

AN
ADDRESS
TO
CHRISTIAN PARENTS
ON THE
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
OF THEIR
CHILDREN.

BY
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MINISTER OF ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, EDINBURGH.

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ADDRESS TO PARENTS.

My Christian Friends, I beg leave to recommend to your serious attention, the exhortations and the statements which are contained in the following pages. They refer to the sacred duties prescribed by that relation in which you stand to your children; and are intended to promote, through the medium of your pious exertions, the honour and prosperity, the present comfort and everlasting happiness, of those

who should be dear to you as your own souls.

That the subject to which I solicit your attentive regard is of high moment, none of you will venture to question or deny. Every person who is accustomed to reflect, or qualified to judge, will acknowledge that, whether we look to the welfare of individuals, of families, or of society at large, it is of great magnitude and universal concern. But to *you*, in whom the speculative conclusions of reason, and the more impressive lessons of experience, are quickened and enforced by the feelings of tender affection, it must wear an aspect of peculiar interest and importance, and suggest obligations the strongest and most endearing which you can be called upon to fulfil.

I hope that in this light it has often presented itself to your minds. I hope that you have often thought of the peculiar character which you bear, of the manner in which it ought to be sustained, and of the effects which may be produced by the discharge or the neglect of its sacred functions. And I hope that some of you at least have not failed to regard your children habitually as rational and immortal beings, and to act towards them in that capacity a faithful and affectionate part. Nay, I must do you the justice to acknowledge, that there are not a few among you, whose conduct in this respect is most laudable and exemplary; who shew, in the attention which they pay to their offspring, that they understand the true nature, and feel the full force

of parental obligation ; who make the duty we refer to, an essential and permanent part of that practical system, by which they manifest their Christian principles. To such of you, I need scarcely offer any encouragement to persevere in the wise and virtuous course you are pursuing. That encouragement, I presume, is already afforded you in the marked and pleasing success which is gradually accompanying your labours, in the improvement and piety displayed by those over whom you are watching, and in the high satisfaction with which you must contemplate their progress in what is equally excellent and necessary. Even though your best efforts may appear to fail—though heedlessness and perversity may frustrate all your endeavours in the

mean time, and darken your prospects with respect to the future life and condition of your tender charge, still you have remaining the cheering conviction that you have obeyed the commandment of God, and satisfied the strongest and noblest claims of natural affection. And Scripture and observation forbid you to cast away the hope that the pains you have bestowed, and the anxiety you have felt, and the intercessions you have made, will not be fruitless in the end—that the good seed which you have sown may yet spring up, and produce those “fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus to the praise and glory of God.”

But, notwithstanding what I have said, it cannot be denied, and should not be concealed, that there prevails

among you a very general and melancholy indifference to the spiritual improvement and eternal welfare of your children. This fact is obvious from your domestic arrangements, in which scarcely an hour in the week is devoted to their religious instruction ; while, in every thing connected with the world, they are reared and tended with unremitting care. It is obvious, from the manner in which they are permitted to spend the time, which not only might, but ought to be employed, either at home or in the house of God, in exercises of a serious kind. It is obvious, from the profane and vicious conduct which they so very frequently exhibit, and which, in a great measure at least, must be ascribed to the criminal inattention that they meet with from their

parents, who seem to think it a duty to allow them to speak and to live as they please. It is obvious, from the deplorable ignorance which they manifest when they come to ask religious privileges, and when, by previous tuition, they should have been ready to embrace them. And it is obvious, from the licentious indulgence and atrocious crimes into which they afterwards plunge with so little reluctance and remorse, and which may be so easily traced to the idle and the evil habits of early life.

Such being the fact, I offer to you the word of exhortation. I offer it to parents in every rank and condition of life. I offer it especially to you, who have not only been yourselves baptised into the Christian faith, and also procured the administration of that

rite to your children, but continue to profess a regard for those solemn engagements into which, on those occasions, you virtually or expressly entered. And may God carry it home to your hearts, and lead you by his grace to a corresponding practice !

I. BE CAREFUL TO IMPART TO YOUR CHILDREN THE KNOWLEDGE OF RELIGION.

If they be kept in ignorance of religion, nothing that is good can be expected from them: they can neither live with comfort to themselves, nor with advantage to others: they cannot, at least, be so useful as members of society; and they cannot at all follow the path which leads to heaven. How shall they believe in doctrines of which they have never heard? How shall they per-

form duties, with the nature and obligations of which they are wholly unacquainted? How shall they feel and act with propriety, if they know not the rules by which their minds and conduct ought to be regulated?

Were it not for the marvellous carelessness of many in this respect, and of many too from whom we should look for better things, I would not have put these simple questions, nor done any thing more than merely announced the exhortation. But as there are so many on whom the carelessness I have mentioned is chargeable, I must remind you explicitly, and beseech you to *keep* in remembrance, that you may as well expect to reap a plentiful harvest from the field which has never been sown, as to see those maintaining a Christian

character in the world, who have not been taught the principles upon which that character should be formed, and the graces of which it should be composed. Have you it in view, that your children shall make a figure in any of the conditions of civil life? In that case you always deem it necessary that they shall have a course of preparatory instruction,—that they shall not enter into any department whatever, till they have been previously made acquainted with its privileges and its duties, with the exertions it requires, the difficulties it presents, and the facilities it affords;—and do you not take special care that they shall receive this appropriate knowledge, and be thus qualified for putting their talents, their industry, and their time to the best account? But is not

the case of religion quite analogous to this? Is it not equally necessary, if you desire that your children shall lead a pious and holy life, that they should be instructed in piety and holiness? And are not you bound to impart to them this instruction as largely and as perfectly as you can; to bestow upon their education in this particular, the highest degree of attention, inasmuch as religion is infinitely superior to every thing which can attract the notice, or engage the activity of men? Why, then, are you so careless, so reluctant to train up your children in the knowledge of divine things? Why that backwardness to engage in such an important duty? And why that cold indifference with which the duty is frequently performed, when it is performed at all?

You may not be so bold, as formally and explicitly to justify such conduct, by offering specific excuses for it in answer to these questions. But it is unquestionable that such conduct prevails to a wide extent; and that various excuses are alleged by parents, either to justify themselves for it beforehand to their own minds, or to soothe their consciences after they have been guilty of it. Now with regard to these, there is one general remark which I would make, and it is this,—whenever any of them occurs to your thoughts, you have reason to be on your guard, to suspect that some deception is about to be practised upon you, and to assume the attitude of defence and resistance. You cannot fail to have, in some respect or other, a conviction that your children

should receive religious instruction. Now this is a conviction of duty; and that which tends to weaken a conviction of duty, or to make you think lightly of it altogether, can never be a sound or a safe monitor. These excuses, to which you listen so readily, though they should assume the form of an angel of light,—though they should be specious and plausible in the extreme,—are still nothing but the evil spirit taking advantage of your simplicity, or your corruption, to enfeeble your sense of right and wrong, and to persuade you that you are acting innocently, because something can be said in palliation of your misconduct. Let me say a few words on some of those particular considerations, by which you try to excul-

pate, or at least to excuse yourselves in the case alluded to.

