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# PASTORAL LETTER.

ADDRESSED

TO THE MEMBERS

OF

THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH,

IN THE

EASTERN DIOCESE.

BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND A. V. GRISWOLD, D. D.

*Alexander  
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## TO THE READER.

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It appertains to the duty of those who are “set for the defence of the gospel,” and to be watchmen in Zion, not less to oppose the corruptions, than to promulgate the true “principles of the doctrine of Christ.” It is an observation, not more common than true, that the best things, by perversion, or other abuse, may become the worst. Such is the depravity of our nature, that the wisest institutions, civil or religious, in the practice of successive ages, are corrupted. It is the propensity of men, in their present state of moral imperfection, to err and stray from whatever is good, and according to godliness; to depart from the excellent rules of the church, as they do from the holy precepts of the bible. Did we faithfully practise what the gospel teaches, and carefully observe those landmarks which the church has set to direct our christian race, most blessed would be the effect.

But among the many and deplorable deviations from the rules of the church, and neglect of its discipline, none can be named, more deplorable, or more pernicious, than what concerns the baptism, and religious education of children. On no one description of human effort does the prosperity of religion, and, we may believe, the salvation of souls, so much depend, as on bringing up children in the bosom of the church, in the faith of Christ, and in the fear of God. But if, through ignorance of the importance, or misapprehension of the nature, of the christian covenant, the baptism of children is neglected, or is performed but as a decent ceremony which custom requires; if they are not brought to Christ in a lively faith, and with ear-

nest prayer ; if children, after their baptism, are not by christians distinguished and treated as brethren in Christ, and members of his church ; if they are suffered to grow up as children of the world, and strangers to the covenant of promise ; this holy institution of our Saviour, and all the salutary provisions of his church respecting it, may become in practice worse than useless. The immense importance of the subject ; its connexion with what is most valuable in this life, and the hopes of God's people in a future state, should induce the friends of christianity, and especially the appointed guardians of its interests, to sound the alarm, and withstand so great an evil. It will justify, it is hoped, the feeble attempt now made, and be accepted as an apology, should one be deemed necessary, for the following pastoral address.

TO THE MEMBERS  
OF THE  
**PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
IN THE  
EASTERN DIOCESE.

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BRÉTHREN, BELOVED IN THE LORD.

**A** REGARD to the duties of my office, and the prosperity of the church, induces me to call your attention to a subject, interesting to all its members, and to those especially who have the care and education of youth. Few christians, it may well be feared, duly estimate the importance of the apóstolick injunction to *bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. That childhood and youth are the proper season for commencing other knowledge, and preparing the mind for any thing and every thing excellent and useful in this life, men need not be told: it is the dictate of common sense, and confirmed by the daily, and universal experience of mankind.

But christians seem to forget, that the same season is most favourable for laying the foundation of religious principle, and a holy life ; and their practice illustrates the truth of their Lord's remark, that " the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The present generation of the *children of light*, have surely most convincing testimony, that childhood is the season most propitious for implanting in the mind the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Missionaries, in various parts of the world, have learned from decided experience, that to begin with the instruction of children, is to be almost sure of success. Never was it more evident than at the present day, that he was a wise man who said, " Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

But there is yet an earlier duty of parents to their children. If we would, as commanded, bring them up in the Lord's *nurture*, we must place them in it. If they are to be educated as God's people, they must be made members of " that holy fellowship." Such has been the wisdom, and such the will of God, from the commencement of his gospel covenant, confirmed in Christ, and sacramentally sealed to our spiritual father Abraham. Under the gospel dispensation it is, as we believe, a duty, and of no small im-

portance, of christian parents; and other christians who have the care of children, to bring them to Christ, that his ministers, in his name, may receive them into the bosom of his church, and place them under his *nurture* and *admonition*. They cannot be too early dedicated to the Lord who has bought them: to that God, and Saviour, and Eternal Spirit, by whom they are created, and redeemed, and sanctified.

On this subject, as on most others of a religious nature, there is a diversity of opinion among christians. The question of infant baptism, as a point of controversy, is not the subject of this address: and to those who think that none but adult believers, in their own persons, to the exclusion of their children and households, have a right to receive this sacrament, the following remarks may be inapplicable and uninteresting. For such they are not intended. But we, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in our twenty seventh article declare, that "the baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the church as most agreeable to the institution of Christ." It is our belief, confirmed by our general practice, that none are, or can be, better qualified than little children to partake of the Saviour's benediction, and enter the kingdom of heaven. But to the more pious of our communion it is a subject of painful observation, and serious concern, that this

duty of bringing children to Christ is so much abused, and neglected, and misunderstood. By some it is performed too much as a formal ceremony, and in compliance with a religious custom. Others there are, pious and conscientious, and their number not inconsiderable, who, from misapprehension of the baptismal covenant, and the offices of the church, have scruples respecting "sponsors in baptism," and making the answers in the name and behalf of children, which in the baptismal office are required. Others still, and we fear more in number, who have no such scruples, and who acknowledge that it is their duty to bring their children into covenant with God, do not as they ought reflect upon its importance:—they neglect their duty; and while themselves are in the christian fold, their children and households are permitted to remain in the world, strangers to the covenant of grace. And a still more numerous class, apparently, are they who are not faithful in performing the sponsor's duty. They bring their children indeed to Christ, and become, as they ought to do, their sureties in baptism; but do not "lead the rest of their life according to this beginning." That these evils are prevalent, and that they are very injurious to religion and the prosperity of the church, is too obvious to require proof: it is certain that through this carelessness and misapprehension, an institu-



tion, so well and wisely calculated to promote sound faith, good morals, and the salvation of men, has been, to a great extent, frustrated.

The following remarks and exhortations are offered, beloved brethren, in the humble hope, that through the Lord's blessing they may in some degree be instrumental in obviating any objections, and removing the scruples which may cause any to neglect the baptism of children, and to awaken in our people a more serious attention to the importance both of placing them, and of bringing them up, in the Lord's nurture and admonition.

This address is of course more especially to SPONSORS—to those who bring, or ought to bring, children to baptism: to show them the nature and object, and convince them of the utility, of becoming sureties for infants, and the immense consequence of faithfully discharging the duties of that most interesting relation. It is offered, together with my humble prayers, for the benefit of the souls under my pastoral care;—souls, to whose benefit my life and talents, however small, are solemnly and most sincerely devoted. It is intended, as the Lord shall give me wisdom, to obviate the objections which some make, or the difficulties which they conceive, respecting this subject; to explain the nature, and show the use of the responses required in the baptism of chil-

dren; and to add some persuasive arguments and exhortations to enforce the performance of the sponsor's duty.

It is a previous, fundamental, and, with some, a doubtful question, whether children can, according to the word and will of God, enter into religious covenant: and it is a question which the word of God alone can resolve. An apostle comprised much theology in few words when he observed, that "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ:" and much is it to be regretted that christians do not profit more by its excellent instructions. Some things are intimated in the new testament, and preached in the gospel, which cannot be well and fully understood, without recourse to the antecedent dispensation, —to the typical institutions of the law given by Moses. The whole bible is but one book; one system of revealed truth; one word of God. Many things, which seem doubtful and obscure, as they are read in one part of this volume, in the other part are made clear and intelligible. Many institutions of the law, which, in themselves considered, appear as unmeaning ceremonies, when compared with their antitypes and fulfilment, in the advent of Christ, the sacrifice of his cross, and the preaching of his gospel, are rendered most significant, and exceedingly interesting. And in like manner, the writings of the

apostles, and the institutions and practices of the church, receive great light and confirmation from the dealings of the Almighty with his people Israel. If, for example, it be made a question, whether infants may be in covenant with God, we need but to consider "the covenant confirmed of God in Christ," with our father Abraham, and the instructions of that schoolmaster "the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after," and no doubt can remain. "Search the scriptures." "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Circumcision, the seal of that covenant, was by divine command, the right of children, no less than of their parents. When God, by immediate revelation, "preached the gospel to Abraham," and "when he was ninety-nine years old," renewed with him, his "everlasting covenant, to be a God unto him, and his seed after him," as is written in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, he said unto Abraham, "Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised:—it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh

for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken my covenant." The same sacramental rite, the same seal of covenanted blessings, temporal and spiritual, was prescribed for the aged parent, and for the infant of eight days old. God was displeased, if any child among them was not circumcised; such child was to be cut off from his people, as being destitute of the appointed seal of the covenant relation. They who were circumcised in childhood, were, the same as adults, "debtors to do the whole law," and entitled to all the privileges of the chosen race; the Lord was their God, and they his people; and they were bound as such to obey him. They became members of the church of God; even of that *stock* and *true olive tree*, into which the gentiles, when converted, were grafted.

