

# COME YE CHILDREN

by C.H. Spurgeon

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*Spurgeon's guide to teaching children about Christ, providing instruction and encouragement for Sunday school teachers, parents, and all who seek to lead young people to the Savior.*

24 Chapters

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## Come Ye Children

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A Book for

Parents and Teachers

on the Christian Training of

Children

"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm 34:11).

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## "Feed My Lambs"—How To Do It

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### Chapter 1

#### "Feed My Lambs"—How To Do It

THE best of the church are none too good for this work. Do not think because you have other service to do that therefore you should take no interest in this form of holy work, but kindly, according to your opportunities, stand ready to help the little ones, and to cheer those whose chief calling is to attend to them. To us all this message comes: "Feed My lambs." To the minister, and to all who have any knowledge of the things of God, the commission is given. See to it that you look after the children that are in Christ Jesus. Peter was a leader among believers, yet he must feed the lambs.

However young a believer may be, he should make an open confession of his faith, and be folded with the rest of the flock of Christ. We are not among those who are suspicious of youthful piety: we could never see more reason for such suspicions in the case of the young than in the case of those who repent late in life. Of the two we think the latter are more to be questioned than the former: for a selfish fear of punishment and dread of death are more likely to produce a counterfeit faith than mere childishness would be. How much has the child missed which might have spoiled it! How much it does not know which, please God, we hope it never may know! Oh, how much there is of brightness and trustfulness about children when converted to God which is not seen in elder converts! Our Lord Jesus evidently felt deep sympathy with children, and he is but little like Christ who looks upon them as a trouble in the world, and treats them as if they must needs be either little deceivers or foolish simpletons. To you who teach in our schools is given this joyous privilege of finding out where these young disciples are who are truly the lambs of Christ's flock, and to you He saith, "Feed My lambs"; that is, instruct such as are truly gracious, but young in years.

We are specially exhorted to feed them because they are so likely to be overlooked. I am afraid our sermons often go over the heads of the younger folk—who, nevertheless, may be as true Christians as the older ones. Blessed is he who can so speak as to be understood by a child! Blessed is that godly woman who in her class so adapts herself to girlish modes of thought that the truth from her heart streams into the children's hearts without let or hindrance.

"We are specially exhorted to feed the young because this work is so profitable. Do what we may with persons converted late in life, we can never make much of them. We are very glad of them for their own sakes; but at seventy what remains even if they live another ten years? Train up a child, and he may have fifty years of holy service before him. We are glad to welcome those who come into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, but they have hardly taken their pruning-hook and their spade before the sun goes down, and their short day's work is ended. The time spent in training the late convert is greater than the space reserved for his actual service: but you take a child-convert and teach him well, and as early piety often becomes eminent piety, and that

eminent piety may have a stretch of years before it in which God may be glorified and others may be blessed, such work is profitable in a high degree. It is also most beneficial work to ourselves. It exercises our humility and helps to keep us lowly and meek. It also trains our patience; let those who doubt this try it; for even young Christians exercise the patience of those who believe in them, and are therefore anxious that they should justify their confidence. If you want big-souled, large-hearted men or women, look for them among those who are much engaged among the young, bearing with their follies, and sympathising with their weaknesses for Jesus' sake.

## Do Not Hinder the Children

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### Chapter 2

#### Do Not Hinder the Children

CONCERNING THIS HINDERING of children, let us watch its action. I think the results of this sad feeling about children coming to the Saviour is to be seen, first, in the fact that often there is nothing in the service for the children. The sermon is over their heads, and the preacher does not think that this is any fault; in fact, he rather rejoices that it is so. Some time ago a person who wanted, I suppose, to make me feel my own insignificance, wrote to say that he had met with a number of negroes who had read my sermons with evident pleasure; and he wrote that he believed they were very suitable for niggers. Yes, my preaching was just the sort of stuff for niggers. The gentleman did not dream what sincere pleasure he caused me; for if I am understood by poor people, by servant-girls, by children, I am sure I can be understood by others. I am ambitious of preaching for niggers, if by these you mean the lowest, the rag-tag and bob-tail. I think nothing greater than to win the hearts of the lowly. So with regard to children. People occasionally say of such a one, "He is only fit to teach children: he is no preacher." I tell you, in God's sight he is no preacher who does not care for the children. There should be at least a part of every sermon and service that will suit the little ones. It is an error which permits us to forget this.

Another result is that the conversion of children is not expected in many of our churches and congregations. I mean, that they do not expect the children to be converted as children. The theory is that if we can impress youthful minds with principles which may, in after years, prove useful to them, we have done a great deal; but to convert children as children, and to regard them as being as much believers as their seniors, is regarded as absurd. To this supposed absurdity I cling with all my heart. I believe that of children is the kingdom of God, both on earth and in heaven.

How often do people expect to see in boys and girls the same solemnity of behaviour which is seen in older people! It would be a good thing for us all if we had never left off being boys and girls, but had added to all the excellencies of a child the virtues of a man. Surely it is not necessary to kill the child to make the saint? It is thought by the more severe that a converted child must become twenty years older in a minute. A very solemn person once called me from the playground after I had joined the church and warned me of the impropriety of playing trap, bat, and ball with the boys. He said, "How can you play like others, if you are a child of God?" I answered that I was employed as an usher, and it was part of my duty to join in the amusements of the boys. My venerable critic thought that this altered the matter very materially; but it was clearly his view that a converted boy, as such, ought never to play!

"They brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it He was much displeased." He was not often displeased; certainly He was not often "much displeased," and when He was much displeased we may be sure that the case was serious. He was displeased at these children being pushed away from Him, for it

was so contrary to His mind about them. The disciples did wrong to the mothers; they rebuked the parents for doing a motherly act—for doing, in fact, that which Jesus loved them to do. They brought their children to Jesus out of respect to Him: they valued a blessing from His hands more than gold; they expected that the benediction of God would go with the touch of the great Prophet. They may have hoped that a touch of the hand of Jesus would make their children's lives bright and happy. Though there may have been a measure of weakness in the parents' thought, yet the Saviour could not judge hardly of that which arose out of reverence to His person. He was therefore much displeased to think that those good women, who meant Him honour, should be roughly repulsed.

Besides, there was wrong done to Himself. It might have made men think that Jesus was stiff, reserved, and self-exalted, like the Rabbins. If they had thought that He could not condescend to children they would have sadly slandered the repute of His great love. His heart was a great harbour wherein many little ships might cast anchor. Jesus, the child-man, was never more at home than with children. The holy child Jesus had an affinity for children. Was He to be represented by His own disciples as shutting the door against the children? It would do a sad injury to His character. Therefore, grieved at the triple evil which wounded the mothers, the children, and Himself, He was sore displeased. Anything we do to hinder a dear child from coming to Jesus greatly displeases our dear Lord. He cries to us, "Stand off. Let them alone. Let them come to Me, and forbid them not."

Once more, it was quite contrary to Jesus Christ's practice. He made them see this; for "He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them and blessed them." All His life long there is nothing in Him like rejection and refusing. He said truly, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." If He did cast out any because they were too young, the text would be falsified at once: but that can never be. He is the receiver of all who come to Him. It is written, "This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." All His life He might be drawn as a shepherd with a lamb in His bosom: never as a cruel shepherd setting his dogs upon the lambs and driving them and their mothers away.

## The Disciples and the Mothers

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### The Disciples and the Mothers

THE immediate disciples of our Lord were a highly honourable band of men; despite their mistakes and shortcomings, they must have been greatly sweetened by living near to one so perfect and so full of love, I gather, therefore, that if these men, who were the cream of the cream, rebuked the mothers who brought their young children to Christ, it must be a pretty common offense in the church of God. I fear that the chilling frost of this mistake is felt almost everywhere. I am not going to make any ungenerous statement; but I think if a little personal investigation were made many of us might find ourselves guilty upon this point, and might be led to cry with Pharaoh's butler, "I do remember my faults this day." Have we laid ourselves out for the conversion of children, as much as we have done for the conversion of grown-up-folks? What! Do you think me sarcastic? Do you lay yourselves out for anybody's conversion? What must I say to you? It is dreadful that the Cainite spirit should enter a believer's heart and make him say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" It is a shocking thing that we should ourselves eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and leave the famishing multitudes to perish. But tell me now, if you did care for the salvation of souls, would you not think it rather too commonplace a matter to begin with boys and girls? Yes; and your feeling is shared by many. The fault is common.