1. You may perhaps allege, that you are not qualified to give your children religious instruction.—This is a plea which strikes deeper than you may at first imagine. It suggests the following questions, which should go far into your hearts and consciences:—Are you really destitute of religious knowledge? Can you not read the Scriptures? And are you ignorant of the truths which they contain? Are you prepared to admit this, and are you living contented in the midst of spiritual darkness, with the light of the gospel shining around you? Have you taken, and are you taking, no pains to acquire the information which you have not, and yet ought to have? Are you satisfied that

you yourselves should “perish for lack of knowledge,” where so much is within your reach; and are you satisfied that your children should perish along with you? Have you received baptism for your children, and how have you fulfilled the engagements you then took upon you, to bring them up in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” Are you so utterly incompetent, that you cannot tell them any thing about God, and Christ, and duty, and heaven, and hell? Or, knowing a little of these subjects, are you careful to impart to them the little that you know? And feeling your personal obligations to instruct them, are you daily labouring to qualify yourselves for the better discharge of that important duty? Is it your grief that you are so deficient in

that respect; and is it your anxious wish and endeavour, by every means to supply the deficiency? Have you endeavoured to get your children taught the art of reading? Having succeeded in this, are you careful to make them read the scriptures, the catechisms, and such other religious books as you can procure for them, calculated to edify them? And have you embraced the advantages afforded by Sunday schools, and by other institutions of a similar description? In short, have you seriously tried, have you persevered in the attempt, have you done every thing that you could, to furnish their minds with Christian knowledge?—Put these questions to yourselves; lay your hand upon your heart, and declare, as before God, whether or not this be the fact,

that you are not so destitute of the requisite qualifications, as you are indifferent to the subject of religion, and far from being anxious to make your children acquainted with it;—that, if you get them fed, clothed, and educated according to their station in life, all is done which you think essential to their welfare.

2. Again, you may perhaps excuse yourselves by alleging that it would give you too much trouble, and would occupy more of your time and attention than you can easily spare.—I acknowledge that the task of giving your children religious instruction will, in all cases, require no small portion of your time, and that, in certain circumstances, it will be attended with considerable difficulty. But if such apologies

are to be sustained for the neglect of duty, what duty is there that will not be neglected ; for what duty is there of which a conscientious and persevering discharge will not, in some instances, be productive of trouble and uneasiness ? Though the labour of instructing your children in the things of God were a thousand times more arduous and harassing than it actually is, still you have no right to decline it. Prescribed by the great Author of your being, and involving the spiritual and eternal welfare of those who are connected with you by the tenderest ties, it is incumbent on you, no less from a regard to the divine authority, than from the dictates of natural affection. The obligation to give your children religious instruction, as far as they are qualified to

receive it, cannot be disputed. And you have no title to grudge any inconvenience, or toil, or sacrifice, which the fulfilment of this obligation may require of you, till you think yourselves entitled to grudge the exertions which are necessary to provide for their animal subsistence and worldly comfort, or till you are prepared to assert that the body is more precious than the soul, and time more important than eternity.

3. Another excuse is sometimes furnished, by under-rating the importance and the efficacy of religious knowledge. You may tell us, that it is very possible for your children to have this knowledge, and yet to act inconsistently with it in after life.—This, indeed, may happen; and we must admit that, unfortunately, it often does happen. But

such a contingency, surely, does not, in any measure, affect the statement, that, in order to lead a religious life, they must be in possession of religious knowledge. Though not an absolute security for good conduct, such knowledge is at least an essential pre-requisite to it. A man with his eyes open may wander from the right path; but this can never be a reason for us shutting our eyes when we travel, especially in a rugged and difficult way. With the light of the gospel shining upon us, we may be so foolish or so perverse, as to prefer walking in moral darkness; but if we would abide in the path of duty and of salvation, as we are bound and profess a willingness to do, how are we to do so unless we have "the light of life?" And let this also be recollected,

that while the religious knowledge which you impart to your children is necessary for their good conduct, and an excellent means for insuring it, yet though it should not be attended immediately with that happy effect, though they should act unworthy of such an advantage, and live as if they did not enjoy it; though all this should happen, yet their acquaintance with the Gospel may, through divine grace, be afterwards the instrument of their conversion, and render more easy and more certain that return to God, which a gross ignorance of his will and character would have completely prevented.

4. Another excuse for neglecting to instruct children in religion, is the allegation that they are incapable of understanding its truths.—This excuse is

at the very least as frivolous as those which we have already considered. Children, I am fully persuaded, understand these things much more readily and much more perfectly than we are generally aware of; and, at any rate, the very best way of improving their powers of comprehension is to furnish them with materials upon which these may be employed, and to afford them opportunities of reflection and inquiry. Besides, if, when you talk of children not being able to understand the truths of Christianity, any thing more is implied than their not being able to see the meaning of these, so as to have their affections moved and their conduct influenced, you forget both the province and the reach of the human mind on this subject. It is not neces-

sary, and it is not possible that children should understand *thoroughly* and *intimately* the religious knowledge which yet it may be very expedient to communicate to them. Were they never to be informed of any thing in religion till they could be made to see its intimate nature and its perfect reasonableness, and all its connections, and bearings, and tendencies, they would never be informed of any thing in religion at all: because you can no more give, than they can receive, the explanation which in that case would be requisite. To what does your own knowledge of religion amount? You know that such and such things are revealed; but you know them only as matters of fact which you are bound to receive on the testimony of God, and which derive

their authority solely from this source. *How* they exist, and *why* they exist, it is not given you to know. That does not seem essential to the purpose for which they are revealed: and it is beyond the attainment of man in his present imperfect state. All that is required, in the first instance at least, is, that you impart to your children that which scripture communicates to you—that you tell them what God has been pleased to reveal in his word—that you store their memories with those interesting truths, and those holy precepts which are inculcated in the gospel, as of paramount importance and universal obligation.

Even taking your objection in a more limited sense, still it has no force in it, unless the sole object of giving your

children religious instruction were to make them profound and learned theologians, to qualify them for instructing others in all the most difficult, and therefore least useful points of divinity, and for baffling, by their ingenuity and acuteness and erudition, the hostile attempts of able and powerful adversaries. But you know well that this is neither the sole, nor the chief, nor the first object of giving your children religious instruction. The great end in view is to make them personally and individually good Christians, to fit them for being useful to society, for adorning the church of Christ upon earth, and for entering at last into heaven and glory. And surely for this end, their minds, young and tender as they are, must be considered as quite competent

to receive by degrees, to comprehend in a sufficient measure, and to retain distinctly, all that is necessary for accomplishing it. What, for example, should hinder children from knowing and believing that there is a God who made all things, and by whom all things are preserved and governed; that he is good and merciful to his creatures; that he is holy to hate sin, and just to punish it; that we have transgressed his law, and deserve his displeasure; that he has had pity on us, and sent Jesus Christ to save us from punishment; that in order to escape this punishment, we must put our confidence in the merits of the Redeemer, and repent of all our sins; that we must walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord; that God knows our inmost thoughts and most secret ac-

tions, and that for all these things he will bring us into judgment ; that there is a heaven where the righteous shall enjoy everlasting happiness, and a hell where the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction ? These, and similar truths, are sufficiently simple and interesting to go home to the understanding, and to make an impression on the memory, of every one who is not completely destitute of mental capacity. And your children must be wonderfully deficient, or your power of communicating knowledge extremely imperfect, if, by care and perseverance, you cannot fix in their minds such an acquaintance with these and other declarations of Scripture, as may serve to make them pious and holy.