When God renewed his covenant with his people, their children were still included. Thus in Deut. xix. 10—13. "Ye stand this day *all of you* before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your *little ones*, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp—that thou shouldest *enter into covenant with the Lord thy God*, and *into the oath* which the Lord

thy God *maketh with thee* this day: that he may establish thee to-day, *for a people unto himself*, and that he may *be unto thee a God*, as he *hath said* unto thee, and as he *hath sworn unto thy fathers.*" So Joshua engaged for himself and *his house* that they would serve the Lord. Josh. xxiv. 15. To doubt then whether infants are capable of being in covenant with God, and whether they can be bound by a religious transaction, performed before they are capable of acting for themselves, is to make ourselves wiser than the Almighty;—it is, in effect, to question the truth of his word, or the equity of his providence.

But if we admit, what is so very evident and certain, that children did, through the agency of others, covenant with God in circumcision, they may no less evidently, so far as the principle in question is concerned, be bound by the covenant in baptism. If privileges and promises may be sealed to them in one ordinance, why not in another? If the circumcised child was a debtor to do the whole law, with equal justice and propriety the baptized infant is bound to obey the gospel. The incapacity, or want of will in the child, cannot be justly urged as any difficulty or objection, more in the one case, than in the other. The reason and fitness of the thing remain to be considered; but the principle that an

infant may be brought under special obligations to God, and participate in the privileges of his chosen people, is very evident.

To those then who question its justice or propriety, we might answer in the words of an apostle, "Who art thou O man that repliest against God?" Is he unreasonable? Has the Lord commanded what in its nature is unjust? The infant under the law could not present himself to be circumcised. So far as he had a will, he was, no doubt, opposed to the painful operation, and made resistance. His parents, or other sponsors, were, by divine appointment, the agents in subjecting the child to the obligations of the law; which, nevertheless, when he came to age, the child was bound to perform. This was perfectly equitable and right, except God can be unjust. Of course, except God at some subsequent period, has revealed that the thing is no longer agreeable to his will, there is nothing unjust or improper in continuing still to initiate them into his church, and binding them—to forsake their sins—to believe in God—and to do his will.

Here then we might rest the discussion of this very important subject. But God is pleased, no doubt, with a rational faith, as he is with a reasonable service. He needs not, indeed, the wisdom of man to vindicate the equity of his providence; and our apologies for the Almighty

are often without excuse: yet it may be useful, should he be pleased to bless the humble effort, to add some remarks upon the nature, reason and propriety of the engagements made in the name of children in baptism. And they are offered, brethren, with humble hope and sincere prayer, that God may make them, in some small degree, subservient to the prosperity of religion.

To understand the *nature* of the engagements made in the name of children, we must bring into view the authority of the baptismal obligation; which rests not upon the act of man, but the will and appointment of Almighty God. If religion were a civil institution, and baptism an ordinance of man, its authority might reasonably be questioned. What makes baptism a sacrament, and its administration useful and obligatory, is the appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his authority alone, are any bound by the covenant which it seals. The obligation is from God. In various other instances he exercises a like authority. We are born into this natural world without our own agency or consent: but does this consideration, in any degree, diminish our duty and obligation to love and serve God? Can we reasonably object to the divine government on the ground of its sovereignty, or excuse our sins by saying that we had no desire to be placed in such a state? Are God's laws the less binding

upon our life and conscience because we had no voice in making them? Of his own nature, and in right of his infinite perfections, he is the Sovereign Arbiter of the universe:—his will is justice in the abstract, and his word the unerring rule of right. No act or promise which we can do or make is so justly obligatory as the laws of God. We are born his subjects, and our utmost allegiance and homage are his due, from the moment we draw our earliest breath. Baptism, then, being of divine appointment, and it being, we now suppose, the Lord's will that infants be brought to Christ and enter his kingdom, his authority is sufficient to bind them to every christian duty. If the natural birth of children makes them debtors "to do justly;" their spiritual *birth of water* does as justly, by the same authority, make them debtors "to love *mercy*, and to walk *humbly* with God." If by the one they are bound to obey a law of works, why not by the other to obey "the law of faith?" Are not God's spiritual benefits of as great obligation as the gifts of nature?

It is a fact remarkable, and much to the purpose of the present question, that the same principle is admitted, and put in practice, in all human governments. In a temporal kingdom or state, every child is born subject to its constitution and laws, no less than if he had given his free assent to every institution. He owes the same alle-



giance to the constituted authorities, is under the same obligation to regard the laws, and to serve and defend his country, as though he had made that country his voluntary choice. Should he be accused of treason, or of any infraction of the supposed civil compact, to no purpose would he plead in justification that the laws are not according to his mind and will. Whatever dislike he may conceive, or disapprobation he may express, of the administration of the government, would not release him from its authority. Now if this be reasonable, and tends to general happiness under human laws, which are always imperfect, and sometimes unjust; how infinitely more so, when applied to the divine government, which is perfectly righteous, and calculated to produce the greatest possible good, both publick and individual.

If we extend our view to the dispensations of God's providence, the same economy evidently pervades the whole. What one of all the descendants of Adam gave his previous assent to that state of probation in which the first man was placed? And yet the "death" which his transgression incurred, "has passed upon all men." Though we cannot see the reason, or though we should presumptuously deny the equity, of this dealing, the *fact* is evident and incontrovertible, that "in Adam all die:" that pains and mortality

are the portion of infants, not less than of those “who have sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” We may deny the fall of man, but the miseries of life will continue; to whatever cause we ascribe them, they certainly exist; and notwithstanding all that we can say of the *innocence* of children, many of them will suffer, and many die.

And not judgments only, but blessings also, are thus dispensed. The whole work of *redemption* is wrought by the sovereign power of God; not by man’s wisdom; and wholly without our previous consent. Did men devise those doctrines of life and salvation, which they cannot even believe without the aid of the Holy Ghost? Or did they first petition that God would send them that Saviour, whom, when sent, but few can be persuaded to receive? Yet not adults only, but infants are redeemed: and to the Saviour’s praise be it said, “Of such is the kingdom of God.” Is there any one who is not justly bound to love and praise the Redeemer? It is in perfect accordance with this economy of nature and grace, that children may be taken into God’s kingdom or church, and that they are bound, no less than adults, as soon as they understand, to obey its laws, and observe its ordinances.

Hence you will perceive, how groundless are the scruples of many, about placing children under

the obligations of the christian covenant, without their assent: as though the obligation were imposed by human authority. It is the redemption of Christ, who bought us with his blood,—it is the will and appointment of Almighty God,—which gives validity, to what is done in baptism. The volitions of man may perform, or may oppose, God's word and will, but cannot alter the nature of his sacrament.

By way of objection, the question is often put, "If children may receive one sacrament, why are they debarred from the other?—Why may they not commune in the Lord's supper?" With like reason might we ask, "Why, if children may be *born* into this natural world, they may not also *labour* for food and raiment?" Children are not debarred from the Eucharist, otherwise than they are from praying, or any other religious act. Our baptism is not *our act*: we are *passive* in the transaction. It is our sacramental *birth* into God's spiritual kingdom. Christ, by his ministers, takes us in his arms, and gives us his blessing. In regard to this sacrament, men and women, however advanced in life, must "become as little children," before they can "enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is the act, or the grace of God, which makes us "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of his kingdom." But the Lord's supper is our own performance,—

“our bounden *duty* and *service*.” It is a voluntary act of devotion, in which we commemorate the Redeemer’s love, and the sacrifice of his cross. We *do* it in remembrance of him : “for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, *ye do show forth* the Lord’s death till he come.” This doctrine which we teach you of infant baptism, perfectly accords, therefore, with the whole economy of the divine government.