The apostles' rebuke of the children arose in measure from ignorance of the children's need. If any mother in that throng had said, "I must bring my child to the Master, for he is sore afflicted with a devil," neither Peter, nor James, nor John, would have demurred for a moment, but would have assisted in bringing the possessed child to the Saviour. Or suppose another mother had said, "My child has a pining sickness upon it, it is wasted to skin and bone; permit me to bring my darling, that Jesus may lay His hands upon her,"—the disciples would all have said: "Make way for this woman and her sorrowful burden." But these little ones with bright eyes, and prattling tongues, and leaping limbs, why should they come to Jesus? They forgot that in those children, with all their joy, their health, and their apparent innocence, there was a great and grievous need for the blessing of a Saviour's grace. If you indulge in the novel idea that your children do not need conversion, that children born of Christian parents are somewhat superior to others, and have good within them which only needs development, one great motive for your devout earnestness will be gone. Believe me, your children need the Spirit of God to give them new hearts and right spirits, or else they will go astray as other children do. Remember that however young they are, there is a stone within the youngest breast; and that stone must be taken away, or be the ruin of the child. There is a tendency to evil even where as yet it is not developed into act, and that tendency needs to be overcome by the divine power of the Holy Spirit causing the child to be born again. Oh, that the church of God would cast off the old Jewish idea which still has such force around us—namely, that natural birth brings with it covenant privileges! Now, even under the Old Dispensation there were hints that the true seed was not born after the flesh, but after the spirit, as in the case of Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob. Will not even the church of God know that "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"? "Who can bring a clean thing

out of an unclean?" The natural birth communicates nature's filthiness, but it cannot convey grace. Under the new covenant we are expressly told that the sons of God are "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Under the old covenant, which was typical, the birth according to the flesh yielded privilege; but to come at all under the covenant of grace ye must be born again. The first birth brings you nothing but an inheritance with the first Adam; you must be born again to come under the headship of the second Adam.

I have sometimes met with a deeper spiritual experience in children of ten and twelve than I have in certain persons of fifty and sixty. It is an old proverb that some children are born with beards. Some boys are little men, and some girls are little old women. You cannot measure the lives of any of us by our ages. I knew a boy who, when he was fifteen, often heard old Christian people say, "The boy is sixty years old: he speaks with such insight into divine truth." I believe that this youth at fifteen did know far more of the things of God, and of soul travail, than any around him, whatever their age might be. I cannot tell you why it is, but so I do know it is, that some are old when they are young, and some are very green when they are old; some are wise when you would expect them to be otherwise, and others are very foolish when you might have expected that they had quitted their folly. Talk not of a child's incapacity for repentance! I have known a child weep herself to sleep by the month together under a crushing sense of sin. If you would know a deep, and bitter, and awful fear of the wrath of God, let me tell you what I felt as a boy. If you would know joy in the Lord, many a child has been as full of it as his little heart could hold. If you want to know what faith in Jesus is, you must not look to those who have been bemuddled by the heretical jargon of the times, but to the dear children who have taken Jesus at His word, and believed in Him, and loved Him, and therefore know and are sure that they are saved. Capacity for believing lies more in the child than in the man. We grow less rather than more capable of faith: every year brings the unregenerate mind further away from God, and makes it less capable of receiving the things of God. No ground is more prepared for the good seed than that which as yet has not been trodden down as the highway, nor has been as yet overgrown with thorns. Not yet has the child learned the deceits of pride, the falsehood of ambition, the delusions of worldliness, the tricks of trade, the sophistries of philosophy; and so far it has an advantage over the adult. In any case the new birth is the work of the Holy Ghost, and He can as easily work upon youth as upon age.

In proportion to our own spirituality of mind, and in proportion to our own child-likeness of heart, we shall be at home with children; and we shall enter into their early fears and hopes, their budding faith and opening love. Dwelling among young converts, we shall seem to be in a garden of flowers, in a vineyard where the tender grapes give a good smell.

## The Children's Shepherd

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### The Children's Shepherd

SIMON PETER was not a Welshman, but he had a great deal of what we know as Welsh fire in him. He was just the sort of man to interest the young. Children delight to gather round a fire, whether it be on the hearth or in the heart. Certain persons appear to be made of ice, and from these children speedily shrink away: congregations or classes grow smaller every Sunday when cold-blooded creatures preside over them. But when a man or a woman has a kindly heart, the children seem to gather readily, just as flies in autumn days swarm on a warm, sunny wall. Therefore Jesus says to warm-hearted Simon, "Feed My lambs." He is the man for the office.

Simon Peter was now a greatly indebted man. He owed much to Jesus Christ, according to that rule of the Kingdom—he loveth much to whom much hath been forgiven. Oh, you that have never entered upon this; service for Christ, and yet might do it well, come forward at once and say, "I have left this work to younger hands, but I will do so no longer. I have experience, and I trust I yet retain a warm heart within my bosom; I will go and join these workers, who are steadily feeding the lambs in the name of the Lord." So far as to the man who is called to feed the lambs.

But especially Peter was prepared for feeding the lambs by being with his Master. He would never forget that morning, and all the incidents of it. It was Christ's voice that he heard; it was Christ's look that pierced him to the heart; he breathed the air which surrounded the risen Lord, and this fellowship with Jesus perfumed Peter's heart and tuned Peter's speech, that he might afterwards go forth and feed the lambs. I commend to you the study of instructive books, but above all I commend the study of Christ. Let Him be your library. Get near to Jesus. An hour's communion with Jesus is the best preparation for teaching either the young or the old.

Mainly that examination should be exercised concerning our love; for the best preparation for teaching Christ's lambs is love,—love to Jesus and to them. We cannot be priests on their behalf unless like Aaron we wear their names upon our breasts. We must love or we cannot bless. Teaching is poor work when love is gone; it is like a smith working without fire, or a builder without mortar. A shepherd who does not love his sheep is a hireling and not a shepherd: he will flee in the time of danger, and leave his flock to the wolf. Where there is no love there will be no life; living lambs are not to be fed by dead men. We preach and teach love: our subject is the love of God in Christ Jesus. How can we teach this if we have no love ourselves? Our object is to create love in the hearts of those we teach, and to foster it where it already exists; but how can we convey the fire if it is not kindled in our own hearts? How can he promote the flame whose hands are damp, and dripping with worldliness and indifference, so that he acts on the child's heart rather as a bucket of water than as a flame of fire? These lambs of the flock live in the love of Christ: shall they not live in ours? He calls them His lambs, and so they are; shall we not love them for His sake? They were chosen in love; they were redeemed in love; they have been called in love; they have been washed in love; they have been fed by love, and they will be kept by love till they come to the green pastures on the hilltops of heaven. You and I will be out of gear with the vast

machinery of divine love unless our souls are full of affectionate zeal for the good of the beloved ones. Love is the grandest preparation for the ministry, whether exercised in the congregation or in the class. Love, and then feed. If thou lovest, feed. If thou dost not love, then wait till the Lord hath quickened thee, and lay not thy unhallowed hand to this sacred service.

This feeding is humble, lowly, unostentatious work. Do you know the name of a shepherd? I have known the names of one or two who follow that calling, but I never heard anybody speak of them as great men; their names are not in the papers, nor do we hear of them as a trade with a grievance, claiming to be noticed by the legislature. Shepherds are generally quiet, unobtrusive people. When you took at the shepherd, you would not see any difference between him and the ploughman, or the carter, he plods on uncomplainingly through the winter, and in the early spring he has no rest night or day because the lambs are needing him: this he does year after year, and yet he will never be made a Knight of the Garter, nor even be exalted to the peerage, albeit he may have done far more useful work than those who are floated into rank upon their own beer-barrels. So in the case of many a faithful teacher of young children; you hear but little about him, yet he is doing grand work for which future ages will call him blessed. His Master knows all about him, and we shall hear of him in that day; perhaps not till then.

Moreover, this is continuous work. "Feed My lambs," is not for a season, but for all time. Lambs could not live if the shepherd only fed them once a week. I reckon they would die between Sunday and Sunday; therefore good teachers of the young look after them all the days of the week as they have opportunity, and they are careful about their souls with prayer and holy example when they are not teaching them by word of mouth. The shepherdry of lambs is daily, hourly work. When is a shepherd's work over? How many hours a day does he labour? He will tell you that in lambing-time he is never done. He sleeps between whiles just when he can, taking much less than forty winks, and then rousing himself for action. It is so with those who feed Christ's lambs; they rest not till God saves and sanctifies their dear ones.