But indeed we need not indulge in

conjecture or speculation on this point : we can appeal to fact. Numerous instances have come within our observation, of children well instructed in things pertaining to God and goodness ; and that the instances are not more numerous and more striking, is owing, not to any impossibility, nor to any difficulty in making the acquisition on their part, but to the neglect which they experience, and the injustice which they suffer, on the part of those under whose management they are naturally placed. And in pursuance of this appeal to fact, I may ask you, if you yourselves have felt any inconvenience, or any mischief to arise from being early instructed in the truths of religion ? Can you say, from experience, that it would have been far wiser to have al-

lowed you to grow up in total ignorance of what the Almighty has revealed in his word, or to have waited till your intellectual powers had acquired their full vigour? Or, on the supposition that you were actually neglected, whether by carelessness or design, do you see any reason for congratulating yourselves on that account, or for feeling gratitude to those who were so wise or so fortunate as to prevent you from becoming acquainted with Christianity? Your answer to these questions, I am persuaded, must be in the negative. You may have to regret, that more judgment and discretion were not employed in your religious education. You may have to regret, that a greater degree of attention was not bestowed upon you than you

actually received. You may, perhaps, have to regret, that you were totally neglected by those who should have cared for you, and left to pick up for yourselves such scanty gleanings of knowledge as you could accidentally obtain. But I am sure you have no reason to regret, that amongst the first ideas that were presented to your opening minds, were those of God and of a Saviour, of piety and of virtue. It is not possible for you to regret, that your earliest years, instead of being spent in idleness, or unprofitable study, or vain amusement, were devoted to the acquisition of knowledge, the most interesting and the most useful; of knowledge which has hitherto guided you in the path of duty, which has comforted you in many a disconsolate

hour, and which at once points out the way to immortality, and teaches you how to pursue it.

Whether then you have been neglected in your childhood, and have lamented the consequences of that neglect; or whether you have been carefully instructed at that period, and are satisfied of the advantages resulting from early instruction; still let your experience determine you to "train up your children in the way in which they should go," by imparting to them the blessings of religious knowledge. Do it betimes; do it diligently; employ every mean that may promise success; and persevere in the good work, till, under the blessing of God, they are made wise unto salvation.

II. TRAIN UP YOUR CHILDREN IN
THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION—ACCUSTOM
THEM TO THE EXERCISES OF PIETY AND
VIRTUE.

It too often happens, I fear, that those who are careful enough to make their children acquainted with religious truth, go no farther than the communication of mere knowledge. They tell them of the various particulars contained in revelation; they perhaps repeat these with frequency; and succeed in making a correct and lasting impression on the memory. But here they stop short; apparently regardless whether the information which has been acquired, remain a bare speculative attainment, or whether it be attended with good practical effects. It is owing to this strange carelessness about

the result, this sort of half measure, this short-sighted mode of proceeding, that we find so many possessing an accurate and extensive knowledge of religion, and yet maintaining such a conduct as we should expect to characterise those only who have been bred in ignorance and error.

But nothing can be more absurd than to act thus with respect to children; thus merely to lay the foundation, without giving any advice, or lending any assistance in erecting the superstructure; thus to provide them with weapons, and not to tell them the use for which these are given, or teach them how to wield them with safety and with advantage. Knowledge, indeed, is even in itself a good thing, as gratifying the curiosity of the human mind, and af-

fording subjects of agreeable or interesting contemplation. But it has no real value in the eye of a wise man, and still less in the eye of God, unless it be employed in answering the great purpose for which it is placed within our reach : that is, unless it be employed to ameliorate the heart, and to improve the character. “ If ye know these things,” says Christ, “ happy are ye if ye do them.” If ye know these things, if ye have been made acquainted with the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, it is so far well ; but your happiness is promoted and secured by this acquisition, only if ye believe the one and obey the other ; only if it actually leads to the formation and maintenance of such a character as God has prescribed in his word.

When therefore you have stored the minds of children with religious knowledge, do not imagine that you have done enough to train them up in the right way, or that they are now qualified for going into the world, and conducting themselves as they ought. No; from the very commencement of your labours, till the very last opportunity that you have of doing them good, you must keep it steadily in view, that the great point to be gained, is the formation of such a temper and such a conduct as the Gospel requires. Every lesson you impart to them must be accompanied with an advice as to the moral influence which it should have on their behaviour; and you should actually see that the lesson is improved, and the advice complied with, as far as circum-

stances will permit; that what you tell them has its due effect in regulating the dispositions of their heart, and the tenor of their deportment; that in every situation, and under every variety of fortune, they make religion their ruling principle and sovereign guide, the perpetual object of their attention, and the chief business of their lives.

Have you told them, for instance, that God is their constant witness, and that he will at length judge them? Endeavour then to make them carry a conviction of these truths into their most secret retirements; point out the connection between such a doctrine and purity of heart, as well as of outward conduct; take advantage of their hopes and fears, to allure and to alarm them into a proper course of behaviour; and

bring all their actions explicitly to the standard of His will, to whom they must give a final and strict account.

Have you told them that God is good, and that all their comforts and enjoyments flow from His bountiful hand? Tell them also of the obligations under which this lays them; make them express their thankful acknowledgments in appropriate language; and check them in every instance of ingratitude to their heavenly Father, of which they may offer to be guilty.

Have you told them that Christ came into the world, and suffered and died for sinners? Shew them also, how much they are bound to love and serve him for this act of condescension and mercy; place before them the odious

nature and character of sin, which made his humiliation necessary ; and impress upon their minds the necessity of hating with a perfect hatred, and of abstaining with the greatest care, from that which brought him to the death of the cross.

Have you told them, that faith in Christ and repentance towards God are necessary to salvation ? Let it be your endeavour, then, that they may believe and repent. Give them such views of their own weakness and of the sufficiency of Christ, as may constrain them to put their trust in his grace and power. Let them know how they are to exercise a true confidence in him ; and explain to them the influence which a true confidence in his merits must maintain over every part of their conduct.

Give them such affecting representations of sin, both with respect to its own nature and their commission of it, as may work in them a godly sorrow—as may lead them to entertain a fixed aversion to it, and diligently to avoid all its pollutions. And help them, by your frequent admonitions, and warnings, and reproofs, to be “righteous before God, walking in all his commandments and ordinances, blameless.”

Have you told them that prayer is becoming and necessary—that it is the appointed mean of receiving spiritual blessings, and essential to a good life? See then that they do pray; that they pray with frequency and with seriousness; that they pray for such things as they ought to ask; that the language of their devotion be appropriate, and

the manner of it decent; that they do not neglect it on any frivolous ground; that they persevere in it as an exercise at once suitable to their dependent state, and conducive to their best interest.

Have you told them, that God requires the sanctification of the Sabbath? Take care, then, that they do not profane that holy day, either by their language or by their conduct. Prescribe to them such tasks as correspond with its nature and the design of its institution. Put the Bible into their hands, and see that they peruse it. Take them with you to the house of God, and see that they engage with reverence and attention in the solemn service of the sanctuary; and in your private and domestic intercourse, require from them an account of what they have heard

and done, and lead them to the improvement of which it should be productive.

Have you told them, that they must give an account of their words as well as their actions? Bring this prospect home to them, and insist upon their abstaining from impure and profane conversation, from false or malicious statements. Guard them against every approach to these abuses of speech. Teach them to set a perpetual watch over their lips, that even in word they offend not God, nor injure their brethren.

