism and its engagements. They should feel bound to the faith and practice signified by their symbolical separation from the world. Children born within the pale of the visible church, and dedicated to God in baptism, are to be taught to read, and repeat the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed; to abhor sin, to fear God, to pray, and to obey the Lord Jesus. And when they arrive at years of discretion, it behoves every one of them to consider the duty of ratifying the vows made in their name, by a personal avowal of allegiance to Christ. The case of such is therefore widely different from that of the world without."—*Plain words to a young Communicant.* By J. W. Alexander, D. D.

baptized, in asserting it to be their duty and privilege, on reaching the years of discretion, to come to the Lord's table, unless by heresy, ignorance, or scandal, they rebut this presumption ; just as those who in words profess Christ may in works so deny him as to nullify that profession ; while at the same time, it everywhere maintains that piety as well as knowledge, weak or strong it may be, but still evangelical and saving, is a qualification requisite for the safe and profitable participation of that sacrament. The credible profession of it is requisite *in foro ecclesiae*, the reality or a prevalent conviction of its reality in the light of candid self-examination, *in foro conscientiae et Dei*. All this imports nothing less than a presumption that the children of the Church are and will prove to be the chosen of

God, until they dispel that presumption, by their own misconduct.*

The same thing appears from the very nature of baptism, which is indeed the badge of union to the visible Church, and why? Because, according to every account of it given in Scripture or our standards, it is a sign of those graces and a seal of those covenants, which pertain to those who are in Christ, not only of Israel, but Israelites indeed. Now although sacramental signs and seals of themselves convey nothing, any more than the seal on a title-deed, and although

* “ Children by baptism are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible Church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers.” *Directory of Church of Scotland*, as quoted in Report on the Discipline of baptized children, to the General Assembly, in 1812, by Drs. Miller, Richards and Romeyn.

they are not attended with any conveyance of the blessings signified to those who do not in faith accept them, any more than a sealed deed conveys real estate till it is delivered and accepted, yet the administration of the seal is founded upon a *presumption* that the things sealed will also be bestowed and accepted, till the contrary appears. On no other ground can infant baptism have significance or propriety. In the case of infants, the parent, guardian or sponsor *quoad hoc*, accepts or professes to accept for himself and child the blessings signified and offered; he binds the child, so far as such promise depends upon the sponsor for fulfilment, to comply with the conditions of the offer, and accept the covenanted mercies when he becomes competent to act for himself. He therefore covenants on

his own part, so far as he acts for the child, or can exert an influence in moulding his principles, feelings, and conduct, his mind, heart, and life, to train him up in the way in which he should go; in short, to educate him to think, feel and act as a child of God. When this is done in its true meaning and intent, most commonly the child, on arriving at riper years, will fulfil his part of the covenant. He will recognize and personally assume his baptismal vows as his own, personally accept by faith the blessings thus stipulated and sealed to faith, personally take his place as a professed follower of Christ, and serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life. There are three parties to this covenant sealed in the baptism of children: God, the parent and the child. Originally the

first two are the responsible stipulators. At the age of majority the child comes in place of the parent. God will be faithful. If the other parties fulfil the conditions, he will convey the covenanted blessings. If they are not conveyed, the fault is *with them*, one or both. Let God be true, though every man were a liar. But if the second party, the parent, be faithful, this will ordinarily secure the fidelity of the third, by God's blessing. Yet herein he hath not divested himself of his own sovereignty. His promise is fulfilled, if filial faith and piety ordinarily ensue upon faithful parental training. For the principle, that a child rightly trained will not prove false to his training in after life, is one of those general laws of God's providential and gracious dealings, which may have its exceptions. It

declares the tendency and usual effect, rather than the invariable rule. "A soft answer turneth away wrath," means that such is its tendency and its ordinary, but not invariable, effect. And who for a moment doubts that the class of baptized recreants would be vastly less than it now is, if Christian parents were generally faithful to their high trust and solemn vows; if, with a just idea of the *status* of their baptized little ones, they exercised due diligence and discretion, in bringing them to a consciousness of their rank, obligations and privileges as members of the family of God, and in moulding their habits of thinking, feeling and acting, into harmony therewith? Should we then witness such vast numbers of them taking their place with heathens and publicans, to which a widely prevalent theory and

practice consign them from the start, in the hope, doubtless, of afterwards possibly reclaiming them? And should we have such masses, who, instead of owning the God in whose name they were baptized, profane his name, and, under the very shadow of the sanctuary, "live as heathens do?" We think not.