And all this has to be done in a singularly choice spirit; the true shepherd spirit is an amalgam of many precious graces. He is hot with zeal, but he is not fiery with passion; he is gentle, and yet he rules his class; he is loving, but he does not wink at sin; he has power over the lambs, but he is not domineering or sharp; he has cheerfulness, but not levity; freedom, but not license; solemnity, but not gloom. He who cares for lambs should be a lamb himself; and blessed be God, there is a Lamb before the throne who cares for all of us, and does so the more effectually because He is in all things made like unto us. The shepherd spirit is a rare and priceless gift. A successful pastor or a successful teacher in a school will be found to have special characteristics, which distinguish him from his fellows. A bird when it is sitting on its eggs, or when the little ones are newly-hatched, has about it a mother-spirit, so that it devotes all its life to the feeding of its little ones: other birds may be taking their pleasure on the wing, but this bird sits still the life-long day and night, or else its only flights are to provide for gaping mouths which seem to be never filled. A passion has taken possession of the bird; and something like it comes over the true soul-winner: he would gladly die to win souls; he pines, he pleads, he plods to bless those on whom his heart is set. If these could but be saved he would pawn half his heaven for it; ay, and sometimes, in moments of enthusiasm he is ready to barter heaven altogether to win souls, and, like Paul; he could wish himself accursed, so that they were but saved. This blessed extravagance many cannot understand, because they never felt it; may the Holy Ghost work it in us, so shall we act as true shepherds

towards the lambs. This, then, is the work: "Feed My lambs."

## Of Such Is the Kingdom of Heaven

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Of Such Is the Kingdom of Heaven OUR LORD TELLS THE DISCIPLES that the gospel sets up a kingdom. Was there ever a kingdom which had no children in it? How, then, could it grow? Jesus tells us that children are admitted into the kingdom; nay, not only that some few are here and there admitted into it, but, "of such is the kingdom of God." I am not inclined to get away from the plain sense of that expression, nor to suggest that He merely means that the kingdom consists of those who are like children. It is clear that He intended such children as those who were before him—babes and young children: "of such is the kingdom of God." There are children in all kingdoms, and there are children in Christ's kingdom; and I am not certain that John Newton was not right when he said that the majority of persons who are now in the kingdom of God are children. When I think of all the multitudes of babes that have died, who are now swarming in the streets of heaven, it does seem to me to be a blessed thought that albeit generation after generation of adults have passed away in unbelief and rebellion, yet enormous multitudes of children have gone streaming up to heaven, saved by the grace of God, through the death of Christ, to sing the high praises of the Lord for ever before the eternal throne. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." They give tone and character to the kingdom; it is rather a kingdom of children than of men.

We know that infants enter the kingdom, for we are convinced that all of our race who die in infancy are included in the election of grace, and partake in the redemption wrought out by our Lord Jesus. Whatever some may think, the whole spirit and tone of the Word of God, as well as the nature of God Himself, lead us to believe that all who leave this world as babes are saved. Now, how do they receive the kingdom, for in the same way must we receive it? Certainly children do not receive it by birth or blood, for we are expressly told in John's gospel that the children of God are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh. All privilege of descent is now abolished, and no babe enters into heaven because it was born of a pious father or mother, neither shall any be shut out because his progenitors were atheists or idolaters. My solemn persuasion is that the child of a Mahomedan, or a Papist, or a Buddhist, or a cannibal, dying in infancy, is as surely saved as the child of the Christian. Salvation by blood or birth there can be none, for the gospel dispensation does not admit of it: if saved, as we assuredly believe they are, infants must be saved simply according to the will and good pleasure of God, because He hath made them to be His own.

Now we have to think of another sort of children; these who outlive the time of infancy and become children capable of actual sin, and of knowing Christ, and being converted. Many of these by faith enter the kingdom. Now, as these children receive the kingdom of heaven, so must we receive it. How do the children receive it? I answer, a child receives the gospel with humility, with simple faith, and with unworldliness. Children are not held up to us as an example in all things, for they have faults which we ought to avoid, but they are here praised in this point,—the way in which they receive the kingdom. How does a child receive it? First, with humility, He is humble enough to be without prejudice. Take a little child and tell him about Christ Jesus the Saviour, and if God blesses

the telling of the story of the cross, and he believes it, he receives it without having any wrong views and notions to battle with. Many a man goes to hear the gospel with the idea that Christ is merely human; he cannot get rid of that prejudice from his mind, and therefore he does not receive Christ Jesus the Lord. Another comes to hear the word with the recollection of all that he has heard and read of infidelity, heresy, and profanity: how can he profit till this is removed? Another comes with his mind stuffed with proud self-righteousness, with a belief in priestcraft, or with a reliance upon some form or ceremony. If we could get this lumber out of the soul, there would be some hope; but all this is a hindrance. Now, the dear child, as he listens to the story of the love of God in Christ Jesus, has none of these prejudices to spoil his hearing. Very likely he does not even know that such evils have been invented by man, and he is blessed in his ignorance. He will find out the evil soon enough; but for the present he humbly drinks in the word, and prays,—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,

Look on me, a little child!

Pity my simplicity;

Suffer me to come to Thee."

Now, this deliverance from preconceived notions is what we greatly need. Just as your little boy or your little girl must believe, even so must you. There is only one way for the shepherd and the sage, the philosopher and the peasant. The little child receives Christ humbly, for he never dreams of merit or purchase. I do not recollect ever having met with a child who had to battle with self-righteousness in coming to Christ.

## As a Little Child

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### Chapter 6

As a Little Child WHEN OUR LORD BLESSED the little children He was making His last journey to Jerusalem. It was thus a farewell blessing which He gave to the little ones, and it reminds us of the fact that among His parting words to His disciples, before He was taken up, we find the tender charge, "Feed My lambs." The ruling passion was strong upon the great Shepherd of Israel, "who gathereth the lambs with His arm, and carrieth them in His bosom"; and it was fitting that while He was making His farewell journey He should bestow His gracious benediction upon the children.

Our Saviour, when He saw that His disciples were not only backward to admit the children to Him, but even rebuked those who brought them, was much displeased, and called them to Him that He might teach them better. He then informed them that, instead of the children being regarded as intruders, they were most welcome to Himself; and, instead of being interlopers, they had full right of access, for of children and of childlike persons His kingdom was composed. Moreover, He declared that none could enter that kingdom except in the same manner as children enter. He spoke with divine certainty, using His own expressive "verily," and He spoke with the weight of His own personal authority, "I say unto you." These prefatory expressions are intended to secure our reverent attention to the fact that so far from the admission of children into the kingdom being unusual or strange, none can find entrance there except they receive the gospel as a little child receives it.

I suppose that these grown-up apostles thought that the children's minds were too trifling. They are at their play and their childish mirth: they will regard it only as a pastime to be folded in Jesus' arms; it will be mirth to them, and they will have no idea of the solemnity of their position. Well! well! Trifling, is it? Children are said to be guilty of trifling! Are not ye also triflers? If it comes to an examination upon the matter of trifling, who are the greatest triflers, children or full-grown men and women? What is greater trifling than for a man to live for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, or for a woman to live to dress herself and waste her time in company? Nay, more, what is the accumulation of wealth for the sake of it but miserable trifling? Child's play without the amusement! Most men are triflers on a larger scale than children, and that is the main difference. Children when they trifle play with little things—their toys so breakable, are they not made on purpose to be trifled with and broken? The child with his trifles is but doing as he should. Alas, I know men and women who trifle with their souls, and with heaven and hell, and eternity; they trifle with God's Word, trifle with God's Son, trifle with God Himself! Charge not children with being frivolous, for their little games often have as much of earnestness about them, and are as useful, as the pursuits of men. Half the councils of our senators and the debates of our parliaments are worse than child's play. The game of war is a far greater folly than the most frolicsome of boyish tricks. Big children are worse triflers than the little ones can ever be. Despise not children for trifling when the whole world is given to folly.

But do the little ones forget? I suppose the events which we best remember in advanced age are the things which happened to us in our earliest days. At any rate, I have shaken hands with greyheaded men who have forgotten nearly all the events which have intervened between their old age and the time of their childhood, but little matters which transpired at home, hymns learned at their mother's knee, and words spoken by their father or sister, have lingered with them. The voices of childhood echo throughout life, The first learned is generally the last forgotten. The young children who heard our Lord's blessing would not forget it. They would have His countenance photographed upon their hearts, and never forget His kind and tender smile. Peter, and James, and John, and the rest of you, are all mistaken, and therefore you must suffer the children to come to Jesus.

In what respect are children deficient of capacity? Do they lack capacity for repentance? Assuredly not: have I not seen a girl weep herself ill because she has done wrong? A tender conscience in many a little boy has made him unutterably miserable when he has been conscious of a fault. Do not some of us recollect the keen arrows of conviction which rankled in our hearts when we were yet children? I distinctly recollect the time when I could not rest because of sin, and sought the Lord, while yet a child, with bitter anguish. Children are capable enough of repentance, God the Holy Spirit working it in them: this is no conjecture, for we ourselves are living witnesses.

