

with the best wishes
A SERMON,

H. B.

DELIVERED AT

THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

Sabbath School Association.

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*By the REV. BENJAMIN M. PALMER.*  
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WITH A REPORT OF THE

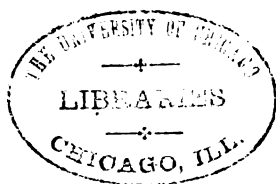
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A SERMON.

MARK, X. 14.

Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

IN ancient days the prophet Isaiah announced the pastoral office of the Saviour in the following interesting language: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom." And we accordingly behold him upon the occasion to which our text has reference, verifying the description which the evangelical prophet gave. For in a verse or two after our text the Redeemer is represented to have taken these little children up in his arms, to have put his hands upon them and blessed them. What tender solicitude! in what more than parental affection does he appear in this beautiful portion of history to manifest to these little ones! His disciples, knowing that these children were too young to be benefitted by his instructions, and that they were not labouring under diseases that required the aid of his healing powers mercy, did not wish their master to be unnecessarily disturbed, and would have thrust aside the importunate parents, who brought their tender charge to Christ. But "the Lord seeth not as man seeth." Christ is pleased with the part the parents acted, and displeased with the undiscerning zeal of the disciples, who endeavoured to frustrate their object; and he has laid down in the text a general principle,

according to which in similar cases he requires his church to be governed, "Suffer little children," &c.

Let us from these words consider

1. The duty here inculcated, and
2. The reason on which it is founded.

1. The duty inculcated is, to suffer little children to come unto Christ and not forbid them. It is evident from the very circumstances of the case before us, that it is not necessary to consider such coming as voluntary on the part of children, or to found the right of children or the duty of parents or others in relation to them, on the circumstance of such voluntary concurrence on their part. The children in question were so young, as to be brought to Christ in their parents' arms, and Luke expressly calls them infants. Neither were they brought to receive any temporal blessing; for they are not represented as labouring under any disease or calamity; but they were brought, says Matthew, in the parallel passage, that Christ "might put his hands on them and pray." Mark and Luke represent the design to be "that he might touch them," and Mark in a verse or two beneath, states the action of Christ in respect to them to be "his putting his hands on them and blessing them." From all these considerations it is manifest that their *spiritual good* was sought by these parents, and that it was with a view to their spiritual good, that Christ gave the general command in the text. These parents too give every evidence of sincere and acceptable piety. Many persons came to Christ themselves, and brought their children to him for temporal blessings such as the cure or removal of diseases. Many thus followed him for "the loaves and fishes" of temporal benefits, who had no anxiety for spiritual favors and set no value on them. These pious parents there-

fore, bringing their infant and unconscious offspring to the Redeemer for his spiritual blessings, and Christ receiving them in this view and rebuking the disciples for forbidding them and pronouncing, that of such children is the kingdom of God, render the whole transaction peculiarly favourable to the doctrine of infant church-membership and to the practice of infant baptism as founded on that doctrine, standing in intimate connection with it and flowing from it. Abraham the father of *true believers* thus initiated by God's command his children into the covenant and family of God, and set them apart by a significant ceremonial seal as his. The *believing parents* in our text have encouragement from Abraham's Lord to bring their children to him for his blessing, and hear him say, "Of such is kingdom of God." The passage therefore, and the transaction connected with it, give no small sanction to the right of believer's children to a baptismal dedication, and to the duty of believing parents, to put them in possession of this right.

2. Children may be considered as permitted, invited and encouraged to come to Christ, or to be brought to Christ *through the medium of such religious instruction* as is adapted to make them acquainted with his requirements and truths. If there is any duty enjoined in scripture with peculiar emphasis, and the performance of which is enforced by peculiar promise, or recommended by the best precedents and examples, it is that of the pious instruction and religious education of all children, and more especially of the children of the righteous. With what strong terms of cordial approbation does God testify of Abraham! "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." In the time of Moses, that duty was judged to be of such vital importance, that this distinguished legislator again and again enforced its observance on the people of whom he had the charge, "These words," says he "which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall 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." Joshua, his successor, though he was the commander in chief of all the hosts of Israel, thought it not beneath him, but rather regarded it as the brightest ornament he could wear, that his family should be trained in the paths of piety "Choose you this day," said he to the men whom he governed, "whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." David, when he had discharged his public duties as the king of Israel, "returned to bless his household." And so solicitous was he, that that son, who after himself was to be seated on the throne, should be able to administer the affairs of the kingdom in a pious and profitable manner, that he gave him this solemn and affectionate charge, "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; if thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever." The same Psalmist represents the Israelites of his day as bearing testimony to the fidelity of their ancestors in the religious instructions they had imparted to their posterity. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old." Ps. xlv. 1. And he