The same conclusion is supported by known or conceded facts: 1. With regard to the large number of children of God's people who die in infancy, few whom this discussion concerns, doubt that they are members of the Church invisible, and heirs of salvation. 2. Of those that grow up, a large proportion, even under the most inadequate nurture, and the most unpropitious modes of thinking on this subject, ultimately, (and for the most part in early life,) give such evidence of piety,

that they are admitted to the Lord's Supper on a credible profession. Even Baptist churches are replenished from their children more than from any other source. 3. The proportion is still greater, immensely greater, in churches which preserve unimpaired, practically as well as theoretically, the true idea of the *status* of baptized children, and also keep high the standard of evangelical truth and piety, as in the Free Church of Scotland. Probably the proportion of them who in time give hopeful evidence of piety, in such bodies, is as large as of those who are first gathered into the visible Church from the world, upon the credible profession of conversion. 4. When Christ bids little children to come to him, it is on the express ground that "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

But of whom is this predicated if not of the seed of the pious, whose God he has specially covenanted to be, assuring his people that his Spirit and his word shall not depart out of their mouth, nor out of the mouth of their seed, nor out of the mouth of their seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever? Isaiah lix. 21. "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Deut. xxx. 6.

If we are not wholly mistaken in this analysis of the doctrine of Scripture and our standards on this subject, which, so far forth, harmonize with all the great Protestant symbols, then we apprehend it follows: 1. That Christian parents, or others *in loco parentis*, having charge

of the religious training of children, are invested with high duties, and encouraged by glorious promises. They are to take these children as those whom Christ has claimed for himself, by affixing to them the seal of his grace. They are to be deeply conscious themselves, and do their utmost to make the child deeply conscious, that, as a visible member of Christ's Church, he is false to his own position if he disobeys that Saviour, as truly as if he should make war upon his own family, or join the enemies of his country. He is to be made to understand that the feelings, acts, habits, and manners which Christ enjoins, alone befit his position, as truly as if he were an adult professor. He should know that his attitude requires that all questions relative to action be determined in the light of Christian principle and divine com-

mand. Of course he should be constantly instructed according to his age and capacity, and in all the ways in which light penetrates the youthful mind, what Christianity is in doctrine and life, what the Lord would have him to do. He should be taught the Bible, and Catechisms suited to his years. Moreover, by the light of holy example, by all ingenuity of illustration, suggestion, and sweet insinuation, which paternal wisdom, or the delicacy of maternal tact can supply, should the holy truths of the gospel be entwined with the tendrils of the tender, forming mind, to "grow with its growth, and strengthen with its strength." There is a high sense in which the parent and teacher is master of the thoughts, judgments, and consequent feelings of the opening mind. It is on this great truth that the divine

economy of social life is largely based, and that the covenants and rites which appropriate to God the children of his people are founded. The very end of the mysterious and inviolable oneness effected by the marriage tie is, that parents may have "a godly seed." Hence the sealing rite of circumcision, and, by parity of reason, baptism, is extended to servants over whose nurture they have control. Gen. xvii. 12.

Indispensable, however, as the work of imparting knowledge is, there is a higher, more delicate and difficult work to be done, in all good education, intellectual, moral, and religious. It is to *train*, by which we understand the formation of right practical habits, in that sphere to which the education pertains. And by a right habit, whether of body or soul, we

mean simply that state which fits and inclines the subject to right action in the premises. Habits of vigorous and effective intellectual activity are the grand benefit of a thorough intellectual education; correct moral habits, founded on good principles, are the grand result of a good moral education. Correct habits of soul, in regard to spiritual and divine things, are precisely what is wrought in it by regeneration. For this no outward culture or human training is a substitute. But as the Spirit operates not in defiance or suspension of the laws and activities of our rational and moral nature; not in contravention of, but in giving due efficacy to, outward motives and means; and as God's promise is annexed to faithful training; so where this is faithfully, discreetly, and prayerfully given, we have

reason to hope and believe that the invisible working of the Spirit will silently mingle with and interpenetrate it, and make it not in vain in the Lord. Now, since there is a wide sphere in which the parent has command of the activity of the child, and can contribute to the formation of outward habits, and even to habits of thought and feeling, he is bound by divine command, by baptismal vows, by every instinct of a gracious soul, to make these habits, so far as he is responsible for them, conformed to the law of God. Hence, God sets it forth as the high commendation of Abraham, and the ground of his large covenants with him and his posterity: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord

may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Gen. xviii. 19.) Hence, the holy resolution of Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Hence the commands and promises with regard to training children in the way in which they should go, and bringing them up in the nurture (or discipline) and admonition of the Lord. Hence, according to our Directory, they are to be taught the Lord's prayer; also "to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and obey the Lord Jesus Christ." Much under God depends upon the skill with which this difficult and delicate duty is performed. It is in its nature continuous, and in its forms manifold. It requires that mingled firmness, fidelity, gentleness, amenity, and sympathy with the young, which are too seldom found together. The more common and perilous delinquency

is a gross negligence which indolently abandons children, without remorse, to their own wayward impulses. Multitudes omit Christian training in every proper sense. But there is a fault so perilous in many who mean to be faithful in this regard, that the Apostle finds occasion expressly to warn them against it. "Fathers, *provoke not your children to wrath*, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." We have seen the good influence of many a pious father worse than frustrated, by a sternness and severity, a harshness and austerity, a frowning and unsympathizing distance from his children, which, if it commanded a reluctant eye-service, commanded nothing better, and repelled their affections, not only from him, but (we fear) from the religion which he thus im-

personated before them. And in many such cases, the wonder that children so trained grow up in irreligion, is misplaced. The promise has failed because the condition of it has failed. Such children have not been trained as God requires. It is quite as easy to err and fail by governing too much, as by not governing enough.*

In aid of this domestic Christian nurture, come, or ought to come, "the inspection and government of the Church." Of course, so far as direct discipline is con-

* "His carriage towards his children was with great mildness and gentleness, as one who desired rather to be loved than to be feared by them.

He was as careful not to *provoke them to wrath*, nor to *discourage them*, as he was to *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. He ruled indeed, and kept up his authority, but it was with wisdom and love, and not with a high hand. He allowed his children

cerned in their younger years, this must be mainly exercised through the parents, by due vigilance and pains-taking on the part of the pastor and elders, to see that they measurably discharge their obligations and vows to train their children up for Christ. But, even in their early days, the officers and members of the Church should manifest a kindly recognition of, and tender interest in, them as lambs of the flock. They should feed them with knowledge, guide them by counsel, and specially commend them to God in prayer.

a great degree of freedom with him, which gave him the opportunity of reasoning with them, not frightening them into that which is good. He did much towards the instruction of his children in the way of familiar discourse, according to that excellent directory for religious education, Deut. vi. 7, which made them love home, and delight in his company, and greatly endeared religion to them."

Life of Philip Henry by his son

Where the old practice of the pastor meeting them, catechizing, and exhorting them as children of the Church, has gone into disuse, it should be revived, and perpetually maintained. All things should be so conducted as to render the child conscious of his Church relations, and to point his mind forward to the time when he will, for himself, be called to assume the privileges and responsibilities of membership; just as minors in the State look forward to the time when they will reach the franchise and obligations of matured citizenship. They should feel that, in either case, they may forfeit the high boon by their miscarriage; and, in that event, will be exposed to corresponding penalties and privations, at the hands of the proper authorities. When they approach majority, the Church should spare

no efforts of instruction, exhortation, rebuke, and encouragement, which their cases may severally require, in order to evoke dormant graces into exercise, and inspire those pious views and feelings which prepare and dispose them to come to the Lord's Supper. If they slide into acts or habits incompatible with godliness, either before or after their first approach to the table, they should be visited with faithful and tender admonition; and, if still incorrigible, with censure; and until they manifest repentance, they should be debarred from communion. Even if they display no bar to communion, which human eyes can detect, they are to be taught that allowed secret sin, of omission or commission, disqualifies them in the sight of God and their own consciences; and that they cannot acceptably receive and give this

pledge of union to Christ, unless, sensible of their sin and deploring it, they trust his blood for deliverance from it, and are firmly resolved, by his grace assisting, to die unto sin and live unto God, and walk in all his commands and ordinances blamelessly. But if they know all this, the very act of coming to the Lord's Supper is a solemn profession of faith in, and obedience to Christ; and, unless there be that in their known words or deeds which discredits such a profession, the Church cannot lawfully exclude them; for inward disqualifications which they do not avow or otherwise manifest, while they intelligently profess Christ, can be known only to themselves and their God. *De occultis ecclesia non judicat.**

* Says Edwards: "Not any pretended extraordinary skill of his (the pastor) in discerning the heart, but the

Our church wisely requires the officers of the church to examine candidates for the

person's *own* serious profession concerning what he finds in his own soul, after he has been well instructed, must regulate the public conduct with respect to him, where there is no other external visible thing to contradict and overrule it. And a serious profession of godliness, under these circumstances, carries in it a visibility to the eye of the Church's rational and Christian judgment."—*Qualifications for Communion*, vol. iv. page 421.