Did you say that children could not love? That, after all, is one of the grandest parts of the education of a Christian; did you dream that children could not attain to it? No, you did not say that, nor dared you think it, for the capacity for love is great in a child. Would God it were always as great in ourselves!

Now, I wonder whether any have such a thought as the disciples' lingering in brain or heart? I wonder whether you ever think in this fashion? I should not be surprised if you do. I hope it is not quite so common as it used to be, but I used to see in certain quarters among old folks a deep suspicion of youthful piety. The seniors shook their heads at the idea of receiving children into the church. Some even ventured to speak of converts as "only a lot of girls and boys": as if they were the worse for that. Many if they hear of a child-convert are very dubious unless he dies very soon, and then they believe all about him. If the child lives they sharpen their axes to have a cut at him by way of examination. He must know all the doctrines, certainly, and he must be supernaturally grave. It is not every grown-up person who knows the higher doctrines of the Word, but if the young person should not know them he is set aside. Some people expect almost infinite wisdom in a child before they can believe him to be the subject of Divine grace. This is monstrous. Then, again, if a believing child should act like a child, some of the fathers of the last generation judged that he could not be converted, as if conversion to Christ added twenty years to our age. Of course, the young convert must not play any more, nor talk in his own childish fashion, or the seniors would be shocked; for it was a sort of understood thing that as soon as ever a child was converted he was to turn into an old man. I never could see anything in Scripture to support this theory; but then Scripture was not so much cared for as the judgment of the deep-experienced people, and the general opinion that it was well to summer and winter all converts before admitting them into the sacred enclosures of the church. Now, if any of you still have an idea in your head hostile to the conversion of children, try and get rid of it, for it is as wrong as wrong can be. If there were two enquirers before me now, a child and a man, and I received from each the same testimony, should have no more right to distrust the child than to suspect the man: in fact, if

suspicion must come in anywhere, it ought rather to be exercised towards the adult than in reference to the child, who is far less likely to be guilty of hypocrisy than the man, and far less likely to have borrowed his words and phrases. At any rate, learn from the Master's words that you are not to try and make the child like yourself, but you are to be transformed till you yourself are like the child.

## Feed My Lambs

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Feed My Lambs THE MOTIVE FOR FEEDING the lambs was to be his Master's self, and not his own self. Had Peter been the first pope of Rome, and had he been like his successors, which indeed he never was, surely it would have been fitting for the Lord to have said to him, "Feed your sheep. I commit them to you, O Peter, Vicar of Christ on earth." No, no, no. Peter is to feed them, but they are not his, they are still Christ's. The work that you have to do for Jesus, brethren and sisters, is in no sense for yourselves. Your classes are not your children, but Christ's. The exhortation which Paul gave was, "Feed the church of God," and Peter himself wrote in his epistle, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind." Let these lambs turn out what they may, the glory is to be to the Master and not to the servant; and the whole time spent, and labour given, and energy put forth, is every particle of it to redound to His praise whose these lambs are.

Many of us have been plucked like brands from the burning, for we were "enemies to God by wicked works"; and now we are in the church among His friends, and our Saviour trusts us with His dearest ones. I wonder when the prodigal son came back and the father received him, whether when market-day came he sent his younger son to market to sell the wheat and bring home the money. Most of you would have said, "I am glad the boy is come back; at the same time, I shall send his elder brother to do the business, for he has always stuck by me." As for myself, the Lord Jesus took me in as a poor prodigal son, and it was not many weeks before He put me in trust with the gospel, that greatest of all treasures; this was a grand love-token. I know of none to excel it. The commission given to Peter proved how thoroughly the breach was healed, how fully the sin was forgiven, for Jesus took the man who had cursed and sworn in denial of Him and bade him feed His lambs and sheep. Oh, blessed work, not for yourselves, and yet for yourselves! He that serves himself shall lose himself, but he that loseth himself doth really serve himself after the best possible fashion.

First, as a proof of love. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." If ye love Me, feed My lambs. If ye love Christ, show it, and show it by doing good to others, by laying yourself out to help others, that Jesus may have joy of them.

Besides being an inflowing of love, the feeding of lambs is an outflow of love. How often have we told our Lord that we loved Him when we were preaching, and I do not doubt you teachers feel more of the pleasure of love to Jesus when you are busy with your classes than when you are by yourselves at home. A person may go home and sit down and groan out—

"'Tis a point I long to know,

Of it causes anxious thought," and wipe his forehead and rub his eyes, and get into the dumps without end; but if he will rise up and work for Jesus, the point he longs to know will soon be settled, for love will come pouring out of his heart till he can no longer question whether it is there.

"So let us abide in this blessed service for Christ that it may be the delight of love, the very ocean in which love shall swim, the sunlight in which it shall bask. The recreation of a loving soul is work for Jesus Christ; and amongst the highest and most delicious forms of this heavenly recreation is the feeding of young Christians endeavouring to build them up in knowledge and understanding, that they may become strong in the Lord.

## The Child Timothy and His Teachers

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### The Child Timothy and His Teachers

NOWADAYS, SINCE THE WORLD has in it, alas! so few of Christian mothers and grandmothers, the church has thought it wise to supplement the instruction of home by teaching held under her fostering wing. Those children who have no such parents the church takes under her maternal care. I regard this as a very blessed institution. I am thankful for the many of our brothers and sisters who give their Sabbath-days, and many of them a considerable part of their week evenings also, to the teaching of other people's children, who somehow grow to be very much their own. They endeavour to perform the duties of fathers and mothers, for God's sake, to those children who are neglected by their own parents; and therein they do well. Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday-school is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Let holy grandmothers and gracious mothers, with their husbands, see to it that their own boys and girls are well taught in the Book of the Lord. Where there are no such Christian parents it is well and wisely done for godly people to intervene. It is a Christly work when others undertake the duty which the natural doers of it have left undone. The Lord Jesus looks with pleasure upon those who feed His lambs, and nurse His babes; for it is not His will that any of these little ones should perish. Timothy had the great privilege of being taught by those whose natural duty it is; but where that great privilege cannot be enjoyed, let us all, as God shall help us, try to make up to the children the terrible loss which they endure. Come forward, earnest men and women, and sanctify yourselves for this joyful service.

Observe that Timothy was taught, not only to reverence holy things in general, but especially to know the Scriptures. The teaching of his mother and his grandmother was the teaching of holy Scripture. Suppose we get the children together on Sabbath-days, and then amuse them and make the hours to pass away pleasantly; or instruct them, as we do in the week-days, in the elements of a moral education, what have we done? We have done nothing worthy of the day, or of the church of God. Suppose that we are particularly careful to teach the children the rules and regulations of our own church, and do not take them to the Scriptures; suppose that we bring before them a book which is set up as the standard of our church, but do not dwell upon the Bible—what have we done? The aforesaid standard may or may not be correct, and we may, therefore, have taught our children truth or have taught them error; but if we keep to holy Scripture we cannot go aside. With such a standard we know that we are right. This Book is the Word of God, and if we teach it, we teach that which the Lord will accept and bless. O dear teachers—and I speak here to myself also—let our teaching be more and more Scriptural! Fret not if our classes forget what we say, but pray them to remember what the Lord says. May Divine truths about sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come, be written on their hearts! May revealed truths concerning the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost, never be forgotten by them! May they know the virtue and necessity of the atoning blood of our Lord, the power of His resurrection, and the glory of His second coming! May the doctrines of

grace be graven as with a pen of iron upon their minds, and written as with the point of a diamond upon their hearts, never to be erased! If we can secure this, we have not lived in vain. The generation now ruling seems bent on departing from the eternal truth of God: but we shall not despair if the gospel be impressed upon the memory of the rising race.

This work was quickened by a saving faith. The Scriptures do not save, but they are able to make a name wise unto salvation. Children may know the Scriptures, and yet not be children of God. Faith in Jesus Christ is that grace which brings immediate salvation. Many dear children are called of God so early, that they cannot precisely tell when they were converted; but they were converted: they must at some time or other have passed from death to life. You could not have told this morning, by observation, the moment when the sun rose, but it did rise; and there was a time when it was below the horizon, and another time when it had risen above it. The moment, whether we see it or not, in which a child is really saved, is when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps for years Lois and Eunice had been teaching the Old Testament to Timothy, while they themselves did not know the Lord Jesus; and, if so, they were teaching him the type without the antitype—the riddles without the answers: but it was good teaching for all that, since it was all the truth which they then knew. How much happier, however, is our task, since we are able to teach concerning the Lord Jesus so plainly, having the New Testament to explain the Old! May we not hope that even earlier in life than Timothy, our dear children may catch the thought that Christ Jesus is the sum and substance of holy Scripture, and so by faith in Him may receive power to become the sons of God? I mention this, simple as it is, because I want all teachers to feel that if their children do not as yet know all the doctrines of the Bible, and if there be certain higher or deeper truths which their minds have not yet grasped, still children are saved as soon as they are wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Faith in the Lord Jesus, as He is set forth in Scripture, will surely save. "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," said Philip to the eunuch; and we say the same to every child: thou mayest confess thy faith if thou hast any true faith in Jesus to confess. If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, and so dost put thy trust in Him, thou art as truly saved as though grey hairs adorned thy brow.