Have you told them, that charity is the royal law of the gospel? Be careful, then, that in their social conduct they do not break this law by any act of cruelty, or oppression, or severity, or revenge; put it in their power to shew

compassion, by giving alms to the poor or instruction to the ignorant; see that they make a right use of what you have intrusted to their disposal; that what they give, they give not with a grudge, but freely—not with ostentation, but with modesty—not from the expectation of gratitude and applause, but from cordial sympathy and disinterested love.

In short, have you told them, that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and give to all according to their works? Teach them to realise this awful and affecting prospect; remind them of it whenever it seems to be losing its influence, or escaping their remembrance; make it bear not merely upon their general deportment, but upon every individual part of it; and labour that all

their thoughts, and words, and actions, may be thus subject to the powers of the world to come.

Conducting the education of your children in this manner, you shall avoid the error—so absurd and so injurious, the expression of so much carelessness, and the source of so much evil—of those who think that they have done enough, when they have taught the young to repeat their catechism and to tell what their Bible contains, though that attainment not being directed to practical purposes, is little else than “sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal;” and thus instructing them not merely in what they are to believe, but how they are to act, and carefully, and affectionately, and perseveringly guiding them into all holiness, you “train

up your children in the way in which they should go," and may hope that when they "become old they will not depart from it."

III. SET BEFORE YOUR CHILDREN A PIOUS AND HOLY EXAMPLE.

The influence of example is so very obvious, so uniformly felt, and so universally acknowledged, that I need not dwell much upon it. You must all be aware, that children are more apt to imitate what you do than to obey what you enjoin ; that the instructions which you give carry with them a tenfold force when you demonstrate your sincerity by your practice ; and that the lessons of piety and virtue which they receive, make very little, if any, impression, when these lessons are immediately con-

tradicted by acts of ungodliness and vice. You must be aware that this fact holds, even among those who have arrived at maturity of age and understanding, and are capable of judging for themselves of what is true or false, of what is right or wrong; even *they* feel the power of evil example frequently seducing them into errors, both of opinion and of practice, in spite of their better judgment. How much more will it hold in the case of children, who of necessity must, in a great measure, receive the instructions that are communicated on the mere authority of those who give them; who have a natural respect for their parents, their masters, and their teachers, which leads them to embrace implicitly whatever seems to be the decided opinion and

real desire of such as stand in these relations to them ; and who have at the same time sense enough to consider the practice and conduct of life, as the surest test and evidence of what men believe to be true and right ! If, then, you walk before them in the paths of wickedness, whatever good advice you may give them, whatever wholesome knowledge you may impart to them, it will be of little or no avail. They may listen to the one, but they will not comply with it ; they may receive the other, but they will not act upon it : And why ? because these things not only want the recommendation of a corresponding practice to work upon their instinctive principles of imitation, and to lead them insensibly to such a course as you would wish them to follow ; but

also and chiefly, because, in consequence of this want, they appear to your children to be nothing else than mere form which there can be no great harm in neglecting, or mere delusion which their pride impels them to resist. They cannot think you in earnest in what you say—with whatever apparent earnestness you say it—since you say and do not: and concluding, not without a very natural conviction of its justice, that your example should at least be as binding on them as your precepts, they follow your example, and give your precepts to the wind.

Indeed, if you do not manifest the power of religion in your own conduct,—if you are sensible that your children are daily witnessing your transgressions of the divine law, you will probably

fail in the mere act of giving them the instruction that is necessary. You cannot do it with the fervour which is requisite to give it its proper effect. You cannot decently insist upon it as a thing of essential consequence. You cannot trace it as you ought to do, to all its practical obligations and consequences. Every sentence of this description and tendency which you uttered would be a sentence of condemnation against yourselves. Your heart would smite you, and your countenance would blush, under the convictions of your gross inconsistency; and to escape the painful self-reproach which you must thus experience, and to prevent your children from charging you with the contradictory conduct of which you are guilty, you will be induced, if not to neglect

their instruction altogether, at least to give it seldom, and to enforce it feebly; you will be deterred from reproving their faults with freedom, and exhorting them to the discharge of duty with confidence. I ask you, if you have not sometimes experienced this? if you have not sometimes failed to speak with sufficient plainness and seriousness to your children respecting religion, from a consciousness that they had it in their power to retort upon *you* the rebukes which you might have administered to *them*, and to say to you with perfect justice, Physician, heal thyself? And when you have made the attempt, have you not generally seen your admonitions slighted and despised by *them*, because they were slighted and despised by yourselves?

And, indeed, how can it be otherwise? How can you say to them with propriety, and how can you say to them with effect, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," if they see you at the same time employing that day in the pursuit of worldly business, of fashionable pleasures, or of idle amusements? How can you, with any good grace, or with any prospect of success, forbid them to take the name of God in vain, when they hear you swearing in your ordinary discourse, and indulging in oaths and imprecations on the most trifling occasions? How can you expect to be heeded by them, when you exhort them to read their Bible, to pray to God, and to attend his ordinances, if they know or observe that the Bible to you is a sealed book, that

devotion is a strange work, that you seldom or never come up to the house of the Lord? In all this there is such a shameful inconsistency, that you will either wholly refrain from communicating instruction, or, if you do communicate it, no good effects can be reasonably expected to result from it.

To train up your children, therefore, in the way in which they should go, you must set before them a good and pious example. You must not merely abstain from those flagrant sins, or perform those leading duties, which will be most apt to strike their attention. You must “deny yourselves to all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and adorn the doctrine of your Saviour in all things, by a conversation in every respect becoming the Gospel.” You must

walk tenderly and circumspectly before them. You must avoid, if possible, even the appearance of evil, that they may find no handle in your conduct to justify or to encourage any deviations from virtue in their own. Thus evincing your sincerity, and thus addressing yourselves to one of the most powerful instincts of their nature, your instructions will be almost irresistible to their minds; the spirit which animates you, will be gradually and insensibly transfused into them; the graces which adorn your character will be copied into theirs; they will be encouraged to resist temptation, and to hold fast their integrity; and in this manner they will be trained up in the way in which they should go—even the way of God's commandments—the way which leads to honour, and glory, and immortality.

IV. KEEP YOUR CHILDREN AS MUCH
AS POSSIBLE FROM BAD COMPANY.

I need not say much to convince you, that the character of your children will depend very much on that of the persons whose society they frequent. There is not a proverb more universally received or understood than this, "Tell me what company you keep, and I will tell you what you are." If you keep bad company, this shews perhaps that you are already depraved, and you are only doing what is most agreeable to your taste. But though this depravity does not pervade your conduct and your feelings, still, if you keep bad company, the effect will be gradually and certainly produced. Your natural propensity to imitation will lead you insensibly to conform to the evil

practices which you habitually witness ; and notwithstanding the aversion or even horror with which you may at first regard violations of purity and rectitude, these emotions will soon give place to indifference, and indifference will be quickly succeeded by attachment and imitation.