In the controversy with his people, which led to their disgraceful rejection of him as their pastor, he offered to be satisfied with the following profession on the part of those baptized in infancy : " I hope I do truly find a heart to give up myself wholly to God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace which was sealed in my baptism, and to walk in a way of obedience to all the commandments of God, which the covenant of grace requires, as long as I live." He says : " If there were an external conversation agreeable thereto, . . . I should think that such a person, solemnly making such a profession, had a right to be received as an object of public charity, however he himself might scruple his own conversion,

Lord's Supper, in regard to their "knowledge and piety;" not as therein undertaking to judge the secrets of the heart, but for the purpose of guarding against heedless, ignorant, irreverent intruders, and ensuring, as far as may be, that Christian knowledge, that apparent sincere trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and

on account of his not remembering the time, not knowing the method of his own conversion, or finding so much remaining sin, &c. And (if his own scruples did not hinder) I should think a minister or a church had no right to debar such a professor, though he did not think himself converted. For I call that a profession of godliness, which is a profession of the great things wherein godliness consists, and not a profession of his own opinion of his good estate." *Reply to Williams*, vol. iv. pp. 465—6. This will hardly tally with Mr. Tracy's theory of the evidences of regeneration and fitness for the Lord's Supper; while yet it does not prove that the great revival, and this theory, had no mutual interdependence.

purpose of obedience to him, which are involved in a credible profession of faith.

While they are to be instructed that the absence of these things is a disqualification for the Lord's table, our ministers are expressly required to invite to it all "such as, sensible of their lost and helpless estate by sin, depend upon the atonement of Christ for pardon and acceptance with God; such as, being instructed in the gospel doctrine, have a competent knowledge to discern the Lord's body; and such as are determined to renounce their sins, and are determined to lead a holy and godly life." And this none the less, though they can give no history of the time, order, manner of the rise and progress of such exercises of soul. If such are their views and feelings, then have they full warrant to come to the

holy feast. Whether they remember the time and manner of the beginning and progressive development of these states of mind and heart, or whether these have ingrained themselves so imperceptibly into the warp and woof of their inner being, that they can mark no distinct epoch, or hinge-point in their career, as the crisis of the new birth; it is enough that they can say, "Whereas I was blind, now I see."* Or even if the sanctifying work of the Spirit was coeval with, or

*" He would blame those who laid so much stress on people knowing the exact time of their conversion, which he thought was with many not possible to do. Who can so soon be aware of the day-break or the springing up of the seed sown? The work of grace is better known in its effects than in its causes. He would sometimes illustrate this by that saying of the blind man to the Pharisees," &c.—*Life of Philip Henry by his son Matthew Henry.*

anterior to their earliest remembrance, and so combined with their Christian training, as to actuate and rule the growth of the soul in its successive unfoldings; so that the candidate remembers not the time when he did not fear God, abhor sin, and look to Christ for forgiveness; he will make none the worse Christian, or be worse qualified for the holy Supper, on that account. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” (John iii. 8.) “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise, night and day; and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the

blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." (Mark iv. 26—28.)

Were this idea of the import of infant baptism intelligently and faithfully carried out in the practical regimen of families and churches, we believe the amount of baptized apostasy would be greatly diminished; that piety among parents and children would not only be more widely diffused, but more complete, elevated, and symmetrical, as a vital force penetrating all the relations of life; that the spectacle of devout men, fearing God, with all their house, would be as frequent as it is delightful; that the Church would be ensured perpetuity and increase, not merely by external conquest and aggregation, but by internal growth and evolution, in the multiplication of those happy families, of which we could say, "Behold how good

and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." "There the Lord hath commanded his blessing, even life for evermore!" Such a cheering faith is warranted by the promises of God, which are none the less true, though our unbelief fail to realize them. Such is the conclusion warranted by every rational view of man's nature, as related to the economy of redemption.