Sound instruction in holy Scripture, when quickened by a living faith, creates a solid character. The man who from a child has known the holy Scriptures, when he obtains faith in Christ will be grounded and settled upon the abiding principles of the unchanging Word of God.

"O teachers, see what you may do! In your schools sit our future Evangelists. In that infant class sits; an apostle to some distant land. There may come under your training hand, my sister, a future father in Israel. There shall come under your teaching, my brother, those who are to bear the banners of the Lord in the thick of the fray. The ages look to you each time your class assembles. Oh, that God may help you to do your part well! We pray with one heart and one soul that the Lord Jesus Christ may be with our Sunday schools from this day and till He cometh.

## "What Mean Ye By This Service?"

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"What Mean Ye By This Service?"

WE SHOULD VIEW EVERYTHING in this world by the light of redemption, and then we shall view it aright. It makes a wonderful change whether you view Providence from the standpoint of human merit or from the foot of the cross. We see nothing truly till Jesus is our light. Everything is seen in its reality when you look through the glass, the ruby glass of the atoning sacrifice. Use this telescope of the cross, and you shall see far and clear; look at sinners through the cross; look at saints through the cross; look at sin through the cross; look at the world's joys and sorrows through the cross; look at heaven and hell through the cross. See how conspicuous the blood of the Passover was meant to be, and then learn from all this to make much of the sacrifice of Jesus—yea, to make everything of it, for Christ is all.

You now see how everything was done that could well be thought of to bring the blood of the Paschal lamb into a high position in the esteem of the people whom the Lord brought out of Egypt; and you and I must do everything we can think of to bring forward, and keep before men for ever, the precious doctrine of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. He was made sin for us though He knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Inquiry should be excited in the minds of our children. Oh, that we could get them to ask questions about the things of God! Some of them enquire very early, others of them seem diseased with much the same indifference as older folks. With both orders of mind we have to deal. It is well to explain to children the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, for this shows forth the death of Christ in symbol. I regret that children do not oftener see this ordinance. Baptism and the Lord's Supper should both be placed in view of the rising generation, that they may then ask us, "What mean ye by this?" Now, the Lord's Supper is a perennial gospel sermon, and it turns mainly upon the sacrifice for sin. You may banish the doctrine of the atonement from the pulpit, but it will always live in the church through the Lord's Supper. You cannot explain that broken bread and that cup filled with the fruit of the vine, without reference to our Lord's atoning death. You cannot explain "the communion of the body of Christ" without bringing in, in some form or other, the death of Jesus in our place and stead. Let your little ones, then, see the Lord's Supper, and let them be told most clearly what it sets forth. And if not the Lord's Supper—for that is; not the thing itself, but only the shadow of the glorious fact—dwell much and often in their presence upon the sufferings and death of our Redeemer. Let them think of Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha, and let them learn to sing in plaintive tones of Him who laid down His life for us. Tell them who it was that suffered, and why. Yes, though the hymn is hardly to my taste in some of its expressions, I would have the children sing—

"There is a green hill far away,

Without a city wall." And I would have them learn such lines as these:

"He knew how wicked we had been,

And knew that God must punish sin;

So out of pity Jesus said,

He'd bear the punishment instead." This will necessitate your teaching the child his need of a Saviour. You must not hold back from this needful task. Do not flatter the child with delusive rubbish about his nature being good and needing to be developed. Tell him he must be born again. Don't bolster him up with the fancy of his own innocence, but show him his sin. Mention the childish sins to which he is prone, and pray the Holy Spirit to work conviction in his heart and conscience. Deal with the young in much the same way as you would with the old. Be thorough and honest with them. Flimsy religion is neither good for young nor old. These boys and girls need pardon through the precious blood as surely as any of us. Do not hesitate to tell the child his ruin; he will not else desire the remedy. Tell him also of the punishment of sin, and warn him of its terror. Be tender, but be true. Do not hide from the youthful sinner the truth, however terrible it may be. Now that he has come to years of responsibility, if he believes not in Christ, it will go ill with him at the last great day. Set before him the judgment-seat, and remind him that he will have to give an account of things done in the body. Labour to arouse the conscience; and pray God the Holy Spirit to work by you till the heart becomes tender and the mind perceives the need of the great salvation.

One thing I am sure of, and that is, that if we teach the children the doctrine of the atonement in the most unmistakable terms, we shall be doing ourselves good. I sometimes hope that God will revive His church and restore her to her ancient faith by a gracious work among children. If He would bring into our churches a large influx of young people, how it would tend to quicken the sluggish blood of the supine and sleepy! Child Christians tend to keep the house alive. Oh, for more of them! If the Lord will but help us to teach the children we shall be teaching ourselves. There is no way of learning like teaching, and you do not know a thing till you can teach it to another. You do not thoroughly know any truth till you can put it before a child so that he can see it. In trying to make a little child understand the doctrine of the atonement you will get clearer views of it yourselves, and therefore I commend the holy exercise to you.

■PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT= "What a mercy it will be if our children are thoroughly grounded in the doctrine of redemption by Christ! If they are warned against the false gospels of this evil age, and if they are taught to rest on the eternal rock of Christ's finished work, we may hope to have a generation following us which will maintain the faith, and will be better than their fathers. Your Sunday-schools are admirable; but what is their purpose if you do not teach the gospel in them? You get children together and keep them quiet for an hour-and-a-half, and then send them home; but what is the good of it? It may bring some quiet to their fathers and mothers, and that is, perhaps, why they send them to the school; but all the real good lies in what is taught the children. The most fundamental truth should be made most prominent; and what is this but the cross. Some talk to children about being good boys and girls, and so on; that is to say, they preach the law to the children, though they would preach the gospel to grown-up people. Is this honest? Is this wise? Children need the gospel, the whole gospel, the unadulterated gospel; they ought to have it, and if they are taught of the Spirit of God they are as capable of receiving it as persons of ripe years. Teach the little ones that Jesus died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Very, very confidently do I leave this work in the hands of teachers. I never knew a nobler body of Christian

men and women; for they are as earnest in their attachment to the Old Gospel as they are eager for the winning of souls. Be encouraged; the God who has saved so many of your children is going to save very many more of them, and we shall have great joy as we see hundreds brought to Christ.

## Samuel and His Teachers

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### Samuel and His Teachers

IN THE DAYS OF ELI the word of the Lord was precious, and there was no open vision. It was well when the word did come, that one chosen individual had the hearing ear to receive it, and the obedient heart to perform it. Eli failed to tutor his sons to be the willing servants and the attentive hearers of the Lord's word. In this he was without the excuse of inability, since he successfully trained the child Samuel in reverent attention to the Divine will. O that those who are diligent about the souls of others, would look well to their own households. Alas, poor Eli, like many in our day, they made thee keeper of the vineyards, but thine own vineyard thou hast not kept. As often as he looked upon the gracious child, Samuel, he must have felt the heartache. When he remembered his own neglected and unchastened sons, and how they had made themselves vile before all Israel, Samuel was the living witness of what grace can work where children are trained up in God's fear, and Hophni and Phineas were sad specimens of what parental indulgence will produce in the children of the best of men. Ah, Eli, if thou hadst been as careful with thine own sons as with the son of Hannah, they had not been such men of Belial, nor would Israel have abhorred the offering of the Lord because of the fornication which those priestly reprobates committed at the very door of the tabernacle. O for grace so to nurse our little ones for the Lord, that they may hear the Lord when He shall be pleased to speak unto them.