“ Vice at *first* sight is of so frightful mien,
As to be dreaded, needs but to be seen ;
But when we’ve grown familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

Now all this is true, even with respect to those who are advanced in life, and whose moral habits are formed and settled. Even to them, bad company is a snare which sooner or later impairs their virtue, destroys their moral sensibilities, and brings them to ruin. How much more must it happen to

such as are only in childhood, and youth ! They are thoughtless, and do not reflect on their danger ; they are inexperienced, and are not sufficiently aware of it ; they are weak and diffident, and have not resolution enough to guard against it. Their disposition is soft, and they easily and unconsciously yield to every impression which is made upon it. And there is in them a natural corruption, which though it may be little observed, or seem even to lie dormant while they are kept at a distance from the pollutions and enticements of the world, yet no sooner does it feel the attraction of outward temptations, than it is roused into activity which will never after slumber for a moment, takes possession of every corner of the heart, and through the evil

habits which it fosters, acquires an exclusive and ruinous dominion over the whole conduct.

If then you would train up your children in the way in which they should go, take care that they avoid the danger to which bad company exposes them. This is a rock on which parents continually split, though it is clearly pointed out to them, and though the ocean of life is covered with the melancholy wrecks which it has occasioned. It is a pestilence which has impaired the spiritual constitution, and ruined the immortal souls of thousands and tens of thousands of the children of men; and yet how few are careful to preserve the young under their charge from its malignant and fatal infection! How absurd, how inconsis-

ent, how cruel, to give them good instruction, and to set before them a good example, and yet to allow them to mingle daily and hourly with those by whose influence they will be effectually taught to despise both the one and the other, to set at nought the authority of God, and to break his commandments without remorse ! Would you think it enough to read them lectures upon health, to descant to them on its value and importance, and to make them acquainted with the best mode of preserving it, and immediately after to permit them to rush headlong into a city where the plague rages with unsparing violence, and sweeps every thing before it ? Would you act in this manner, when their mere bodily health or their mere animal life is

concerned? No; you would be most anxious, you would strain every nerve, you would employ every mean, to keep them as far as possible from the destructive contagion. And should not you feel the same anxiety at least, should not you make the utmost exertions to save them from the evil that is in the world, by which the health, the purity, the comfort, the happiness of their souls is in danger of being lost for ever? Surely, it becomes you to give all diligence, that they be kept from the influence of those evil communications by which the good principles that you have instilled into them, and the good manners that you have taught them, may be impaired or corrupted; that they be not allowed to associate much with any individual,

through whose language, or through whose example, they may be in any measure seduced into that way which leadeth down to the chambers of destruction.

Now, in executing this part of your duty to your children, you must not rest satisfied with mere general cautions; you must condescend to particulars, you must enter into details, you must point to individuals, that your object may be more certainly and fully accomplished. It often happens, that the most vicious, those from whom you have reason to dread most on your children's account, have some qualities to recommend them to the respect and esteem of their fellows. They are brave, perhaps, or they are clever, or they are generous. Now, remember,

that these qualities, by which you yourselves are apt to be blinded and misled, serve to render their vicious example so much the more powerful; not only because the sentiments of your children towards them will make them more prone to imitate what is bad, but also, because these sentiments will lead them to choose them as their constant companions, and thus to be more frequently exposed to the influence of their example.

In all such cases, scruple not to tell your children to avoid particularly the society of such wicked and dangerous companions. And take care that your warning be obeyed. You may allege that you cannot be supposed to be acquainted with the precise characters of all the children with whom yours may be led to associate. I do

not suppose that your knowledge in this respect can be so extensive and minute as might be wished. But you may always have a great measure of such knowledge, if you take any pains to acquire it. And it is only expected that you shall make use of such precautions as are fairly within your reach. Even when you deal in general admonitions, you should illustrate your admonitions by instances which have come within your own knowledge, of bad company and bad example being the ruin of children; and particularly by instances that are known to your children themselves, that are adapted to their circumstances, and calculated to make an affecting impression on their minds. But let me press it upon you, that it is not enough to *speak* to your

children about avoiding bad company. This, doubtless, is a lesson which you must repeat with frequency and with emphasis. But you must do more than speak. You must act. You must see that what you say is attended to. If your advice is at first neglected, insist that it shall be complied with. And if this be ineffectual, let the prudent exercise of discipline be resorted to, and, in short, every proper mean employed for attaining the object in view.

Your children will generally choose the company of those who are at the same period of life with themselves. But they will often have occasion to go into the company of older persons, to listen to their conversation, and to witness their actions. And these are not always guarded before children, either

in what they say or do. It will be necessary, therefore, to keep your children from the contagion of their example also; and if you cannot always prevent them from being in such dangerous company, be careful to point out to them the existence of the evil in as strong terms as are consistent with truth and prudence, and affectionately to warn them against its influence. You have a relation or acquaintance, for instance, who is addicted to swearing. It would not be proper, it is not requisite that you forbid him to enter *your* house; nor can you prevent your children, perhaps, from occasionally visiting him in his own. In such a case, however, let the intercourse between him and them be as rare as circumstances will permit. Let it be, if pos-

sible, only when you yourselves are present. And frequently take occasion to condemn the practice of swearing, not merely in general, but with a particular reference to the person who is addicted to it, and from whom the danger is apprehended. And so with other vices in all similar circumstances.

You may in all this give offence. If you do so, it will be owing either to imprudence on your own part, which you may beware of, or to too great irritability on the part of others, which you cannot help. But remember, that if the thing cannot be done without giving offence, still it ought to be done; for it is the spiritual, the everlasting welfare of your children which is at stake; and that is an object by far too interesting and important to be neglect-

ed for any reason that does not imply a breach of moral duty.

Before concluding this particular, there is one point of some consequence to which I request your attention for a moment. When I exhort you to caution your children against keeping bad company, and to prevent them from associating with wicked persons, do not suppose that I wish you to inculcate any thing like hatred or ill will against such persons. This you must carefully avoid. Speak of them with regret, rather than with anger. Shew by what you say, and by the manner of saying it, that it is their conduct which you condemn, and not their persons which you dislike; that you wish them to reform, to be virtuous, and happy; and that it is only on account of their wick-

ed deeds, and the anxiety which you feel about the welfare of your children, that you hold them out as persons whose company should and must be shunned.

V. EXERCISE A PROPER KIND AND DEGREE OF DISCIPLINE ON YOUR CHILDREN.

This practice has been more or less adopted in every country, and in every age. And the universality of the practice can only be owing to a strong sense of its imperious, indispensable necessity. From certain theories, indeed, on the subject of education, it has been banished as brutal, and degrading, and mischievous: but to theories respecting the management of human beings, which have been created in the regions of fancy, or put together in the

retirements of philosophy, or proposed by those who think, on the one hand, that the heart is good by the inspiration of nature, and, on the other, have had no experience in the tuition of the young; to theories proceeding from such sources, and founded on such principles, and labouring under such disadvantages, we cannot safely pay any serious regard. They who reflect for a moment on the thoughtlessness natural to children; who believe in the original perversity and waywardness of the heart; who consider, that the feeling and the fear of pain are elements in our moral constitution, which the allwise Creator evidently intended to serve useful purposes; who attend to the workings of their own minds, and the events and history of real life; they

who attend to these things cannot entertain a doubt of the expediency of discipline. And they who have had it as a part of their ordinary occupation to train up children—who have experienced it in all its varieties, and felt the difficulties with which it is attended, will laugh to scorn that whining sensibility, that vain fanciful speculation, which would explode the use of discipline; and they will acknowledge the practical wisdom of Solomon, who says on the subject,—“ Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him.”