Hence too may you see the nature of those responses made in the name of children, which often give offence, and are very much misunderstood. From what has been said it appears, and it should be carefully considered, that whatever duty or obligation is laid upon all or any one in the administration of baptism, arises from the nature and divine authority of the sacrament, and not from the responses ; and if nothing be said in the child’s name, as in private baptism, the covenant is the same, as is also the obligation. In the responses which the church requires, we recognise and express those duties of repentance, faith and obedience, which, according to our knowledge and abilities, are inseparably connected with our being members of Christ’s church. It is, we fully believe, the Saviour’s will, that “little children” should enter his kingdom. The person who administers the ordinance, receives them in Christ’s

stead" and name, into his family and household. It is the duty of his church, to see that his will be done respecting infants. She directs that they be brought unto him, by persons duly qualified for this charitable office. The minister acts as the servant of Christ; the sponsor, as a member or an agent of the church, performing her injunctions. And as the one declares the grace and benefits which God exhibits to man in that sacrament, so does the other acknowledge the duty which it most justly requires.

The practice of the primitive church, and the understanding of this matter by christians of the first four centuries, will help to show both the antiquity and the reasonableness of such sponsors in baptism. Indeed, the early commencement of the practice is a strong presumptive evidence, that it had the sanction of apostolick usage. It appears from Tertullian, that about one hundred years after the apostles it was a custom, established and general in the church, for godfathers, as they were then called, to answer and promise in behalf of children at their baptism.\* From subsequent writers, and especially from St. Augustine, who flourished about three hundred years after the apostles, we learn that it was the established and undoubted practice for parents, and other pious persons not the

\* Tertul. de Bap. c. xviii.

parents, to present children to be baptized; and that the manner and custom of doing it was similar to our present usage.† The reason assigned by Jewish writers for engaging children in covenant with the true God, without their consent, is that nothing is done but what is for their undoubted good:—that we may confer privileges on a person without his knowing it; but to take away privileges without his consent, is unjust.

The engagements made, in the early ages of the church, in behalf of children, were also similar to our present practice. These were then considered of much importance; according to the words of St. Peter, that baptism saves us, not by the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but by the *answer*, or *stipulation* of a good conscience towards God. From ancient writers we learn that such *stipulations* (for to such it is reasonable to believe the apostle had reference) were universally required: in the case of grown persons, to be made by their own mouth; and when infants were baptized, by sponsors in their name. The substance of what the sponsor promised in behalf of the child was, that *he renounced the devil and worldly vanities; that he believed in Christ; and that he would turn to God.\** The Jews re-

\* See Wall on Baptism, part i. c. xv.

† See Bing. Antiq. B. xi. c. viii.

quired of those who entered into covenant, (adults for themselves, and children by their sponsors,) to renounce idolatry, and believe in Jehovah. Christians, being taught that idolatry is making religious offerings to devils, express the same thing by renouncing the devil and his works. The celebrated preacher, Mr. Saurin, in his sermon on *The Perfection of Christian Knowledge*, understands St. Paul, in the sixth chapter to the Hebrews, by "the doctrine of baptisms," to mean "the confession of faith that was required of such as had resolved to profess christianity. Of such persons," he says, "a confession was required, and their answers to certain questions were demanded. The formularies that have been used on this occasion, have been extremely diversified at different places, and in different times; but the most ancient are the shortest, and most determinate. One question that was put to the catechumens was, *Dost thou renounce the devil?* to which he answered, *I renounce him.* Another was, *Dost thou believe in Jesus Christ?* to which he replied, *I believe in him.* St. Cyprian calls these questions, *the baptismal interrogatory*; and the answers are called by Tertullian, *the answer of salvation.* And we have a passage upon this article in an author still more respectable, I mean St. Peter, who says, *Baptism doth also now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards*

*God.* 1 Peter iii. 21. that is the answer which was given by the catechumen before his baptism." In a word, it is very evident from the earliest christian writers, that responses were always required of those who were baptized; that, generally speaking, they were very similar to those which our church now requires; and that, in case of infant baptism, these answers were made by sponsors.

Under the old dispensation, and still under the christian, the church is the surety for children taken into her pale. The church, as the Lord's body, takes them in her arms; receives them into her *nurture*; and they are placed under her guardianship and care. But it is requisite, and, in the nature of the thing, highly expedient, that some person or persons should particularly be appointed to superintend the religious education of each child baptized. The Jews required, as in circumcision, so in baptism, (which also they administered to children,) that for an infant proselyte, either his father, or else the consistory or church of the place, or at least three grave persons, should answer, or undertake in the child's name. Christians also have always required, at least, one sponsor. The parents, if suitable persons, have been generally preferred. But in case the parents were dead, or not christians, or were otherwise disqualified, other suitable persons have performed this charitable office. And



the church is bound to extend this parental care to every child within her reach ; not to orphans only, but in some cases to the children of unbelievers, where it can with propriety be done, and without infringing the parent's right. In the gospel covenant which was made with Abraham, all the children of whom the Israelites had the care, not more " he that was born in their houses," than he who was " bought with money of any stranger who was not of their seed," was to be circumcised. Gen. xvii. 12. No children for the sins of their parents should be excluded from the privileges of God's people : though unhappily there are some parents to whom the church cannot, without imprudence, commit the religious care of baptized children. St. Augustine (*ad Bonifacium*) says, that " infants are offered (in baptism) for the receiving of the spiritual grace, not so much by those in whose hands they are brought, though by those too if they are good faithful christians, as by the whole congregation of saints and faithful men. For they are rightly said to be offered by all those whose desire it is that they should be offered, and by whose holy and united charity they are assisted towards the communication of the Holy Spirit. So that the whole church of the saints does this office as a mother." They are offered, he adds, not by parents only, but by any other persons—by any that can afford to show them this compassion. " Neither did the baptism de-

pend on the holiness, or right faith, or intention of those who brought the child. It was supposed to be done by the order, and at the desire of the church, and particularly of those who assisted with their prayers at the office.”\*

These sponsors are sometimes called *sureties*, and sometimes *witnesses*: but the most ancient, the most expressive, and therefore the most proper appellation, is that of *godfathers*. They are parents to the children in what concerns their duty to God—their best interest—their spiritual life. As he that showed mercy on the man who fell among thieves, though a stranger, was truly his *neighbour*; so in the eye of faith, and in what concerns religion, are they fathers and mothers, though of no worldly kindred, who bring infants to Christ, bring them up in his nurture, and are instrumental in making them the sons of God, and joint heirs with their Saviour, of an everlasting inheritance. Godfather or godmother is a name, which, if considered in its true import, must awaken in the sponsor's breast a deep interest and pious concern for the godchild; and when such child comes to years of understanding, he must, unless devoid of pious sensibility, reciprocate the kindness with grateful affection. For Christ's sake we spiritually leave father and mother; we form new relations; we of his church are one body, one family, and members

\* See Wall, p. i. c. 15.

one of another. Infants lie at the door of the church, like the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. Though the *angel* is sent to *move the waters*; though Christ's messenger preaches deliverance to the maimed, and halt, and blind, inviting all to partake freely of the waters of life; yet infants cannot partake of these mercies except some *man put them into the pool*. And is not he a *father in God*,—is not he a friend indeed, who conscientiously performs for them this charitable office? who does all that man can do to give them a new *birth* of water and of the Spirit?

“That God alloweth this charitable work, in bringing infants to his holy baptism;” that the provision, respecting sponsors, is a wise institution, and when faithfully performed, of incalculable benefit, is sufficiently evident. The main difficulty is in understanding in what sense the godfather can say, in the name of a child, that he renounces sin, believes in God, and will keep his commandments? It was not three hundred years after the apostles, when a bishop named Boniface, proposed this same difficulty to another bishop, the celebrated Augustine, desiring him to answer it, not by saying that such was the custom of the church, which every body knew; but to explain the matter—to give a reason for this practice. Augustine justified it on the ground

that baptism, which the child received, is *the sacrament of faith*, representing the thing signified; and that the child, in receiving it, became a believer by covenant. It is not necessary now to state, or to examine his reasoning on the subject: both the question and the answer show, that the objections to this practice were then understood, and seriously considered; and that no one doubted but the practice generally obtained. Some have thought, and still think, that the sponsors are brought into peril by such engagement, as promising what cannot be known, and may never be performed. The same objection was suggested by Tertullian, who, though possessed of eminent talents, had some erroneous notions respecting sins committed after baptism. He advised that neither children nor any young people should be baptized:—that the sacrament should be deferred till they were married, or were so far advanced in age that they would not be likely to fall into sin. His remarks on the subject prove, as has been observed, that baptizing children, and engaging for them as we now do, was the general practice of the church, within one hundred years of the apostles' days.