says (lxxviii. 5.) "God established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a *law* in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children who should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children." And Solomon transmits and inculcates the same sentiments and duties on his son. The book of Proverbs is full of his injunctions and instructions on this subject; some of them addressed to the young, exciting them to becoming efforts to obtain heavenly wisdom; others, urging such as sustain the parental relation, or in any other connection have the charge of the rising generation to imbue their minds with heavenly and divine instruction. "If thou criest after wisdom and seekest for her as for hid treasure, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." In relation to the part he had acted towards his own son, he says "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom: I have led thee in right paths." Isaiah, in a prayer to God, makes the following declaration, "the father to the children shall make known thy truth." The New Testament declarations on this point are in perfect accordance with the spirit and precepts of the old. The Apostle Paul explicitly lays his injunctions on the primitive believers. "And ye parents provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Further, children should be brought to Christ by being conducted by their parents or guardians to the sanctuary which is Christ's house, that they may there learn his will and be *publicly taught* their duty.

3. When children are directed to be "suffered and not forbidden to come to Christ," it is still further implied, that it is *their duty and privilege* voluntarily to choose his instructions, and learn his heavenly lessons and obey them, as soon as their understandings are capable of comprehending, and their memories of retaining them. Very ample and very express are the recommendations and precepts of the word of God in relation to this particular. Solomon's writings are replete with them, and "the other scriptures" are by no means destitute of testimonies on this head. "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early, shall find me." "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." "My son give me thy heart." "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." How humbly young Solomon acknowledged his deficiencies, and how fervently and acceptably he prayed for heavenly wisdom, may be learned by any one who will read the 3d. Chapter of the 1st. book of Kings. "Come ye children," says the Psalmist, "hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." "O God! thou hast taught me from my youth" "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."

It would be needless to multiply farther particular testimonies and authorities on this part of our subject; and more fully to enlarge upon them would consume time, that ought to be employed on another part of the discourse. We shall only pass on to consider very briefly in the

2d place. The reason, on which the duty is founded. "For of such is the Kingdom of God." This

phrase is evidently used in at least two senses in the New-testament, to signify either the church of Christ on earth, or the place of eternal blessedness in heaven. Understood in the former of these senses, it affords abundant encouragement to pious parents, such as those who are concerned in the text appear evidently to have been, to introduce in a visible manner their children into the church by its initiating rite, and to follow up this "work of faith and labour of love" by that course of religious culture and instruction to which they become obligated by the very act of baptismal dedication. If such children legally belong or are scripturally connected with the church, they ought to partake intimately, largely and constantly of the instructions which she imparts to her children both in the written word and published gospel. And christian parents who bring them into the church, and the church which receives them should see to it, that they have "line upon line and precept upon precept"

If we consider the words as implying, that the kingdom of future eternal glory will consist in a great and predominant degree of those who die in infancy, or of those who in their tender years were brought to a belief and acknowledgment of the truth, and an embrace of the gospel, it is an idea in the highest degree probable in itself, and that furnishes a motive peculiarly strong for doing every thing in our power to pre-occupy the minds of children with religious thoughts and instructions, that shall operate as an antidote and a guard against those poisonous and soul ruining sentiments which they may hear advanced and advocated in their future intercourse in the world. Although the scriptures are not as explicit on the subject of the condition of deceased in-

ants, as on many others, yet, since the promises of God to his own people are so decisive in relation to their children, and his regard expressed for them so great, there is ground for cherishing the belief of the future blessedness of such *of them* as die in infancy; and since many of the children even of the wicked die before they commit *actual* transaction, the thought is not presumptuous, that the atonement of the second Adam takes away the pollution entailed by the Apostasy of the first, and that all who die at this early period go to increase the population of the celestial world.

There are others who imagine, that by the phrase "of such is the kingdom of God," we are to understand, not literally children but figuratively *adults resembling children* in their simple and unassuming character, their unambitious, humble and dependent deportment. Whatever force there may be in this idea, from it we would derive an argument for suffering all children in the way of instruction to come or to be brought to Christ. For if children notwithstanding the moral depravity which is inseparable from their nature, as corrupt branches of a corrupt stock, or polluted streams from a poisonous fountain, are from their simplicity and comparative innocence, before they are hardened in sin by habit and by the example of the world, proposed as a model for the imitation of the disciples of Christ, we draw from that circumstance a valid argument in favour of their early religious instruction. Let such light be poured into their understandings, let such impressions be made upon their hearts, let such tenderness be imparted to their conscience, as by the blessing of God may issue in their conversion; or if it do not, may serve to fortify them against the influence of infectious ex-