There may be children of such gentle dispositions, of such a reasonable turn of mind, or so much under the influence of sanctifying grace, as not to

stand in need of this coercive method. But such instances are extremely rare; and while there are some who will do nothing without it, and others who even set it at defiance, it is the general fact, that, in the great proportion of children, there is a strong tendency to go wrong,—a *foolishness*, as Solomon terms it, natural to them, which is perpetually leading them astray; and to prevent or to remedy the operation and effect of which, discipline, if not wholly sufficient by itself, is at least highly useful as an auxiliary.

Those who argue against this mode seem always to forget, that one great object to be gained in the attention paid to children, is to prevent them from acquiring evil habits, and that any delay in the pursuit of this object is fatal to

its accomplishment. You may reason with them on the impropriety of certain actions,—you may employ the winning arts of persuasion,—you may remonstrate, and exhort, and intreat,—you may bribe, and you may promise, and you may soothe, and you may reprove,—but all the while that you are persevering in this humane and rational way, as it is called, the vicious actions from which you were desirous to guard or to wean your children are repeated; they grow into fixed and favourite habits,—and then what becomes of your reasoning, and your remonstrances, and your entreaties? And if you shall at length have recourse to that discipline with which you should have commenced, you may be mortified to find that it is too late; that it has

lost its power ; that the evil is inveterate and incurable. Had you, in the first instance, corrected your children for wanton disobedience, or for deliberate contumacy, or for premeditated vice, the feeling of pain and the fear of punishment being associated with such conduct, they would have been checked and restrained at the very outset, and during the whole progress of their career. Their propensities might not have been subdued, but they would have been weakened from the want of indulgence ; or at least they would not have been allowed to gather strength by frequent gratification, and to grow up into habits which you may never be able to eradicate.

You talk of being rational. But surely if the end in view be one of in-

finite moment, that way, so long as you do not act immorally, is the most rational, by which it is to be most certainly and most effectually accomplished. It is the perversion of reason—it is the height of folly, to aim at such refinements in such a case, and that, too, in opposition to the warrant of sacred Scripture, and the lessons of universal experience. You talk of being humane; yes, by all means be humane, especially to children;—the discipline I would recommend, as it does not reject the guidance of reason, so neither does it exclude the exercise of humanity. But call you that humanity, which, by saving them a little transient pain, consigns them to the dominion of vice, and makes them the victims of deserved infamy in this world, and of eternal woe in the next? Call you that

humanity, which shudders at the idea of administering some wholesome correction to their bodies, though it be for the welfare of their better part; and which, by thus preventing them as it were from sowing in tears, prevents them also from afterwards reaping in joy? Call you that humanity, which cannot endure to see them suffering a few pangs at present for their ill desert, but can deliberately assist, by this misplaced and short-sighted tenderness, to put them into the number of those who are at length to lie down in everlasting burnings? Yes, it is humanity: but it is the humanity of those heathens of old, who offered their children to an idol, that was so formed as to grasp them in its hands, and instantly let them fall into a gulf of fire; and who, considering it as a bad omen that

the little victims should be offered weeping, soothed, and caressed, and kissed the poor innocents that they might go smiling into ruin. Acting in this manner, your tender mercies are cruel: your aversion to the use of discipline, if it may not be resolved into a mere selfish regard to your own feelings, is at least no more than a morbid sympathy with theirs,—a spirit of ill-judged indulgence, for which your children themselves will never thank you, when they come to feel its effects upon their conduct, and for which they may arraign you at the bar of God, as the cause of their eternal ruin.

It is probably from a regard to all these considerations, that Solomon gives the following pointed and wholesome admonitions. “Withhold not correction from a child; for if thou beat him

with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. Correct thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. He that spareth the rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him be-
times.”* And as an apt and affecting illustration of the subject, we may refer to the conduct and the fate of Eli and his house. His children acted wickedly, and he contented himself with reproving them, which was of no avail, instead of employing that severe correction by which they might have been restrained. Hear the sentence which God pronounced against him, and which he also executed in an awful manner:—“The Lord said unto Sa-

* Prov. xxix. 17. and 15.

muel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day, I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever."

But whilst it is your duty, in training up your children, to administer discipline, the good effects resulting from this, will depend much on the way in which it is done. It may be done in such a way as, in a great degree, if not

wholly, to defeat the object. Avoid such errors ; and when you exercise discipline, do it with justice, do it with discrimination, do it with lenity, do it with temper.

1. Correct with *justice*. See that the punishment be merited before it be inflicted : and take care not only to be satisfied of this yourselves, but also, if possible, to convince those who suffer, that they deserve to suffer. If they are not conscious of having committed any offence ; if you shall, rashly or on mistaken grounds, impute to them an action of which they have not been really guilty, the chastisement which you give is worse than useless. It will kindle indignation and resentment in their breasts. Instead of feeling genuine respect for your authority, they will fear and hate you as tyrants : And

if the injustice be often repeated, considering themselves as the victims of oppression, they will be discouraged, and become regardless whether they act right or wrong, since, in the mode of treatment, no uniform distinction seems to be made between the two modes of conduct.

2. Correct with *discrimination*. Do not confound small offences with great, and annex the same punishment to both. This will introduce a very improper and mischievous confusion into their ideas respecting moral conduct; and if they find that, in the exercise of that discipline to which they are subjected, all sins are to be treated as of equal magnitude, they will soon make their practice correspond, not, however, by abstaining from all, but by indulging in the greatest with as little fear

and remorse as in the least. Study, therefore, to proportion their punishment to their demerit. Inquire into those circumstances by which their misconduct is aggravated on the one hand, or extenuated on the other. See whether it is the consequence of mere youthful indiscretion, or the result of deliberate wickedness; whether they have gone into it willingly, or whether they have been drawn into it with difficulty and reluctance. And, as you will discover a variety in their degrees of criminality, let there be the same variety in their decrees of correction.

3. Correct with *lenity*. Be sure to keep within, rather than to go beyond, the punishment which may be deemed strictly due. Let there be nothing—either in itself, or in the mode of inflicting it—that is harsh or wanton, or

that can make them suppose that you take any pleasure in it. That would lead them to regard you with horror and detestation, and would ultimately teach them to be cruel and remorseless in their resentments. But, by correcting with as much gentleness as is consistent with the attainment of your object, you shew them, that, in imitation of your heavenly Father, you do not afflict them willingly, nor grieve them without a cause; that it is with the utmost reluctance you hurt their feelings, or give them pain; that nothing determines you to do this, but a sense of its paramount necessity, and a sincere regard for their welfare. When they see this, they will not only learn to fear you, but their fear will be mingled with love; and these two affections, thus blended and operating toge-

ther, will have a powerful effect in preventing a repetition of the faults for which they suffer.

4. Correct with *temper*. If you never correct but when you are in a passion, you will be extremely apt to go to excess; which is always attended with hurtful consequences. It also represents you in a weak and ridiculous light to your children, which must be injurious to the permanent and habitual influence of your authority. And appearing to them, not as the wise and deliberate exercise of discipline employed for their good, but as a mad ebullition of rage, to gratify your own resentment, it will lead them to the most disrespectful notions of your character, and defeat the very best purposes to be served by judicious correction. Correct them, therefore, with such a com-

plete possession of yourself, as that you shall be under no temptation to needless severity, and as will shew them that you are acting with a settled conviction of its propriety, and a calm and affectionate view to their best interests.