Well may we suppose that a practice, so early and so general, was not begun, and has not been continued, without good reasons, founded on the nature of the christian covenant, and the usage of the apostles. The view which we have taken

of the subject will assist in understanding these reasons, and show why such responses are and ought to be made. If the covenant in baptism be the same, when no responses are made; and the responses are not absolutely essential to a valid administration of the ordinance, which we admit; some may suppose they must at least be unnecessary, and ought, for the removing of all scruples, to be omitted. But we must also admit that the *prayers* and *thanksgivings*, which accompany baptism, are not essential to its validity. Christ did not command us to pray on the occasion; but simply to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It does not follow as a just inference that either the prayers or the responses are without use, or that they ought to be omitted. It has been shown that the sponsors express audibly, and acknowledge, that covenant or obligation, which, by the will and authority of Almighty God, is laid upon those who enter the church. Of course the answers must be useful for the instruction of the people, that they may know, and be often reminded of God's mercies and their own duty. We are very prone to neglect and forget these things, and it is no less necessary now, than it was in the apostles' days, to teach christians again and "again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." The congregation, by hearing those responses, are most se-

riously put in mind, "what a solemn vow, promise and profession *they* have made," or must make and perform, if they would obtain an assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. We are thus continually taught, and most solemnly reminded, that the blessings of baptism are not absolute, but conditional; that God requires of his people repentance, faith and obedience; and that, if they would finally be saved, they must "lead the rest of their life accordingly." If baptism were administered and nothing said of its nature, it would have too much the appearance of an insignificant ceremony. If its privileges only were rehearsed, without the conditions, the duties would be too little regarded.\* To give the sacrament its most natural appearance, and to make the more strong and lively impression, the infants are represented as expressing, by their sponsors, that obligation which their Saviour makes binding upon their conscience; "which promise," therefore, and most justly, "when they come to age, themselves are bound to perform." To many, no doubt, the transaction appears singular; but the meaning is good, the work is charitable, and the practice both proper and useful. For besides the instruction by this means given generally to all concerned, it is expected espe-

\* See Secker on the Catechism, Lect. iv. And Wall, vol. i. p. 315.

cially of those who present the children to baptism, that they will look to their education; and see that they "are taught, so soon as they shall be able to learn," what faith and obedience they owe to their God and Saviour. And what can be more likely to impress upon their minds a deep sense of this duty, than those answers which they are required to make in behalf of the children?

And who can say, that in this transaction, any injury or injustice is done to the child? The act of the sponsor, indeed, without the child's consent, is instrumental in laying him under the obligation of God's covenant. And it was exactly the same under the old dispensation, and by the express and positive command of God. And is the Lord unjust? Is it harder to obey the gospel, than the law which was given by Moses? Is the yoke of Christ less easy, than that "yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?" We have seen that it is God's will that children should enter his covenant; and this is proof sufficient that the thing is just and good. But we know further that God is good and merciful: he requires of us a reasonable service; and obedience to his government is the most perfect freedom. His laws are given, not only for his own glory, but for our benefit. It is certain that baptizing a child does him no harm; it debars him from no right; it subjects him to no manner

of inconvenience. It confers upon him blessings only, and binds him but to his own best good. This reason for bringing children into covenant with God, was given, not only, as we have seen, by ancient Jewish writers, but also by the early christians, who, as they ought, acknowledged that great benefits were bestowed on baptized children. If children were left, as too many are left, unbaptized, still they are bound, at the peril of everlasting perdition, to believe, and to do, all those things, which in baptism they engage to do. What promise is there of life and salvation, but to those who believe and are baptized, and devote themselves to the service of God? Who that lives in a christian land is not bound to live as a christian? Who without hazard to his immortal soul can "neglect so great salvation?" There is no engagement, in the baptismal covenant, in behalf of a child, which he is not bound, in duty to God, and regard to his eternal welfare, as soon as he is capable of understanding his duty, to perform.

Some will say, and none can deny, that this is what each one must do for himself. And does it follow that there is nothing which we must do for each other? Is there no communion of saints? Are we not bound to promote the salvation of others by all possible means? The wisdom which is from above teaches us, to "train up a child in the way that he should go, and" declares, that "when he is old, he will not



depart from it." And the most decided experience has shown, that no means of establishing men in the faith and fear of God are more effectual, than bringing them up from childhood in his nurture and admonition. And to say that this should be neglected with a view to leaving them free to seek God for themselves, is to reject the wisdom of experience; it is pretending to be wiser than God; and on the same principle we may neglect to preach to men, or to pray for them, or to exhort one another. If it is our duty to use any means to save others, it is our duty to use all means which God has put in our power, and which he is pleased to bless to that happy effect. When we preach to men, or exhort them, it is often without their consent: they dislike our admonitions, and are displeased at hearing the doctrines of Christ. We compel our children to *learn* and to *do* many things of a temporal nature from which they are averse: but we are wise, and do our duty to them, in such compulsion, because we have reason to believe it will be for their benefit. But what God requires as necessary to their salvation, is certainly, and without question, for their benefit. When you pray for your children, you hope to obtain for them blessings; is this the less just and beneficial, because the good is obtained without their agency or consent? In baptizing children we begin a work which must be done, before they

can have an assurance of eternal blessedness.—The church in “this charitable work,” does for them the best, and all that man can do, to train them up in the way they should go; to obtain for them God’s grace and heavenly benediction; and to prepare them for heaven and a blessed immortality.

When the child comes to age and maturity of understanding, he is at liberty—he has the full natural power, should such be his foolish choice—to reject the Saviour, and despise his mercies. But should he, as charity, which “believeth all things,” must hope that he will do, continue to walk in the right way, his acknowledging and ratifying the baptismal covenant, especially when it is officially done, in the solemn rite of confirmation, must be equally the same, as to all benefits and religious purposes, as if the promises were first made by his own lips. It happens, we have reason to fear, not unfrequently, that adult persons are baptized, when, like Simon the sorcerer, they have not true faith. If afterwards, as St. Peter exhorted him, they repent, and become true converts, they are not to be rebaptized; no denomination of christians, it is believed, would in such case do it. The seal of the covenant, when administered by one commissioned from God, is on his part good. He gives us this present life to perform what, on our part, is required.

Should it be urged against bringing children

into God's covenant, that their sins committed afterwards will be more sinful; the correctness of the position, except in a qualified sense, may be questioned. And it may more justly on the other side be urged, that they who are regularly baptized are, through God's blessing upon his own ordinance, less likely to sin.

But allow to this objection its full force; and if it proves any thing, it proves too much. We are accountable to God for all the talents, and for every blessing that we receive. If you labour to accumulate wealth, and to leave your son a rich inheritance, you thereby increase his responsibility; and should he abuse his wealth, which there is danger that he will do, he is more guilty. The same may be said of learning, and of every advantage bestowed. And do men therefore—do any christians, or ought they, on this ground, to waste riches, or to bequeath their estates to strangers, or to their enemies, rather than to their children? Any man who sins in a christian land is more guilty, than if he did the same thing “ignorantly, in unbelief.” But who would infer from this a preference for the savage state? Every Sunday that passes by—every sermon that you hear—every religious privilege which you possess—will but add to your condemnation, if these mercies are abused. But still, and not the less, should we desire and be thankful for these privileges. On the principle

of this objection, ministers of Christ ought not to preach the gospel; "for it is better for men not to know the way of righteousness, than to turn," which they very much do, "from the holy commandment delivered unto them." As in temporal things, so in religious concerns, we must, with faith and diligence, use all means for doing and obtaining every good; hoping and trusting that God, according to his word and promise, will give his blessing.