It is easy to say that all this may be accomplished by God's sovereign grace accompanying his word, even without making account of the church-state of believers' children, as has been set forth. True, all things are possible with God; he can and does sometimes save men without any visible instrumentality but his written word. But is this his ordinary way? Or, as man is constituted, is it likely to

be the most effective way? No; faith cometh by hearing, and it pleases God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. For he works not in violation of, but in conformity to, the laws of man's active and moral powers. So in reference to the children of the covenant, his way is the best and most successful way, whether we can perceive the rationale of it or not. But is it difficult to see this? Is not the effect of fixing their place, and lot, and sympathies, and associations with the world, at the outset, to give the world the advantage of a prior possession and use, of first moulding their tastes, attachments, and habits, so that the hindrances to their embracing Christ are augmented beyond measure? Does not the attitude in which one is placed, have much to do in deciding what can be

made of him? And in all its bearings upon the kind of training which will be given to a child, and the effect which that training will have upon him, is there not a heaven-wide difference between the question, whether he shall apostatize from the Church, in which he was born and reared, to the world from which he was taken by the mercy of God, while yet a babe; or whether he shall renounce the world, and all its associations, to which he has been wedded by a life-long habit and association, to take his place in the Church? These and similar questions speak their own answer in the light of reason, experience, and the word of God. It was no irrational fear of the two tribes and a half, when they were afraid that the children of the tribes over Jordan should cause their own "children to cease

from fearing the Lord," by treating them as if they had "no part in the Lord." (Josh. xxii. 24, 25.)

It is true that God is mindful of his covenant, notwithstanding the unbelief and shortcomings of his people, and we rejoice in the multitudes of their offspring, that, even under the most defective views of his covenant, and the most flagrant parental neglect, still become his children by regeneration and adoption. Even so, evermore where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound. Else what, and where were we all? Nor would we, in the least, disguise or extenuate the danger of abusing such an administration in the house of God, as our standards teach, and we have very imperfectly shadowed forth. Like all other ordinances of God, it may be, and it has been, misconceived

by the ignorant, and perverted by the formal, from the days of the father of the faithful, with whom the covenant was first in form made, until now. What then? What advantage hath the seed of the pious, and what profit is there in his baptism? Much every way;—not to those who pervert it, who take the rite without the substance, or mistake the rite for substance—but to those who justly apprehend it, and believe, and do accordingly, and in proportion as they so apprehend, believe, and do. It is easy to say that the Quakers have piety without external rites and ordinances, that the Romanists have these in profusion with scarcely any piety. But he who would make an inference from this, would simply show the narrowness of his mind. For another fact consistent with each of these

is, that piety most flourishes in communions which make evangelical faith the life of the soul, while they use the simple ordinances and sacraments of Scripture, not as barren forms, but according to their divine intent and efficacy, for the promotion of that faith. For, however baptism may save, there must be more than the outward washing away of the filth of the flesh; even the answer (*sponson*, *ἐπερωτημα*) of a good conscience towards God. All are not Israel that are of Israel. "He is not a Jew that is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew that is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

These views were among the commonplaces of the Reformed Theology, which

gave being and shape to our own standards. They were stated with various degrees of fulness and clearness, by different standard authors, according to the measure of completeness and consistency which each one had reached in his own thinking on the subject. Some present the doctrine without those cautions and limitations which are a substantive part of it. Others use a loose phraseology, which puts their real principles in an attitude liable to misconception. But they with great unanimity teach that pedobaptism is legitimate, because, 1. By virtue of the covenant there is a presumption that the children of believers are among God's elect, to whom belong the blessings signified and sealed in baptism; 2. Because they are capable of receiving saving grace even in infancy. As expressed in the

first Helvetic Confession, it is a ground of their baptism, that *de eorum electione pié est præsumendum*. And since the elect either possess, or are destined to possess, regeneration and adoption, it is not uncommon to speak of the elect, the regenerate, the sanctified, the children of God, as one and the same. In this aspect some writers, Reformed and others, speak of the presumption that the children of believers are elect, till the contrary appears, as a presumption that they are regenerate, and children of God, till the contrary appears. The strong statements of Calvin, which many have tried to wrest to the support of baptismal regeneration, are well known. As God is pleased to covenant with his people to be a God to them and their seed after them, and to permit them to act as the representatives of their off-

spring, while these are unable to act for themselves, in stipulating for them the service and accepting the grace signified in baptism, Vitringa founds upon this fact the presumption that the baptized will in person accept the position, the service, and the blessings, thus assumed for them by parental faith. If God is pleased to regard and treat them in their parents, the presumption is that they will themselves assume the vows made for them, till the contrary appears. After showing that the promise of the covenant does not ensure to all and singular of the children of believers the grace of life, since all experience proves the contrary, he says, "When God hath begun to manifest his grace to the parents or either of them, we may not presume otherwise than that he will confer the like grace upon

their infants, so long as the contrary does not appear." *Non licet aliter præsumere quàm illam eandem gratiam præstiturum infantibus, quamdiu nobis non liquet contrarium.* He even goes so far as to say, *Iuste præsumimus ex lege charitatis eos esse sanctificatos per Spiritum Sanctum*; a form of statement which, taken by itself, many would take as more than is true, and more than his real doctrine, as gathered from all his representations, means.