ample, and make it long before, they can with a quiet mind bring themselves to "stand in the way of sinners and to sit in the seat of the scornful." How many are *savingly converted* in consequence of faithful and complete religious instruction imparted to them in the period of childhood, especially when accompanied by bright example, and enforced by fervent prayer! How many, who are not converted, are rendered moral and kept so, notwithstanding all the enticements and examples of the vicious and the profligate! How many, who ultimately succeed in "making themselves as vile" as others, require years to do it, in consequence of the long and strong restraints, which conscience, enlightened by a correct and pious education, imposes on them! In whichever of these three ways religious instruction operates, it presents a motive irresistible to every rational well disposed mind for "training up a child in the way he should go." But often sound and saving conversion sooner or later ensues.

We have endeavoured to illustrate, though briefly, the two points proposed for particular consideration. It remains that we *improve* the subject. And it admits of various and serious improvement. It admits of an appeal, that ought to go with the keenness of a "two-edged sword" to the heart of every one that bears the honored but awfully responsible name of *Parent*. We cannot however indulge ourselves at present in applying it to literal parents, though the manners of the age, the habits of the place, the present Providence of God, and the word of truth would render it in this connection, most solemnly applicable. We have now time only to bring the subject to bearing on the various departments of the Sabbath

School system, whose operations we would exhibit, and whose interests we design to promote.

Sabbath Schools originated in England. They were the invention of benevolence for the purpose of teaching such children to read, as, from the poverty of their circumstances, or the constancy of their employment, had no access to the ordinary sources of instruction during the week. But this was not their only nor their ultimate design. They were intended to be, and they have actually proved, a most powerful and efficient machinery in aid of the cause of morality and religion, particularly among the inferior and unfortunate orders of mankind. They were designed to have, and they actually have produced, a most manifest and extensively meliorating effect on the habits, the manners and the morals of millions, both by their immediate and remote influences. Thousands, and tens of thousands in England, Scotland, Ireland and continental Europe, have been refined, civilized, improved, moralized and made happy by them. Not a few have in addition to all this been rendered truly holy. Testimonies numerous and decisive in proof of the correctness of these statements could easily be produced from a variety of quarters. The Sabbath School scheme has within a few years been taken up with zeal and vigour in this western world, and scarce a day passes, or intelligence from distant quarters of our country arrives, without bringing an account of the increase, progress, and success of Sabbath Schools. And, though vastly less needed in our favoured and happy country, than in the ignorance, vice and wretchedness of the old world, yet even here they are abundantly required.

Two years ago the business was commenced in this city under circumstances disheartning and discoura-

ging. Backed by no patronage, and encountering many objections from the luke-warm and the indifferent, as well as from many well meaning persons who did not understand the nature nor know the value, but have since realized the importance of the object, a few adventurers determined to do something. They did not "despise the day of small things," but commenced their humble efforts, and have had the pleasure to see, not only their own efforts thrive, but their example followed in the Methodist, Episcopal, Baptist and Presbyterian churches. The result of their labors may be judged of in part by the numerous objects of their instruction assembled in this house, and by the Report which is drawn up of their progress, success and prospects. They found scarce any want of literary instruction among the indigent of our city. We stand clear in the eyes of God and man of every degree of charge, in relation to this matter. If ever a community did its duty in respect to the provision made to teach the poor, this community has. But they found a most deplorable destitution of religious instruction, and to impart that, they commenced their operations. They found religious ignorance, and all the vices connected with it, in every quarter into which they penetrated. And, would to God, my brethren, religious ignorance were confined to the huts of poverty. Unhappily its darkest, deepest shades are extensively to be found among those who "dwell in ceiled houses." The conductors of this institution subject themselves every sabbath to a tax of four or five hours on their time, health, strength, and patience, as well as often through the week, to a tour through the city in quest of objects to be benefited by their self-denying efforts and pious labours. But they have pecuniary expenses to encounter in the

purchase of books for use and for reward, and in procuring needful clothing for those of their little charge, who assign the want of this as a reason for declining to avail themselves of the proffered religious instruction. To meet these exigences, they make this day their appeal to all who think their object worthy to be patronized and promoted; and presuming, that a simple statement of such facts as these is argument enough to procure them all the aid they need, and that all the eloquence in the world would not prevail, or ought not to prevail, where this consideration does not, we will leave it to your understandings and your heart to dictate, what you ought to do, only observing, that I have no doubt, œconomy and fidelity will regulate and direct the appropriation of whatever is bestowed.

We will direct our remaining observations to the Instructors of this Sabbath School; to the parents whose tender charge enjoys its benefits, and to the favoured objects of this system of spiritual benevolence.