Some object,—for objections to religion are generally more agreeable to our natural hearts than obedience,—some object to bringing their children into the christian covenant, that it will tend to prejudice their minds, or prepossess their judgments, respecting religion; that their minds should be left free and disengaged, till their judgment is matured, and they can without any bias choose for themselves. This objection is similar to the preceding, and the answer may be similar. This reason applies with equal force, and by some, no doubt, is intended to be applied, to all instruction of children in the doctrines and principles of religion. From parents and teachers, children receive their faith, no less than their baptism. And if they ought not to enter into covenant with God, because, after they come to man's estate, it may induce them to continue their religious profession, contrary to their better judgment; for the same reason we

must not teach them the scriptures, nor any religious creed. Leave them wholly free in these things, and they may prefer paganism, or the faith of Mahomet; or, what is most probable, will be deists in profession, and in practice, atheists. Would you admit such reasoning in temporal things? Are you not desirous that your children should imbibe those moral or political principles, which in your judgment will best promote their honour and happiness? Why are you at such pains to inure them to habits of study, or labour, or frugality? Leave them to their own freedom, and it is ten to one that they will prefer idleness and dissipation. You know this well, and it makes you the more anxious to give them wholesome instruction. They who believe not in Jesus Christ, or think his religion of little importance, of course will have very little concern that their children should be christians. But the pious believer, who considers what man is, and what God has taught, must, we may suppose, be convinced that his child's moral and religious character, not less than his prosperity and fortune in this present world, very much depend on his education.

If we do teach religion to children, it must, in the nature of the thing, be according to some system, manner and form; it will be ordinarily, and it ought to be, that which, after due examination, we conscientiously believe to be according to the

word and will of God. It is for us to do our duty to our children: to do every thing in our power, (while we are wiser, and they dependent,) to make them good in this world, and happy for ever. You who believe that the spiritual "life which we now live," and which only we can live, "is a life of faith in the Son of God;" that "you are not your own, but are bought with a price," no less than the "precious blood of Jesus Christ;" that God's covenant in him is the only life and hope of the world; and that it is God's will that we should be instruments of each others' salvation; you who believe this, must be sensible that it is not a matter of choice merely, or of expediency, or of opinion, whether we will be of any religion, or of no religion. You, who are believers, know that God now calls all men every where to repent; that no name is given under heaven but that of Jesus Christ, whereby men can be saved. You know that his gospel is to be preached to every creature; that the faithful must do all in their power to make disciples of all, baptizing them in those three sacred names on which their salvation wholly depends. You are fully persuaded that none can neglect this great, this free and glorious salvation, but at the awful peril of their immortal welfare. You know that God requires of christians, what he so much commended in the father of the faithful, and the want of which he so severely punished in

the otherwise good Eli, that they should *command their children and their household that they shall keep the way of the Lord.*

There is indeed a plausibility in what is so much said, of leaving young people to search the scriptures for themselves, and to form their own creed from the bible. That every young person, with right motives, and a good heart, would do this, is devoutly to be desired. But does it follow that they need no instructor, to awaken their attention to the gospel of salvation, and guide them into the knowledge of its truth? The scriptures themselves suppose, and they require, that we should teach them to each other; especially parents to children. They are indeed the standard of truth; they are the gold in a mine inexhaustible: but has every child skill, by natural instinct, to extract the pure metal from the dross of various difficulties and false interpretations? Are men by nature inclined to search diligently, and receive cordially the doctrines of eternal life? There is nothing which the scriptures themselves more clearly teach, than that the heart, being corrupt, is by nature inclined to reject or pervert their sacred sense. There is danger, as at first, so in every age, that the unlearned and unstable will wrest them to their own destruction. The wise and good Being who has given them as the greatest blessing to mankind, has, in the same wisdom and goodness, ordained, that we shall teach and explain their

sense to others. "How can I (*understand what I read*, said the Ethiopian nobleman) except some man should guide me?" To deny the scriptures to the people is a pernicious violation of what the scriptures teach; but the neglecting to inculcate their true sense, is no less evil in its consequence. The Bereans were wise, who having heard the apostles preach, searched the scriptures for themselves; and was he less wise, who, while reading in his chariot the prophet Isaiah, "desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him?" And supposing that youth were able *without some one to guide them*, to search and know the word of God, is there no danger of their neglecting this duty? Will they, without any to "command," or to lead them, turn to God, and become wise unto salvation? As well may you expect them to become good scholars, good artificers, or good men, without directing and controlling their studies, their labours, or their morals, as that they will be good christians without instruction and care. An evil heart of unbelief is continually inclining us to depart from the living God. It was from a perfect knowledge of our perverse and evil hearts, and our proneness to depart from his laws, that he said, "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when



thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes."

Well then may we say, that no injustice or injury is done to children, in bringing them into covenant with their God and Saviour. But we hesitate not to say more positively, that in thus bringing them to Christ, we do them great and essential good. It is not for us to assign limits to God's mercy;—to prescribe bounds to the operations of his grace;—to determine what only and in full are the benefits to children in being "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven." God may see good in our religious performances, which we know not, or durst not claim: his grace may abound beyond all that we can ask or think. Some benefits we easily perceive. By baptism, children become our brethren in Christ; members of his body the church; they are united with him, as are branches with the vine. They partake in the communion of saints. They are sacramentally made sons of God by adoption; have a new affinity to his people, who must or ought to feel for them a greater affection; be more interested in their welfare, and more disposed to do them good. Baptized children are entitled to all the privileges of God's elect: they are in a visible state of salvation, and have a right to all the means of grace. They are included in God's

covenant, and his seal is upon them; they have, with other members of the church, a common interest in all its blessings, and in all the prayers which are offered up for its health and prosperity. No one can reasonably doubt, but all the spiritual advantages of the circumcised child under the law, which were "much every way," are the blessed privilege of baptized children, and in a higher degree; and especially that, which indeed includes all others—*That the Lord will be their God, and they shall be his people.*

To say of any, either infants or adults, that they cannot be saved without baptism, we are not authorized. But to say that we have an assurance of salvation, without this sacrament, is equally presumptuous. Our Lord has declared that "except *any one* be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God;" "which shows the necessity of this sacrament, where it may be had," to a full assurance that we are in a state of favour with God; and it is no inconsiderable benefit of baptism, that visibly it removes the condemnation of being aliens from the covenant of promise.

The sanctifying efficacy which may attend the administration of this ordinance, especially to those who die in infancy, is worthy of serious consideration; taking due care that we are not presumptuous on the one hand, nor faithless on the other. We believe that the prayers of pious

christians are blessed to children, when devoutly offered on their behalf: why else do we pray for them, especially in sickness? But in baptizing them, the most solemn prayers for God's benediction, and their spiritual good, are offered by the whole congregation of the faithful; besides which, according to Christ's own ordinance, are added a devout dedication of the child to God, and the sacred seal of his promised mercy in Jesus Christ, by his minister, and in his name. Is it consistent with a true faith to suppose that God will not hear these prayers, nor regard with his favour a transaction so solemn, and so conformed to his will?

Baptism, administered to a child, "is," says the pious and learned Archbishop Usher, "a complete and effectual sacrament, and God's visible graces are truly sealed to his benefit under visible signs. And though the use and comfort of baptism are not at present enjoyed by the infant; yet they are now enjoyed by the parent, who believes God's promises for himself and his seed; and they are enjoyed also by the congregation," who believe that "of such is the kingdom of God;"—who rejoice to see them "brought to Christ;" and, far from *rebuking those who bring them*, unite in faithful fervent prayer that such "children may lead the rest of their life according to that beginning."