De Moor, commenting on the confession prescribed to parents in the Belgic Liturgy, on bringing their infants to baptism, that as they are born in sin and thus subject to misery and condemnation, so they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore to be baptized as members of his church; (*in Christo sanctificatos esse, ideoque tanquam membra ecclesiæ ejus debere bapti-*

zari;) expounds and accepts it in this sense, that a promise of saving grace is given indefinitely to the children of believers in preference to those of unbelievers, and that it is actually bestowed upon some of them in earliest infancy, whence it is permitted specially to entertain a good hope concerning children now offered in baptism by believing parents. *Unde speciatim de hisce liberis, qui nunc offeruntur baptizandi, spem bonam concipere licet.* This hope, however, he is careful to say is often disappointed in the event. He quotes Markius with approbation, as saying, that while it is conceded that profession is a prerequisite to baptism in adults, we deem it sufficient in the case of infants, if, in the judgment of charity, it be likely to follow. *Putamus sufficere si infantibus secundum iudicium charitatis sub-*

sequatur. The point to be observed is, that the baptism of children is here founded on the charitable presumption that they will prove to be partakers of the blessings it seals.

Witsius, having shown that many children of the pious prove not to be children of God, and thus that the covenant must not be understood as ensuring the grace of life to all and each of them, says, "Charity requires us to count them as beloved children of God, and as of his family, till they evince the contrary by their depraved disposition and conduct." *Charitas enim jubet infantes ejusmodi, ut dilectos Dei liberos, ipsiusque Dei familie adnumerare, donec contrarium pessimâ indole pravisque facinoribus, &c.* The words, "hypothesis," "presumption," "supposition," "count," "regard," &c., in such connec-

tions, mean not the positive conviction that all the children of the covenant are or will be real children of God, any more than Paul meant that he really believed all whom he addressed as "saints" were really such; but that they are to be reckoned and treated as among Christ's redeemed ones, till the contrary is evinced.

We conclude with the following from the Life of Philip Henry by his son Matthew, author of the celebrated commentary on the Bible, as showing the views, practical and theoretical, of these devout men. If we cannot see our way clear to follow them, so far as there is any appearance of requiring authoritatively what ought to be the free act of the child, we think all pious parents should rejoice and labour to bring their baptized children to

such views and feelings, as would lead them freely and intelligently, in this or equivalent ways, to fulfil their baptismal obligations.

“He drew up a short form of the baptismal covenant for the use of his children. It was this :

““I take God the Father to be my chiefest good and highest end.

““I take God the Son to be my Prince and Saviour.

““I take God the Holy Ghost to be my Sanctifier, Teacher, Guide, and Comforter.

““I take the word of God to be my rule in all my actions; and the people of God to be my people in all conditions.

““I do likewise devote and dedicate unto the Lord my whole self, all I am, all I have, all I can do.

“ ‘ And this I do deliberately, sincerely, freely, and for ever.’

“ This he taught his children; and they each of them solemnly repeated it every Lord’s day in the evening after they were catechized, he putting his *Amen* to it; and sometimes adding, ‘ So say, and so do, and you are made for ever.’

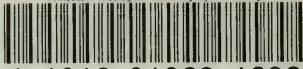
“ He also took great pains with them to lead them into the understanding of it, and to persuade them to a free and cheerful consent to it. And, when they grew up, he made them all write it over severally with their own hands, and very solemnly set their names to it, which he told them he would keep by him, and it should be produced as a testimony against them, in case they should afterwards depart from God and turn from following after him.

“He was careful to bring his children betimes, (when they were about sixteen years of age,) to the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, to take the covenant of God upon themselves, and to make their dedication to God their own act and deed; and a great deal of pains he took with them to prepare them for that great ordinance, and so to translate them into the state of adult church membership.

“In dealing with his children about their spiritual state, he took hold of them very much by the handle of their infant baptism, and frequently inculcated upon them that they were born in God’s house, and were betimes dedicated and given up to him, and therefore were obliged to be his servants. Psalm cxvi. 16. I am thy servant, because the son of thine handmaid.—*Miscellaneous works of Rev. Matthew Henry*; Vol. 1 pp. 51, 2.



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