To you, my "fellow workers in the Gospel of Christ and in the kingdom of God," powerful auxiliaries to the "watchmen on the walls of Zion," I would say your work is humble, but pre-eminently great, useful and glorious. You do not claim, and probably may never find your names on the page of the historian, in the song of the poet, in the production of the orator or in the records of the statesman. But, if you are faithful in your work, and perform it upon proper principles, your "record will be on high," and your transactions registered above, when the names of Cæsar and Alexander, and others whose fame, or rather, as will one day appear, whose infamy has been rung through the world, will perish and their

"memory will rot." The world is now turned upside down, and sin has upturned it. The great men on our globe have, in many, perhaps in most instances been the greatest transgressors that have occupied it, with a very few exceptions. Their progress has been marked with blood, their skirts have been stained with blood, their empire consolidated by the unnecessary and wilful waste of human lives. But if your humble efforts are successful in "turning any into righteousness," in saving any from "the wrath to come," your recompence, tho' a recompence of grace, will be unspeakable and eternal. But, that your work may prosper, attend to the spirit with which you undertake and conduct it; let it be the humble, holy, unostentatious, unambitious, yet zealous spirit of him who "went about doing good." A contrary spirit may, unless you are vigilant, obtain a place among you. Instantly, seriously, sacredly resist feelings of unhallowed jealousy, and unholy rivalry. Adhere to the system you have adopted, to prevent, or to cure disorders of this nature. Let harmony mark and influence all your proceedings, the spirit of doing most good be the basis of them, and where, after consultation and discussion on particular measures, you will differ, let the more general sentiment freely prevail, and the disagreeing individuals fall in with it. Your object is one, your work is one, your charge is one, and your reward will be one. Commend yourselves and your undertaking to God in separate and united prayers. To carry your system of exertions to the best result, punctuality and fidelity, as well as due subordination, are essentially requisite in the individual parts assigned you; punctuality in the time of your attendance, fidelity both in understanding and discharging your respective duties. When

you find it necessary, from the increase of the objects of your benevolence, to increase your own numbers, endeavour to obtain and select as your helpers, persons of solid practical piety; or, if this be impracticable, get as near to this mark as you can, and value such: for yours is a work of too much self-denial, to be well discharged by unstable or by worldly minds. And may you all possess both in your undertaking and in the everlasting recompence of it, that "peace which passeth all understanding."

Let me next address the parents of these favoured children. Highly favoured parents, what gratitude do you owe to God, and under him, to those who encourage and assist your children in becoming acquainted with the sacred scriptures. Some of you never attended to this work yourselves, till these your friends found you out, and brought their friendly and affectionate offers to your doors. Your children learn in a few weeks what otherwise they would not have learned in several years, or perhaps never learned at all. Others of you, though you made it a matter of conscience in part to "bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," find you can do it now with incomparably more ease and advantage than before. Your children, through the inviting associations connected with a Sabbath School, learn cheerfully, what before they learned reluctantly, learn much, where before they learned little. Cordially and constantly co-operate with those, who require nothing more than your countenance and encouragement at home in what they do when their pupils are assembled. Let no trifling reason or excuse induce you to detain, even once from their Sabbath exercises, your offspring thus taken by a friendly hand and conducted in the path of life. What tho^s

you see no immediate striking benefit showing itself in the moral and religious character of your little ones. The seed is sowing that may spring up to everlasting life, perhaps while you live, perhaps while you are sleeping in the dust of death. Do your part, and leave God, and trust God, to do his.

Children, happy are you, happy to possess such privileges, happier still, if you improve them. Only see what a great change two years, and with some of you less time, has made in your condition. Not long since, some of you probably were both ignorant and wicked; no body paid any attention to you, or gave you any religious instruction; you broke the Sabbath, and cursed and swore, and never went to church, and understood nothing of God and Christ, and heaven and hell. But now, you are better taught, and have learned many good things from God's own word, the Bible. Some of you can repeat by memory whole books of it, as well as several hymns and catechisms. You ought to be very thankful to God, and very attentive to what is said to you by your parents, and instructors. You ought to learn more and more of God's holy will, and pray to him to bless to you what you do learn, to give you a new heart, to help you to love him, and to believe and serve Christ, and to obey your parents. Strive yourselves, and pray to God, to keep you from all wicked practices which you were once guilty of, and which you see other children indulge in. Pray to him night and morning and at other times; pray for yourselves and for your parents and teachers, think over and over often in your minds, what you learn on the Sabbath, and be like Josiah, who "while he was yet young, served the God of his father;" and remember, that God has

said "I love them that love me and they that seek me early shall find me." Amen.