The benefits of their baptism are also realized and enjoyed effectually by the children when

capable of perceiving them. That infants are born in the corruption of original sin, is clearly taught in the sacred scriptures: it was unquestionably the doctrine of the primitive church; and a doctrine which the articles, the liturgy, the homilies, the baptismal office, and the catechism of the Protestant Episcopal Church, most explicitly admit and declare. Baptism is the same evidence in regard to them, as to adults, that their sin is remitted; it seals to the one as it does to the other the hopes and promises in Jesus Christ; and is an assurance, that through the merits of the second Adam, they will not be condemned for the transgression of the first. It lays the foundation of a religious life; it places them in the most favourable situation to be brought up in the Lord's faith and fear. As their understanding opens, the benefits of the Saviour's covenant unfold to their view; the comforts of his love, with the sacramental token of their interest in his redemption, naturally, and, in many happy instances we trust, powerfully, affect their hearts, constrain them to continue in his love, and help them finally to attain the reward of the righteous. The church requires, and she expects "that the infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn," the nature of the christian covenant; the obligations of trust and obedience which were justly, as they were solemnly, laid upon him in baptism; and that he be "sufficient-

ly instructed" in the rudiments of christianity, which are summarily comprehended "in the church catechism, set forth for that purpose." Let this be faithfully done; let the child be thus trained up in the way in which he should go, and, generally speaking, he will not depart from it. Let this be faithfully done, and we should not see so many "turn from the holy commandment given unto them."

It is not unfrequently objected to our baptismal office particularly, that it requires answers which are not true in point of fact, and promises, which the sponsor cannot perform. To obviate all objections of this nature, nothing is necessary but a careful attention to the office itself. What is there in this transaction at variance with truth? The sponsor, *in the child's name*, renounces what is sinful; acknowledges a belief in Christ; desires to be baptized in that faith; and promises, by divine aid, to keep God's commandments. If he sincerely, and with intention to fulfil it, promised this in his *own name*, it would not be *false*, even though he should not faithfully perform the covenant. But the whole engagement is made in the name of the child, and nothing more or less is required or intended. The sponsor expresses audibly that engagement which baptism lays upon the infant; and for reasons already given. Before the questions are put, the minister explicitly states the nature of the engage-

ment required. "After this promise made by Christ, this infant must also faithfully, for his part, *promise, by you*. that are his sureties, until he come of age to take it upon himself." The question perfectly accords with the same sense and intention: "Dost thou, *in the name of this child;*" as does also the address to the sponsors: "Forasmuch as this *child hath promised* by you, his sureties." They act as agents for another, in the performance of a "charitable work;" and what they engage is not for themselves; but for the child only. This is further and fully confirmed in the catechism, and office for confirmation. Certainly then the transaction is strictly true; they do exactly what they profess to do;—they engage *in the child's name*. Suppose a man, engaged as an attorney, should sign a bond for another; there is no falsehood, and need be no misunderstanding, in the engagement. How far it is obligatory, and whether or not it is afterwards performed, are other questions.

Equally unfounded is the other part of the objection—that *the sponsors promise what they cannot perform*; for they promise to perform nothing, either possible or impossible;—not even that they will teach the child religion, or bring him up in the faith and fear of God. But it is highly necessary that this should by some one or more be done: in the nature of the thing it is most proper, and it is generally expected, that they, who

present the children to baptism, should see to the performance of this most essential duty. And accordingly the church, as she ought, enjoins it upon them: "it is your parts and duties to see that this infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise and profession *he hath here made* by you." And they are directed what particularly to teach, and how to discharge the duty. This is no part of their verbal engagement, but in the reason of the thing, as also from the authority of the church, and the general understanding of christians, it justly rests upon them, and would so rest, though no responses were made.

What just ground, then, is there for scruples in making these responses? The chief danger is that of making them in practice a mere form and ceremony, neglecting to do and perform "according to this beginning." The commencement is good; it is according to revealed truth and christian charity; and the performance of "your part" is no more *impossible* or difficult than other religious duties. "If there be first a willing mind," the yoke will be easy, and the burden light. The responses, we have seen, may be made in truth, and with a good conscience. Suppose you say nothing at the baptism of your children, would they not still be bound to believe in God, and to serve him, and you to bring them up in the Lord's nurture and admonition? To whom

else can the church so reasonably, or with so much confidence, commit the religious care of the infants received into her bosom, as to those whose pious regard for the same infants has brought them to Christ? as to those who, in spiritual things, have become their parents? Though you do not verbally promise to do this, can you reasonably deny that "it is your parts and duties?"

It is more natural to object than to obey. Some think it improper to require any sponsor, beside the parents. A moment's reflection will convince you how reasonable and fitting is this part of our discipline. Consider of what immense concern to the good of society, and the salvation of the soul, is the religious education of children: and also how uncharitable, how unchristian it is, having taken them by covenant into the christian fold, to abandon them to the world! to suffer them, without restraint or admonition, to stray from God's ways, like lost sheep! The parents of a child, if they are religious people, are certainly the most suitable to be his sponsors; and it is generally expected that they will perform the sponsor's duty. But parents, in very many cases, are unqualified to be "teachers of good things,"—to discharge this duty. Parents may die, or be otherwise *unable* to discharge it. In too many cases, the partiality of parents, and their unwillingness to restrain their children, renders it expedient that they should



be aided in so important a work. The church, having one general rule, may, of course, in all such necessary cases, require another sponsor, without giving offence; not to mention what danger there is, that, without such rule, the ministers of Christ, through negligence or favour, might sometimes baptize children without proper sureties. Many reasons may be urged for the fitness and wisdom of requiring, that, at least, one pious member of the church should engage with the parents, in this important duty. And should the parents be unable, or should they neglect the duty, the church, and the other sponsor particularly, should do what can reasonably, and with propriety, be done, to supply the defect. For it should still be understood, that the church is bound to this duty; and, when you present a child to baptism, you are supposed to engage particularly for that one, what, in a more general sense, you are bound to do for all; that is, to assist, so far as is necessary and reasonable, in its religious education. It will not be difficult to determine to what particulars, and in what degree you are bound. Your own conscience will in such case tell you what you ought to do.

The objection last noticed will remind us of another, which it would be happy if we could answer as easily as those preceding:—that sponsors, very often, and very much, neglect their duty;—that, having promised in the child's name,

they afterwards give themselves but little concern how he "leads the rest of his life." That too much occasion is given for this objection, we must with shame acknowledge: but no *unjust* inference from such neglect should be admitted. Were this evil much greater than unhappily it is, still the intention of the church is good, and the institution is wise. If the abuse of good things were a just reason for their discontinuance, nothing good could be retained: the bible itself, and christianity, must be discarded. The neglect of this duty is evident and deplorable; but it is our own fault, and shows the necessity of attending to what is the object of this address,—of being more faithful and diligent. With thankfulness to the Father of mercies, we acknowledge that many are conscientious and diligent in this thing, and even in the present lax state of church discipline, much good is effected by educating children in the christian fold. How great would be the benefit—how gloriously would the church, through the divine blessing, lift up her head in prosperity—if all were faithful! This is the short and easy way, to obviate every difficulty,—to silence every objection.

Thus, beloved brethren, do you see, how early in life, and by means how gracious, interesting and effectual, does our merciful Saviour bestow his spiritual blessings. His "promise is to you and to your children;" he commands them to be

brought unto him; he is much displeased with those who would keep them from his fold. Provision is made by divine wisdom, that, through the instrumentality of our faithfulness, the children of believers, like the child Jesus, shall *increase in wisdom* as they grow in *stature*:—that they shall be nourished and brought up *in favour with God and man*. We see, from the holy scriptures, that children are not, by reason of their tender age, disqualified for covenanting with God; that he has graciously extended to your infants and little ones, the privileges of his chosen people; that the gospel of the blessed Jesus has not closed up the channels of his grace, nor contracted the circumference of revealed mercy; that it gives us no authority to exclude so large a portion of the human family from the advantages which they had under the former dispensation. No good reason or true scripture can be given, why we should not administer to them the sacrament of faith, even the seal of “the covenant that was confirmed of God in Christ,” with the father of the faithful. This covenant, no institutions of “the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, can disannul:” nor does it appear that any precept of the Saviour, or practice of his first disciples, has curtailed its privileges. To little children, accordingly, have been sealed God’s promised blessings in Jesus Christ, from the days of Abraham; and they ought to be so sealed,

“even to the end of the world.” The justice and the reasonableness of this, I have endeavoured briefly to show and illustrate; without presuming, however, to doubt that what the Almighty has so sanctioned, must, in its nature, be righteous as it is merciful. The doubts and scruples which have deterred some from bringing their children to baptism, appear to be groundless. It has been shown, we have reason to hope, to your satisfaction, that the obligations of baptism are of divine authority; and that the responses, which the church requires, are not intended to *change*, but to *show* the nature of the ordinance; not to lay on men new obligations; but to teach, and induce them to perform, what God himself requires. By attention also to the baptismal office, and to the catechism, it is seen that there is nothing declared in those promises, which a pious christian may not truly, and most conscientiously, declare; nor any thing required, in the whole transaction, which the word of God does not make it our duty to perform.