When Eli perceived that God had called the child, he taught him his first little prayer. It is a very short one, but it is a very full one—"Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." Let the Christian parent explain to the child what prayer is; tell him that God answers prayer; direct him to the Saviour, and then urge him to express his desires in his own language, both when he rises, and when he goes to rest. Gather the little ones around your knee and listen to their words, suggesting to them their needs, and reminding them of God's gracious promise. You will be amazed, and, I may add, sometimes amused too; but you will be frequently surprised at the expressions they will use, the confessions they will make, the desires they will utter; and I am certain that any Christian person standing within earshot, and listening to the simple prayer of a little child earnestly asking God for what it thinks it wants, would never afterwards wish to teach a child a form, but would say that as a matter of education to the heart the extemporaneous utterance was infinitely superior to the best form, and that the form should be given up for ever. However, do not let me speak too sweepingly. If you must teach your child to say a form of prayer, at least take care that you do not teach him to say anything which is not true. If you teach your children a catechism, mind that it is thoroughly scriptural, or you may train them up to tell falsehoods. Teach him nothing but the truth as it is in Jesus so far as he can learn it, and pray the Holy Spirit to write that truth upon his heart. Better to supply no sign-posts to the young traveller than to mislead him with false ones. The light of a wrecker's beacon is worse than darkness. Teach our youth to make untruthful statements in religious matters, and Atheism can scarcely do more to corrupt their minds. Formal religion is a deadly foe to vital godliness. If you teach a catechism, or if you teach a form of prayer to your little ones, let it be all true; and, as far as possible, never put into a child's mouth a word which the child

cannot truly say from his heart.

It is said of the Rev. John Angell James, "Like most men who have been eminent and honoured in the Church of Christ, he had a godly mother, who was wont to take her children to her chamber, and with each separately to pray for the salvation of their souls. This exercise, which fulfilled her own responsibility, was moulding the character of her children, and most, if not all of them, rose up to call her blessed. When did such means ever fail?" I beseech you, the teachers of the Sunday-school—though I scarcely need to do so, for I know how zealous you are in this matter—as soon as ever you see the first peep of day in your children, encourage their young desires. Believe in the conversion of children, as children; believe that the Lord can call them by His grace, can renew their hearts, can give them a part and a lot among His people long before they reach the prime of life.

## Instructions for Teachers and Parents

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### Instructions for Teachers and Parents

FIRST, GET THE CHILDREN to come to your school. The great complaint with some teachers is, that they cannot obtain scholars. In London, we are having a canvass of the children; that is a good idea, and you ought to have a canvass of every country village, and of every market-town, and get into the Sunday-school every child you can. My advice to you is, get the children to come by all fair and right means. Do not bribe them; that is a plan to which we strongly object, and it is only adopted in schools of the lowest order, schools of so mean a class that even the fathers and mothers of the children have too much sense to send them there. "But, then, Farmer Brown won't employ them, or the squire will turn them out of their situations; or, if the children don't go to the school on Sundays, they shall not go on weekdays." Oh, that beggarly trick of bribing! I wish there were an end of it; it only shows the weakness, and degradation, and abomination of a sect that cannot succeed without using so mean a system. But with the exception of that method, do not be very particular how you get the children to school. Why, if I could not get people to come to my chapel by preaching in a black coat, I would have regimentals to-morrow, I would have a congregation somehow. Better do strange things than have an empty chapel, or an empty schoolroom. When I was in Scotland, we sent a bellman round a village to secure an audience, and the plan was eminently successful. Spare no right means, but do get the children in. I have known ministers who have gone out into the streets on the Lord's-day afternoon, and talked to the children who were playing about, and so induced them to come to the school. This is what an earnest teacher will do; he will say, "John, come into our school; you cannot think what a nice place it is." Then he gets the children in, and in his kind, winning manner he tells them stories and anecdotes about girls and boys who loved the Saviour, and in this way the school is filled. Go and catch the children. There is no law against it; all is fair in war against the devil. So my first instruction is, get the children, and get them anyhow that you can.

Next, get the children's attention. "Come, ye children, hearken unto me." If they do not hearken, you may talk, but you will speak to no purpose whatever. If they do not listen, you go through your labour as an unmeaning drudgery to yourselves and to your scholars, too. You can do nothing without securing their attention. "That is just what I cannot do," says one. Well, that depends upon yourself; if you give them something worth attending to, they will be sure to attend. Give them something worth hearing, and they will certainly hearken. This rule may not be universal, but it is very nearly so. Don't forget to give them a few anecdotes. Anecdotes are very much objected to by critics of sermons, who say they ought not to be used in the pulpit; but some of us know better than that, we know what will wake a congregation up; we can testify, from experience, that a few anecdotes here and there are first-rate things to get the attention of persons who will not listen to dry doctrine. Do try and gather as many good illustrations in the week as you possibly can; wherever you go, if you are really a wise teacher, you can always find something to make into a tale to tell your children. Then, when your scholars get dull, and you are losing their attention, say to them, "Do you know the Five Bells?" If there is such a place in the village, they all open their

eyes directly; or you ask, "Do know the turning against the Red Lion?" Then tell them something you have read or heard which will secure their attention to the lesson. A dear child once said, "Father, I like to hear Mr. So-and-so preach, because he puts so many 'likes' into his sermon;—'like this, and like that.'" Yes, children always love those likes." Make parables, pictures, figures for them, and you will always get on. I am sure, if I were a boy listening to some of you, unless you told me a tale now and then, you would as often see the back of my head as my face; and I do not know, if I sat in a hot schoolroom, but that my head would nod, and I should go to sleep, or be playing with Tom on my left, and do as many strange things as the rest, if you did not strive to interest me. Remember, then, to make your scholars "hearken."

## Model Lesson for Teachers

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### Model Lesson for Teachers

TEACH THEM morality: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." Now, we never teach morality as the way of salvation. God forbid that we should ever mix up man's works in any way with the redemption which is in Christ Jesus! "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Yet we teach morality while we teach spirituality; and I have always found that the gospel produces the best morality in all the world. I would have a Sunday-school teacher watchful over the morals of the boys and girls under his care, speaking to them very particularly of those sins which are most common to youth. He may honestly and conveniently say many things to his children which no one else can say, especially when reminding them of the sin of lying, so common with children, or the sin of petty theft, or of disobedience to parents, or of breaking the Sabbath-day. I would have the teacher be very particular in mentioning these evils one by one; for it is of little avail talking to them about sins in the mass, you must take them one by one, just as David did. First look after the tongue: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." Then look after the whole conduct. "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." If the child's, soul is not saved by other parts of the teaching, this part may have a beneficial effect upon his life, and so far so good. Morality, however, by itself is comparatively a small thing. The best part of what you teach is godliness. I said not, "religion," but godliness. Many people are religious after a fashion, without being godly. Many have all the externals of godliness, all the outside of piety; such men we call "religious," but they have no right thought about God. They think about their place of worship, their Sunday, their books, but nothing about God. He who does not respect God, pray to God, love God, is an ungodly man, whatever his external religion may be. Labour to teach the child always to have an eye to God; write on his memory these words, "Thou God seest me." Bid him remember that his every act and thought are under the eye of God. No Sunday-school teacher discharges his duty unless he constantly lays stress upon the fact that there is a God who notices everything that happens. Oh, that we were more godly ourselves; that we talked more of godliness, and that we loved godliness better!

But you will not have done half enough unless you teach carefully the fourth lesson,—the absolute necessity of a change of heart. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Oh! may God enable us to keep this constantly before the minds of the taught, that there must be a broken heart and a contrite spirit, that good works will be of no avail unless there be a new nature, that the most arduous duties and the most earnest prayers will all be as nothing, unless there be a true and thorough repentance for sin, and an entire forsaking of sin through the grace and mercy of God! Be sure, whatever you leave out, that you teach the children the three R's,—Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration. Tell the children they are ruined by the Fall, and that there is salvation for them only by being redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Keep constantly before them these vital truths, and then you will have the pleasing task of telling them the sweet subject of the closing lesson.

Thus have I given you five lessons; and now let me solemnly say that, with all the instruction you may give to your children, you must all of you be deeply conscious that you are not capable of doing anything in the securing of the child's salvation, but that it is God Himself who, from the first to the last, must effect it all. You are simply at pen; God can write with you, but you cannot write anything of yourself. You are a sword; God can with you slay the child's sin, but you cannot slay it of yourself. Be ye, therefore, always mindful of this, that you must be first taught of God yourself, and then you must ask God to use you to teach; for unless a higher Teacher than you work with you, and instruct the child, the child must perish. It is not your instruction that can save the souls of your children; it is the blessing of God the Holy Spirit accompanying your labours, May God bless and crown your efforts with abundant success! He will surely do so if you are instant in prayer, constant in supplication. Never yet did the earnest teacher or preacher "labour in vain in the Lord," and often has it been seen that bread cast upon the waters has been found after many days.