VI. BE CAREFUL TO REGULATE THE AMUSEMENTS OF YOUR CHILDREN.

Amusements are discouraged neither by the spirit nor by the precepts of religion. The constitution of our nature seems to require them. And nothing but the most gloomy superstition can ever deny them to the young, when they may serve either to promote the health of the body, or to give relaxation to the mind.

But then, my friends, the amusements of your children should be placed under the controul of Christian

principle. You must be quite aware, that unrestrained indulgence in them is attended with pernicious consequences; that there is a tendency in those of early life to prefer them to every serious occupation; that young persons seldom reflect on their nature, except in so far as they may be more or less calculated to furnish enjoyment; and that the habits of idleness, levity, or vice, which they produce, too often affect the character and condition of mature age, to its very latest periods. If you look around you, many examples of this will occur to your view. And every one of these should be a warning against any degree of negligence or carelessness in this branch of your parental duty. Indeed, I would press this part of the subject on your parti-

cular attention, both because it is of far greater importance than is commonly imagined, and because many parents seem to imagine, that the amusements of their children are not a fit subject of religious cognisance. The following rules I would recommend to your observance; and, as the application of them must depend very much on your own judgment and discretion, I will mention them without any lengthened illustration.

1. Take care that their amusements be innocent in their own nature.—If, either in whole or in part, they violate any of the divine commandments, you cannot surely hesitate to prohibit them. And therefore you cannot hesitate to prohibit such as expose any thing that is religious to ridicule—such as imply a profanation of the name of

God—such as exhibit what is indecent and impure—or such as sport with the feelings and the welfare of others. It will not do to say, that they are but partially contaminated with these evils, and that in this view they can do little harm. You must not thus trifle with sin. It is far better that your children should forego pleasure, than contract guilt; and, even though the consequences should not be extensively or permanently mischievous, still it is wrong to allow them any indulgence that partakes of ungodliness or immorality. It is what no genuine Christian can ever prevail upon himself to do; and it is what no enlightened and affectionate parent can ever reconcile to any just principle, or any humane feeling.

2. Even when amusements are inno-

cent, you must take care that they be not carried to excess.—Whenever they are carried to excess, they are no longer innocent ; and, in that case, must be forbidden as strictly as if they were essentially improper. They are carried to excess, when they are allowed to consume too much time—when they prevent sufficient attention from being paid to what is truly important—when they endanger the health or dissipate the mind—when they produce habits of irregularity, by turning day into night and night into day—when they seduce the heart from serious consideration—when they interfere with the duties of the Sabbath, or the exercises of domestic piety. Whether it be from their own tendency, or from the disposition of your children, that they are liable to be thus abused, it is incumbent on you

to have your eye upon them—to watch them with peculiar jealousy—and to be ready to interpose your advice or your command whenever necessity requires.

3. Lastly, it may be proper that you select and prescribe those amusements that are at once innocent in themselves, and least liable to be indulged in too much, or perverted to bad purposes.— For this end, keep in view the legitimate objects which they are intended to promote, and act under the impression, that your first and most momentous concern is with the spiritual interests of your children. Influenced by these considerations, you will neither think it below you to interfere in the direction of their amusements, nor will you grudge the trouble that may be requisite to give them all the advantage which these can bestow, and at the

same time prevent all the injury to which they might otherwise lead.

VII. BE OFTEN ENGAGED IN PRAYER FOR YOUR CHILDREN.

If you do not pray for your children, it may be safely inferred that you do not pray at all; because, in offering up petitions for others, you could not possibly neglect those who are nearest to your heart. Now, it is important for you to consider, whether, on the supposition of your habitually neglecting prayer, you can, with any propriety, be denominated Christians. I do not hesitate to tell you, distinctly and unequivocally, that, on such a supposition, you have no good title to that appellation. You may call yourselves what you please, and you may stand as high as you wish in the opinion of the

world, but if there be any truth in the Gospel, you can lay no claim to the Christian character. And this charge may be established against you by arguments which you can neither repel nor misapprehend.

If there be one precept in scripture more plain or emphatic than another, it is that which enjoins you to pray to God. You are not simply commanded to pray,—you are required to be “instant in prayer”—to “pray without ceasing”—and “in every thing, by prayer and supplication, to make your requests known unto God.” And these injunctions are recommended and enforced by the example of Christ, and of his apostles, and of all those holy men whose conduct is held out in scripture as worthy of our esteem and imitation. But if you are living in the deliberate

and practical contempt of such sacred injunctions, and such authoritative examples, with what decency, or with what truth, can you call yourselves disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ? or upon what grounds can you expect to enjoy the salvation which he has accomplished?

There is another consideration equally deserving of your notice. You are not only required to pray, but prayer is represented in scripture as that, by the use of which, you are to obtain the blessings of the Gospel. Unless you ask these blessings in prayer, you cannot hope to receive them,—you cannot hope for mercy to pardon your offences, or for grace to sanctify your souls, or for any one of the benefits which result from Christ's interposition. Neglecting the instituted *mean*, it is the

height of folly and presumption to think that you can obtain the promised *end*. It is affronting to the Almighty, to act on the supposition that the appointments which he has clearly revealed in his word can be disregarded with impunity. The habitual contempt of such appointments, involves in it at once the grossest disrespect for their Sovereign Author, and a willing renunciation of all the gracious offers which he has made in the dispensation of the Gospel. So that, in neglecting the duty of prayer, you wilfully sacrifice your eternal interests, and are guilty of the double sin of violating a plain command, and despising a merciful appointment.

Be persuaded, then, to cultivate a spirit of prayer and supplication. Have frequent recourse to the throne of grace,

to “ask of God, who giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not,” those spiritual benefits of which you stand in need. And let this be your encouragement, that the Great Being, to whom you address yourselves, has promised, for Christ’s sake, to grant your requests in so far as they are consistent with your real happiness. “Draw nigh unto him, and he will draw nigh unto you.” Pray to him with fervour, and humility, and faith, and perseverance, and he will, in due time, supply all your wants, and give you at last the salvation of your souls.

But at present I exhort you to the performance of this duty, in reference to the improvement and welfare of your children. If you love them with Christian affection, and feel anxious that they should prosper in religion, you

will not fail to remember them in your intercessions with God. You will pray *with* them in your families, and you will pray *for* them in your retirements. And whether in social worship or in private devotion, you will have a constant view to their spiritual welfare.

This pious conduct on your part, will operate for the advantage of your children in several ways. In the *first* place, when they observe that you “walk with God” in the exercise of prayer, they will draw conclusions favourable to your sincerity in every other respect. This will naturally inspire them with additional love to your person, and reverence for your character. The instructions which you communicate will of course be heard and obeyed by them with a more willing submission. Your moral example, sanc-

tified by the spirit of devotion, will have a more endearing and powerful influence over their deportment. And thus, while you, in a particular manner, recommend to their attention, and inculcate on their practice, the important duty of prayer, you succeed by the same means in leading them to a cheerful and conscientious discharge of all the other duties which they are required to perform.