Permit me then, most affectionately, and as one whose duty it is to watch over your spiritual concerns, to beseech and exhort you to think on these things. If what has been said is reasonable; if it is agreeable to the word of God, and the practice of his church in every age from its first commencement; let us continue faithfully so

to practice. Let parents, and other christians to whom the Lord has committed the care of children, consider well the immense importance—to their souls, we may believe, and to society, most certainly—of dedicating them to the “Lord who has bought them;” of admitting them to the privileges of his covenant; and bringing them up in his holy admonition. Consider well his own words, “Except *any one* is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The *birth of water* is their entrance into the visible pale of God’s kingdom here on earth. The *birth of the Spirit* is their sanctification;—“the renewing of the Holy Ghost,” by which they are vitally united with the Saviour, and become spiritually and truly the children of God. The one is “the outward and visible sign:” the other is “the inward and spiritual grace *given* unto us.” The former, your children receive “by the washing of regeneration;” by the regular administration of baptism. The latter, is the gift of God only, and, so far as it is connected with means, and the fidelity of his people, is obtained by their faith and prayers in administering the sacrament, and by watching over the souls of baptized children, and carefully instructing them in all the doctrines of the gospel, and the duties of christian life. As both are necessary to a complete christian state, and a full hope in Christ, every thing in our power should be done to effect.

both; that your children may enter the kingdom of God, in this way, which their Saviour has appointed. Remember too what he further says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not:" and also the reason for it which he gives: "*for* of such is the kingdom of God." Will you say our Lord here means that children are *like believers*? How can this be a reason for their *coming to Christ*; except the likeness be that which qualifies for God's kingdom? Or will you say, as some do, "Let them come; who *forbids* them." "Who art thou that repliest against God?" How did they *come*, to whose case our Lord's words have particular reference? Pious people *brought them*. Children are to come to baptism, as they came to circumcision. In the days of Abraham many, it is not improbable, ridiculed the circumcision of children, as they now do their baptism, and pretended to prove that the ordinance could do them no good: for the arguments used apply with the same force to the one ordinance, as to the other. However man may reason, let God be true. When children are brought, in the arms of charity, through faith in Christ, and an humble trust in God's *mercies which have ever been of old*, and shall *endure forever*, their coming, we have good reason to believe, is according to his will. And does it not follow that they whose duty it is to perform "this charitable work," by neglecting it,

virtually "forbid them?" And *when Jesus sees it*, will he not be "much displeased" with those who keep them from him?

"But we think, brethren, better things of you, though," "to stir up your minds by way of remembrance," "we thus speak." We cannot suppose that you have serious doubts whether children should be brought to Christ, and we hope and exhort that no scruples of minor importance, nor negligence, nor inattention, cause you to frustrate the Lord's will and the provisions of the church respecting your offspring. In the darker ages of the church, when ignorance and superstition had obscured the splendours of the Saviour's doctrine, and usurped authority had restrained the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, there was a blind reliance upon religious rites; an undue confidence in external means. The propensity perhaps now is to the opposite extreme. Religious experience—the pious affections of the heart—are unquestionably of primary importance. But even these are not to be exalted above measure. Our purest affections are impure, and our salvation of God only. There is danger certainly of undue reliance on occasional excitement of our passions, and of ascribing that to the spirit of God, which is but the transient effect of animal feeling. While we carefully avoid formality, and trusting in outward rites, let us venerate whatever our Lord

has ordained. Neglect not the outward sign, and carefully seek for the inward grace.

But it is not so much respecting their own children that pious christians are generally negligent. Those who have an awakened sense of God's mercies in Jesus Christ, and are seriously concerned for their own salvation, are not, in many cases, indifferent respecting their offspring. But the souls of other children are also precious, and are purchased with the same blood. Some children have no parents, or none who can assist them. Others, are orphans as to all that concerns religion; they have no godfathers or godmothers, except charity shall provide them. And how excellent, how useful, is such charity! To become sponsors for the children of others, if it be done, as it ought to be, with conscientious seriousness, will add something to your cares, and perhaps to your labours. And what great good can we ever effect, without labour and care? If we "serve God with that" only "which costs us nothing," the service is of little worth. If we would live as christians, and obtain the reward of the righteous, we must live not to ourselves, but to the Lord whose we are. If a man is unwilling to do a charitable work, reasonably in his power, because it will cost him some trouble and care, "how dwelleth the love of God in him?" The christian is not to be weary in well doing. We should rather rejoice to have the opportunity



and power of contributing to the temporal comfort of others; and more when we can promote their spiritual good. What greater good can we do, than to be instrumental in uniting them in covenant with their Saviour, and preparing them for immortal blessedness? In a christian country too, like this, where the facility of religious education is so great, and the means so abundant, there is less ground of fear and concern in undertaking this good work, which may be truly called a "labour of love." With a moderate portion of care, the duty may, in most cases, be faithfully performed.

Consider seriously what weighty reasons there are for your engaging in this duty; and what great advantages are likely to result from it. Consider that unless some will undertake the religious education of children, they will, generally speaking, grow up in ignorance of their Saviour, and "without God in the world." Consider in every case to which you are called, whether, if you decline it, the duty can more conveniently, or will at all, be done by others? Consider which is the greater evil, that a child should be left to stray in the broad road of infidelity and sin; or that you should be burdened with additional cares? The benefit will be great to yourself. Such a work done for the love of Christ, and a pure desire to benefit your fellow creatures, will be an evidence to your own conscience that the

love of God dwelleth in you: it will brighten your hopes of immortal blessedness. Many who have not the means of other charity, can do this, which is the greatest of all, thus "laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may attain eternal life." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." You may, in such case, say with Peter, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee." And it will be better to the children than *silver* or *gold*. Experience has fully confirmed the blessedness of such charity, and if sponsors more generally performed their duty, the advantages would be still more evident. God has given his blessing to this charitable work. No christians more excellent have ever adorned his church than many of those who, in the language of the early fathers, *were regenerated to God in their infancy*.

This truly christian practice of mutually engaging to assist in the religious education of each other's children, among many other benefits, both to parents and children, has, when rightly viewed, and faithfully practised, a powerful effect in promoting among christian brethren friendly relations, and in uniting families by the endearing bonds of gratitude and love. The blessing extends to all the parties concerned. What pious parent will not rejoice to be thus assisted, if

necessary, in what concerns the present comfort, and the future happiness of his children? or will not rejoice in the reflection, that should it please God to remove him from this life, there is one at least who will, in the love of God, be their parent, and conduct their feeble steps through the perils of a sinful world, in the paths of righteousness and peace? These kind offices of charity knit together the hearts of God's people, as one family, even one body in Christ, and increase the happiness of religious society. The sponsors will naturally regard with more tender affection, the child whom thus they adopt in the love of Christ. And the child, as he arrives at maturity of understanding, ought to feel, and, we may suppose, will feel and cherish a grateful affection for his sponsors. Certainly there is much benefit, and many advantages, to encourage you in this great and most important duty.

Let it not, however, be supposed, that the care of baptized children appertains to the sponsors only. They are members of God's kingdom; they are a part of the christian family; they belong to that "household of faith," to which we are "especially" bound to "do good." Sacramentally, and so far as we are authorized to judge of their spiritual state, they "are regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's church," and we are bound to consider and to treat them as God's children by adoption, and our brethren in Jesus Christ. In common with

us, they are branches of him, the true Vine. In common with us, they are *grafted* into that *true olive tree*, from which *some of the branches*, the unbelieving Jews, *were broken off for unbelief*: with us, they *partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree*. What man can do, what can be effected by christian charity, to preserve them in this fellowship, to prevent their being taken away as fruitless branches, or broken off for unbelief, as christians we are bound to do. Our too general defect in this originates in part, as I conceive, and perhaps chiefly, in our inattention to a just distinction between those who are in the church, and those who are in the world. We are not to love the latter less than we now do; but the former more for the Lord's sake,—for their union with Christ,—for their covenant with God. How dreadful is the thought, that when the Lord has given such testimonials of his love and favour to baptized children, they may at last, through our negligence, be lost! We often enough hear the objection, and we too often see the melancholy fact, that those who were baptized in childhood, afterwards “turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” We would rejoice if the same might not be said of many “baptized in riper years.” But is it true of those children who so fall away from the christian faith, that they were faithfully brought up in the Lord's nurture and admonition?