## "Come, Ye Children"—Three Admonitions

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### "Come, Ye Children"—Three Admonitions

FIRST, recollect whom you are teaching; "Come, ye children." I think we ought always to have respect to our audience; I do not mean that we need care if we are preaching to Mr. So-and-so, Sir William this, or My Lord that,—because in God's sight such titles are the merest trifles; but we are to remember that we are preaching to men and women who have souls, so that we ought not to occupy their time by things that are not worth their hearing. But when you teach in Sabbath-schools, you are, if it be possible, in a more responsible situation even than a minister occupies. He preaches to grown-up people, to men of judgment, who, if they do not like what he preaches, can go somewhere else; but you teach children who have no option of going elsewhere. If you teach the child wrongly, he believes you; if you teach him heresies, he will receive them; what you teach him now, he will never forget. You are not sowing, as some say, on virgin soil, for it has long been occupied by the devil; but you are sowing on a soil more fertile now than it ever will be again,—soil that will produce fruit now, far better than it will do in after days; you are sowing on a young heart, and what you sow will be pretty sure to abide there, especially if you teach evil, for that will never be forgotten. You are beginning with the child; take care what you do with him. Do not spoil him. Many a child has been treated like the Indian children who have copper plates put upon their foreheads, so that they may never grow. There are many who are simpletons now, just because those who had the care of them when young gave them no opportunities of getting knowledge, so that, when they became old, they cared nothing about it. Have a care what you are after; you are teaching children, mind what you teach them. Put poison in the spring, and it will pollute the whole stream. Take care what you are after! You are twisting the sapling, and the old oak will be bent thereby. Have a care, it is a child's soul you are tampering with, if you are tampering at all; it is a child's soul you are preparing for eternity, if God is with you. I give you a solemn admonition on every child's behalf. Surely, if it be murder to administer poison to the dying, it must be far more criminal to give poison to the young life. If it be evil to mislead grey-headed age, it must be far more so to turn aside the feet of the young into the road of error, in which they may for ever walk.

Third, remember that your children need teaching. "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." That makes your work all the more solemn. If children did not need teaching, I would not be so extremely anxious that you should teach them aright. Works of supererogation, works that are not necessary, men may do as they please; but this work is absolutely necessary. Your child needs teaching. He was born in iniquity; in sin did his mother conceive him. He has an evil heart; he knows not God, and he never will know the Lord unless he is taught. He is not like some ground of which we have heard, that hath good seed lying hidden in its very bowels; but, instead thereof, he hath evil seed within his heart. God can place good seed there. You profess to be His instruments to scatter seed upon that child's heart; remember, if that seed be not sown, he will be lost for ever, his life will be a life of alienation from God; and at his death everlasting punishment must be his portion. Be careful, then, how you teach, remembering

the urgent necessity of the case. This is not a house on fire, needing your assistance at the engine; nor is it a wreck at sea, demanding your oar in the lifeboat; but it is a deathless spirit calling aloud to you," Come and help me." Therefore, I beseech you, teach the fear of the Lord, and that only; be very anxious to say, and to say truly, "I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

## "Come, Ye Children"—The Psalmist's Invitation

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### "Come, Ye Children"—The Psalmist's Invitation

IT IS A SINGULAR THING that good men frequently discover their duty when they are placed in most humiliating positions. Never in David's life was he in a worse plight than that which suggested this Psalm. It is headed, "A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed." This poem was intended to commemorate that event, and was suggested by it. David was carried before King Achish, the Abimelech of Philistia, and, in order to make his escape, he pretended to be mad, accompanying that profession of madness with certain very degrading actions which might well seem to betoken his insanity. He was driven from the palace, and as usual, when such men are in the street, it is probable that a number of children assembled around him. You have the sad story told in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. In after days, when David sang songs of praise to Jehovah, recollecting how he had become the laughing-stock of little children, he seemed to say, "Ah! by my folly before the children in the streets, I have lowered myself in the estimation of generations that shall live after me; now I will endeavour to undo the mischief,—"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." The doctrine is, that children are capable of being taught the fear of the Lord.

I can bear witness that children can understand the Scriptures; for I am sure that, when but a child, I could have discussed many a knotty point of controversial theology, having heard both sides of the question freely stated among my father's circle of friends. In fact, children are capable of understanding some things in early life, which we hardly understand afterwards. Children have eminently a simplicity of faith, and simplicity of faith is akin to the highest knowledge; indeed, we know not that there is much distinction between the simplicity of a child and the genius of the profoundest mind. He who receives things simply, as a child, will often have ideas which the man who is prone to make a syllogism of everything will never attain unto. If you wish to know whether children can be taught, I point you to many in our churches, and in pious families,—not prodigies, but such as we frequently see,—Timothys and Samuels, and little girls, too, who have early come to know a Saviour's love. As soon as a child is capable of being lost, it is capable of being saved. As soon as a child can sin, that child can, if God's grace assist it, believe and receive the Word of God. As soon as children can learn evil, be assured that they are competent, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to learn good. Never go to your class with the thought that the children cannot comprehend you; for if you do not make them understand, it is possibly because you do not yourselves understand; if you do not teach children what you wish them to learn, it may be because you are not fit for the task; you should find out simpler words, more fitted for their capacity, and then you would discover that it was not the fault of the child, but the fault of the teacher, if he did not learn. I hold that children are capable of salvation. He who, in Divine sovereignty, reclaimed the grey-haired sinner from the error of his ways, can turn a little child from

his youthful follies. He who, in the eleventh hour, findeth some standing idle in the market-place, and sendeth them into the vineyard, can and does call men at the dawning of the day to labour for Him. He who can change the course of a river when it has rolled onward, and become a mighty flood, can control a new-born rivulet leaping from its cradle-fountain, and make it run into the channel He desireth, He can do all things: He can work upon children's hearts as He pleases, for all are under His control.

"I will not stay to establish the doctrine, because I do not consider that any are so foolish as to doubt it. But, although you believe it, I fear many do not expect to hear of children being saved. Throughout the churches, I have noticed a kind of abhorrence of anything like child-piety. We are frightened at the idea of a little boy loving Christ; and if we hear of a little girl following the Saviour, we say it is a youthful fancy, an early impression that will die away. I beseech you, never treat child-piety with suspicion. It is a tender plant; do not brush it too hard. I heard a tale, some time ago, which I believe to be perfectly authentic. A dear little girl, some five or six years old, a true lover of Jesus, requested of her mother that she might join the church. The mother told her she was too young, and the poor little thing was exceedingly grieved. After a while, the mother, who saw that piety was in her child's heart, spoke to the minister on the subject. The minister talked to the child, and said to the mother, "I am thoroughly convinced of her piety, but I cannot take her into the church, she is too young." When the child heard that, a strange gloom passed over her face; and the next morning, when the mother went to her little bed, she lay with a pearly tear on each eye, dead for very grief; her heart was broken, because she could not follow her Saviour, and do as He had bidden her. I would not have murdered that child for a world! Take care how you treat young piety. Be very tender in dealing with it. Believe that children can be saved just as much as yourselves, I do most firmly believe in the salvation of children. When you see the young heart brought to the Saviour, do not stand by and speak harshly, mistrusting everything. It is better sometimes to be deceived than to be the means of offending one of these little ones who believe in Jesus. God send to His people a firm belief that little buds of grace are worthy of all tender care!

## King David's Two Encouragements to Parents

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King David's Two Encouragements to Parents and Teachers THE FIRST IS THAT of pious example. David said, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." You are not ashamed to tread in the footsteps of David, are you? You will not object to follow the example of one who was first eminently holy, and then eminently great. Shall the shepherd boy, the giant-slayer, the sweet psalmist of Israel, and the mighty monarch, leave footprints in which you are too proud to tread? Ah, no! you will be happy, I am sure, to be as David was. If you want, however, a higher example even than that of David, hear the Son of David while from His lips flow the sweet words, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." I am sure it would encourage you if you always thought of these examples. You who are teaching children, are not dishonoured by that occupation; some may say, "You are only a Sunday-school teacher," but you are a noble personage, holding an honourable office, and having illustrious predecessors. We love to see persons of some standing in society take an interest in Sabbath-schools. One great fault in many of our churches is that the children are left for the young people to care for; the older members, who have more wisdom, taking but very little notice of them; and, very often, the wealthier members of the church stand aside as if the teaching of the poor were not (as indeed it is) the special business of the rich. I hope for the day when the mighty men of Israel shall be found helping in this great warfare against the enemy. In the United States we have heard of Presidents, of Judges, Members of Congress, and persons in the highest positions, not condescending, for I scorn to use such a term, but honouring themselves by teaching little children in Sabbath-schools. He who teaches a class in a Sabbath-school has earned a good degree. I had rather receive the title of S.S.T. than M.A., B.A., or any other honour that ever was conferred by men. Let me beg you, then, to take heart, because your duties are so honourable. Let the royal example of David, let the Godlike example of Jesus Christ inspire you with fresh diligence and increasing ardour, with confident and enduring perseverance, still to go on in your blessed work, saying as David did, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