Secondly, Praying for your children will increase your affection for them, and in that way render you more zealous in promoting their religious and moral improvement. Supplications in their behalf, indeed, must arise from a sincere attachment to them, but the exercise which it receives from these supplications, tends to confirm and strengthen it. Devotion gives to it a proper cha-

racter and a peculiar energy. Accustomed to remember your children before God, you are led to think chiefly of their immortal souls and their eternal interests; and habitually associating the idea of them with that of their heavenly Father, making mention before him of their wants, their dangers, their distresses, and their sins, and earnestly entreating from him, on their account, the bounties of his providence, and the gifts of his mercy, they gain insensibly a higher place in your affection, and the tie which links them to your heart becomes more tender and more refined, more rational and more permanent. Thus prayer having the effect of making you love your children with greater ardour, will necessarily constrain you to do more for their

benefit than you would otherwise have done. Under the influence of this increased affection, you will grudge no labour, and withhold no sacrifice of personal ease, which may be necessary to make them wiser and better, as the children of God. Nay, from the execution of this task, which is always irksome when performed from a dry sense of duty, you will derive the most exquisite satisfaction, and will account yourselves equally honoured and happy, that you can be instrumental in rearing your children for the service of God, and the glories of immortality.

I have to add, in the *third* place, that prayer to God is requisite for giving effect to all the care which you bestow on the religious education of your children. It holds in this, as in every other case, that though “ Paul may

plant, and Apollos may water, it is God alone who giveth the increase." Unless his blessing accompany your exertions, these exertions will terminate in vanity. Unless his holy Spirit give direction and energy to the means which you employ, the end at which you aim can never be accomplished. You may say to your children, and do for them, all that it is possible for you to say and do, but if the divine influences do not go along with your instructions and your labours, these will prove fruitless and unavailing. Now, the blessing of God is to be obtained by "asking it in prayer believing," by applying for it earnestly at a throne of grace, in a dependence upon the merits of Jesus Christ, your advocate and intercessor with the Father. This is the way pointed out in the word of God, and there-

fore it is the way which you must adopt.

Let your petitions then ascend to heaven, with frequency and with fervour, for the blessing of the Most High, to give effect to every effort which you make for the religious education of your children. Pray that he would direct and assist you, in a work so important both to you and to them. Pray that the understandings of your children may be savingly enlightened; that their hearts may be renewed and sanctified; that they may be enabled to remember their Creator and Redeemer in the days of their youth. Pray that they may be kept from the power of those peculiar temptations to which they are exposed; that they may be made obedient to their parents and teachers; that as they advance in years,

they may also grow in the habits of piety and virtue ; that the lessons which you give them, the example you set before them, the discipline you inflict upon them, and all the pains you take with them to promote their edification, may be rendered efficacious for answering the great end which you ought to have in view, that of making them faithful servants of God upon earth, and preparing them for the happiness of heaven. Asking these things in prayer, you have every reason to expect them : because you ask them from him who is the fountain of all good, and who has given you both commandment and encouragement to pray for what is needful, equally for yourselves and for your offspring.



MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, I have thus exhorted you to the discharge of a most interesting and most important duty—the duty of bringing up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—a duty which you owe not only to them, but also to yourselves, to society, to Christianity, and to God. To stimulate you to the immediate, and diligent, and unwearied performance of it, I might urge many powerful considerations. I might appeal to your sense of moral obligation; to your feelings of humanity and parental affection; to your patriotic sentiments; to your honour and your interest; to your hopes and to your fears of an eternal world. But the length to which this Address has already extended, forbids me to enlarge on them. Permit me only to say a few words to such of you as are con-

scious of paying no attention to the religious education of your children, of allowing them to grow up in ignorance and vice, and perhaps even encouraging them in sin by your conversation and your conduct. There may be more of you who fall under this description, than you are apt to imagine or willing to admit. For there is a culpable thoughtlessness, which may eventually do as much mischief in this case as direct criminal intention. Indeed, a conscious and systematic design of ruining the souls of your children, is a species of barbarity which I would not impute to any of you. But since carelessness is frequently productive of the same effects, those parents who are chargeable with it, should be warned of their guilt and their danger. And to such of you I address these concluding remarks.

Remember, that your connection with your children is uncertain; that you may soon be snatched from them, and laid in the silent grave. Remember, that the time is coming, when they may be thrown loose on the world, to pursue, with more fatal industry than you are aware of, the path into which you have initiated them; to reduce to practice all the evil lessons which you have given them; and to shew, by their wickedness and their ruin, what a monstrous sin it is in parents to neglect the religious education of their children. And remember, that this may happen when, having mingled with the dust, you cannot, by any effort or diligence, correct the errors which you have committed, or mitigate the calamities which you have occasioned. It has sometimes happened, that the recollection of a pa-

rent's virtues, and a parent's love, has recalled to the ways of religion the undutiful child, who had even brought his father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. But, in your case, having neglected and undone your children, they will have the recollection of no virtues, and of no love, to check them in their wild career. It may even be dreaded, —and, O, what anguish will your departed spirits feel if they be permitted to see it!—that they will come to your grave, not to lament the loss which they have sustained by your departure, —not to reflect, with melancholy pleasure, on all the kindness which you shewed them,—not to warm their own piety, and strengthen their own virtue, by the remembrance of yours,—not to vow, over your hallowed dust, to persevere in that path which you had

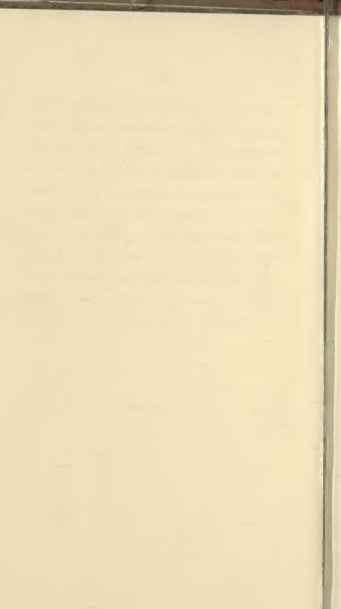
pointed out to them as the path to heaven;—but, to trace all their corrupt principles and vicious habits to your criminal and cruel indifference to their spiritual interests,—to call heaven and earth to witness, that they have been misled by those who should have been the faithful guides of their childhood and their youth,—to bewail the day on which they were born, and to curse the memory of those who gave them birth. If you have a spark of feeling in your breast, such a prospect is sufficient to awaken you to instant and active exertion.

But a more awful and alarming prospect than this lies before you. Whether your children shall ever be made sensible of the injustice which you have done them, or whether they shall live and die in the same disregard of the

gospel and of godliness in which they have grown up under your inspection, there is a period coming, and it cannot be far distant, when both they and you must give an account to God, and be judged according to your works. If, through your wicked instrumentality, —through your indolence, or counsel, or example, they have acted so as to be placed on the *left* hand of the throne of judgment, and receive a sentence of condemnation, on what ground can you possibly expect to be placed on the *right* hand, and to receive a sentence of acquittal? How can *you* hope to go away into life eternal, when *they* are, *by your means*, sent into everlasting punishment? This view of the subject may never before have occurred to your minds. But it deserves your most serious consideration. It is countenan-

ced by what our Saviour says of the fate of those who cause others to stumble and fall. And it is well calculated to awaken all the sensibilities, and to rouse all the energies of your souls. May God send these considerations far into your consciences, and determine you to train up your children in the way in which they should go, that they may be your comfort in time, and your crown of joy in eternity! Amen.

THE END.



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