Has the church, have those to whom the church committed this care, in nothing been deficient? Had they, in offering the child to baptism, a lively faith in the promises of God, and the means of grace? Did they then, and on suitable occasions since, fervently, and without ceasing, pray for God's spiritual benediction? Have christians uniformly considered and treated those children as members of Christ, and branches of his family? Have they duly instructed, admonished and watched over them, in the Lord? In a word, have they, as the church requires and expects, been "taught all things which a christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health?" Have they been "virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a christian life?" In most of these unhappy instances, it is believed, could the truth be known, the fault has been, not in the institution, but in the neglect of it. It is very impious, however common, to justify our neglect of duty by degrading the means of grace.

Let it then be well considered that the church is the guardian of baptized children, and is sacredly bound to nourish them with maternal care. She has wisely provided for their instruction, by requiring three sponsors; but all the three may die, or be absent, or neglect the duty. Such spiritual orphans, who have neither godfather nor godmother to nourish their souls and instruct them in the Lord, are not to be left

destitute. All christians are their spiritual fathers and mothers; all are bound, as occasion offers, and need requires, to conduct them in the paths of virtue and religion. I repeat, with confidence in the correctness and importance of the remark, that much of the evil under consideration is owing to inattention to the religious state of baptized children, and to the duties which we owe them as members of Christ. How affecting is our blessed Saviour's regard for little children, as we have it recorded in the 10th chapter of St. Mark, and the 18th of St. Matthew, compared with passages corresponding. With what kind affection does he take them in his arms and bless them. He declares such to be worthy members of his kingdom: he proposes them as the pattern for all true christians: pronounces a blessing on those who in his name receive, and a judgment upon such as offend them!\*

But be it still remembered that it is especially the duty of those who bring children to baptism, to see to their religious education. In a particular and spiritual sense, they are your children. Would you forsake those whom, in Christ, you have adopted? The church has intrusted them to your care. In private baptism, (which is permitted, and ought to be practised, only in

\* To offend, means to put a stumbling block in their way—to cause them to fall from their christian profession. It ought then to be seriously considered whether, to neglect the religious education of children, be not in fact to offend them.

cases of necessity,) it should be considered that you who present the children are bound as their sponsors; and though the formalities of the baptismal covenant should not, as the church has appointed, be observed, you should not be the less willing to perform the important duty. All believing parents should consider themselves bound to do this for their children. Both reason and religion require it at their hands.

Let it not satisfy your conscience to have engaged in so good a work. In ancient times, sponsors were considered as guardians of the spiritual life of those children for whom they had become sureties; by wholesome restraints and good instructions they conducted them in the paths of godliness; and cherished for them a particular and tender affection. So tender, so parental, was supposed to be this affection, that, by a law of Justinian, afterwards confirmed in some councils,\* a man might not marry a woman for whom, when she was a child, he had been a sponsor. However unwarrantable may have been the prohibition, the affection, which it supposes, ought to be realized. The relation is near and interesting, and connected with the purest principles of faith and piety. With your heart, and in your prayers, devote and commend them to their God and Saviour. With unremitting vigilance watch over their morals, and guide them in the way they

\* See Bingham, v. i. p. 513.

should go. You should carefully instruct them in the nature, the privileges, and obligations of that covenant of life eternal, into which they were admitted by baptism. Teach them the fall of man; the wickedness of an unrenewed heart; the mercy of God in Jesus Christ; and all the duties of a christian life. At suitable times, and on suitable occasions, "call upon them to hear sermons," and to be constant and devout in their attendance on divine worship. The most essential "articles of the christian faith," are briefly "contained in the apostles' creed;" which therefore should be taught and explained. The vulgar prejudice which, of late years, has been excited against creeds, originates, we may fear, in hostility to the doctrines which they teach. If any can discover that this venerable formula of christian faith does not contain a true summary of the most essential truths and doctrines revealed and taught in the sacred scriptures; or if they can substitute a better compendium of what is most necessary to be received, let them reject the apostles' creed; remembering, however, that whatever they teach in sermons, or other discourse, except it be in the pure and unperverted language of the Divine Spirit, rests as much, at least, on human authority, as the creeds and articles adopted by the church. Till we can find a better, let us venerate and avail ourselves of this, which is the most ancient, and most approved; not esteeming it the less because our forefathers, for



many ages, have in these words, "with their mouth made confession unto salvation:" nor because such myriads of saints and martyrs have testified and sealed with their blood, that this is "the gospel which they preached, which they received, and wherein they stood; by which also they were saved."

You ought to pray for children, and with them, and teach them to pray; and especially to "learn," to understand, and to use "the Lord's prayer." By some christians, indeed, this seems to be as little esteemed, and as little used, as the creed; but, till you can find a better prayer, and one prescribed by greater authority, to teach your children, teach them this. "The ten commandments" are an epitome of the moral law; they are a summary of the duty which we owe to God, and to our fellow creatures. Let these be taught them, and duly explained; not forgetting carefully and continually to direct their view to the "two commandments" on which, as our Lord has shown, "hang all the law and the prophets:"—to love God with all our heart, with the utmost energy of the soul and mind; and to love our neighbour as ourself, doing to others as we desire them to do to us. These "and all other things which a christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health," should baptized children be carefully taught, that they may know, and clearly understand, and have in continual remembrance, "what a solemn vow, promise and

profession, they made by you," when, by the sacramental covenant, they were "made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of his kingdom." Teach them what faith and diligence God requires, on their part, to make their "calling and election sure," and finally inherit eternal life. For this purpose, it is of the utmost importance "that these children be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a christian life; remembering always, that baptism doth represent unto us our profession; which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died, and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness; continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living."

Finally, let it be duly considered and carefully taught them, that, at a suitable time, when their understandings are matured, and their minds well instructed, they ought, in God's presence, and before the congregation of his people, to take upon themselves the baptismal obligation: to "renew," in their own name, "the solemn promise and vow; ratifying and confirming the same; and acknowledging themselves bound to believe and to do all those things, which.....their sponsors then undertook for them." "So soon as they are *sufficiently* instructed in the.....church catechism set forth for that purpose;" so soon as they have

obtained a competent knowledge of their duty to God, and of their salvation in Christ, and are prepared, with a right faith, and sincere piety, to devote themselves to God in a religious profession; they should "be brought," with their own voluntary consent and desire, "to the bishop:" they should be instructed how, and when, to receive confirmation.

May the Lord, in his great goodness and mercy, give you hearts and wisdom to perform these very important duties: may he guide you by his spirit, and strengthen you with his grace. Great, and most encouraging, are the promises, which, in his word, he gives to those parents, and others, who bring up children in his faith and fear. If you do your duty as sponsors; as their parents in Christ; as friends to their souls; if you watch over their steps, and commend them to God in your daily prayers; if you give them seasonable counsel, and wholesome instruction; lead them in the paths of virtue, and the way of salvation; train them up in the way that a christian should go, and according to the precepts and the example of their blessed Saviour; you may humbly hope that in them and for them, God, even your own God, will give you his blessing,—will reward both you and them, for this labour of love. Through the instrumentality of your pious care, God will preserve them from many evils of the present life; he will make them a comfort to

yourselves, and a blessing to the world; and in a better world, will make them your crown of rejoicing. With grateful affection they will remember, to their latest breath, your pious care; and, through endless ages, will bless their God, for such friends indeed.

That the Lord may give you grace for his sake, and for the love of their souls, in due time and place to bring your children to Christ; and that the rest of your conduct and care may be "according to this beginning," is the humble prayer of

Your friend and spiritual pastor,

A. V. GRISWOLD.