"The second is the encouragement of great success. David said, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me:" he did not add, "perhaps I will teach you the fear of the Lord," but, "I will teach you." He had success; or, if he had not, others have. The success of Sabbath-schools! If I begin to talk of that, I shall have an endless theme; therefore, I will not commence. Many volumes might be written on it, and then when all were written, we might say, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain all that might be written." Up yonder, where the starry hosts perpetually sing God's high praises, up where the white-robed throng cast their crowns before His feet, we shall behold the success of Sabbath-schools. There, too, where infant millions assemble Sabbath after Sabbath, to sing,—

"Gentle Jesus meek and mild," we see with joy the success of Sabbath-schools. And up here, in almost every pulpit of our land, and there in the pews where the deacons sit, and godly members join in worship, there is seen the success of Sabbath schools. And far away across yonder broad

ocean, in the islets of the South, in lands where those dwell who bow before blocks of wood and stone, there are the missionaries who were saved in Sabbath-schools, and the thousands, blessed by their labours, contribute to swell the mighty stream of the incalculable, I had almost said infinite, success of Sabbath-school instruction. Go on with your holy service; much has been done already, but more shall yet be done. Let all your past victories inflame you with fresh ardour, let the remembrance of your triumphs in previous campaigns, and all trophies won for your Saviour on the battle-field of the past be your encouragement to press on with the duty of the present and the future.

## Childhood and Holy Scripture

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### Childhood and Holy Scripture

PAUL TAUGHT YOUNG TIMOTHY the gospel himself: he made him not only hear his doctrine, but see his practice. We cannot force truth upon men, but we can make our own teaching clear and decided, and make our lives consistent therewith. Truth and holiness are the surest antidotes to error and unrighteousness. The apostle said to Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them."

To be prepared for the coming conflict, we have only to preach the gospel, and to live the gospel; and also to take care that we teach the children the Word of the Lord. This last is specially to be attended to, for it is by the mouth of babes and sucklings that God will still the enemy. It is idle to dream that human learning must be met by human learning, or that Satan must cast out Satan. No. Lift up the brazen serpent wherever the fiery serpents are biting the people, and men shall look to it and live. Bring the children out, and hold them up, and turn their little eyes towards the divinely ordained remedy; for still there is life in a look—life as against the varied venoms of the serpent which are now poisoning the blood of men. There is no cure after all for midnight but the rising sun; no hope remains for a dark world but in that light which lighteneth every man. Shine forth, O Sun of Righteousness, and mist, and cloud, and darkness must disappear. Keep to the apostolic plans, and rest assured of apostolic success. Preach Christ; preach the Word in season and out of season: and teach the children. One of God's chief methods for preserving His fields from tares, is to sow them early with wheat.

Note the time for instruction. The expression, "from a child," might be better understood if we read it, "from a very child;" or, as the Revised Version has it, "from a babe." It does not mean a well-grown child, or youth, but a child just rising out of infancy. From a very child Timothy had known the sacred writings. This expression is, no doubt, used to show that we cannot begin too early to imbue the minds of our children with Scriptural knowledge. Babes receive impressions long before we are aware of the fact. During the first months of a child's life it learns more than we imagine. It soon learns the love of its mother, and its own dependence; and if the mother be wise, it learns the meaning of obedience and the necessity of yielding its will to a higher will. This may be the keynote of its whole future life. If it learn obedience and submission early, it may save a thousand tears from the child's eyes, and as many from the mother's heart. A special vantage-ground is lost when even babyhood is left uncultured.

I was noticing, in the life of that man of God whose loss presses very heavily upon many of our hearts—namely, the Earl of Shaftesbury—that his first religious impressions were produced by a humble woman. The impressions which made him—Shaftesbury—the man of God, and the friend of man, were received in the nursery. Little Lord Ashley had a godly nurse who spoke to him of the things of God. He tells us that she died before he was seven years of age; clear proof that early in life his heart had been able to receive the seal of the Spirit of God, and to receive it by humble instrumentality. Blessed among women was she whose name we know not, but who wrought

incalculable service for God and man by her holy teaching of the chosen child. Young nurses, note this.

It is well to note the admirable selection of instructors. We are not at a loss to tell who instructed youthful Timothy. In the first chapter of this epistle Paul says, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." No doubt grandmother Lois and mother Eunice united in teaching the little one. Who should teach the children but the parents? Timothy's father was a Greek, and probably a heathen, but his child was happy in having a venerable grandmother, so often the dearest of all relatives to a little child. He had also a gracious mother, once a devout Jewess, and afterwards also a firmly believing Christian, who made it her daily pleasure to teach her own dear child the Word of the Lord. O dear mothers, you have a very sacred trust reposed in you by God! He hath in effect said to you, "Take this child and nurse it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages." You are called to equip the future man of God, that he may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If God spares you, you may live to hear that pretty boy speak to thousands, and you will have the sweet reflection in your heart that the quiet teachings of the nursery led the man to love his God and serve Him. Those who think that a woman detained at home by her little family is doing nothing, think the reverse of what is true. Scarcely can the godly mother quit her home for a place of worship, but dream not that she is lost to the work of the church; far from it, she is doing the best possible service for her Lord. Mothers, the godly training of your offspring is your first and most pressing duty. Christian women, by teaching children the Holy Scriptures, are as much fulfilling their part for the Lord, as Moses in judging Israel, or Solomon in building the temple.

## Witnesses for God Converted in Youth

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### Witnesses for God Converted in Youth

I SUSPECT THAT Elijah did not think very much of Obadiah. He does not treat him with any great consideration, but addresses him more sharply than one would expect from a fellow-believer. Elijah was the man of action—bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal; Obadiah was a quiet believer, true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position, and therefore driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court. I notice that even after Elijah had learned more of him at this interview, he speaks concerning God's people as if he did not reckon much upon Obadiah, and others like him. He says, "They have thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." He knew very well that Obadiah was left, who, though not exactly a prophet, was a man of mark; but he seems to ignore him as if he were of small account in the great struggle. I suppose it was because this man of iron, this prophet of fire and thunder, this mighty servant of the Most High, set small store by anybody who did not come to the front and fight like himself. I know it is the tendency of brave and zealous minds somewhat to undervalue quiet, retired piety. True and accepted servants of God may be doing their best under great disadvantages, against fierce opposition, but they may scarcely be known, and may even shun the least recognition; therefore men who live in the fierce light of public life are apt to under-estimate them. These minor stars are lost in the brilliance of the man whom God lights up like a new sun to flame through the darkness. Elijah flashed over the sky of Israel like a thunderbolt from the hand of the Eternal, and naturally he would be somewhat impatient of those whose movements were slower and less conspicuous. It is Martha and Mary over again, in some respects.

Elijah has an interview with Obadiah, and bids him go and say to Ahab, "Behold Elijah." It may sometimes be the nearest way to our object to go a little round about. But it is remarkable that Obadiah should thus be made useful to a man so much his superior, He who never feared the face of kings nevertheless found himself using as his helper a far more timid individual.

Joseph feared God in the court of Pharaoh, Daniel was a trusted counsellor of Nebuchadnezzar, Mordecai waited at the gate of Ahasuerus, Pilate's wife pleaded for the life of Jesus, and there were saints in Caesar's household. Think of finding diamonds of the first water on such a dunghill as Nero's palace. Those who feared God in Rome were not only Christians, but they were ensamples to all other Christians for their brotherly love and generosity. Surely there is no place in this land where there is not some light: the darkest cavern of iniquity has its torch, Be not afraid; you may find followers of Jesus in the precincts of Pandemonium. In the palace of Ahab you meet an Obadiah who rejoices to hold fellowship with despised saints, and quits the levees of a monarch for the hiding places of persecuted ministers.

"I notice that these witnesses for God are very often persons converted in their youth. He seems to take a delight to make these His special standard-bearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel!

When all Israel became disgusted with the wickedness of Eli's sorts the child Samuel ministered before the Lord. Look at David! When he is but a shepherd boy he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had revolted it was a child, Josiah by name, that broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests. Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God. The Lord hath to-day—I know not where—some little Luther on his mother's knee, some young Calvin learning in our Sunday-school, some youthful Zwingli singing a hymn to Jesus. This age may grow worse and worse; I sometimes think it will, for many signs look that way; but the Lord is preparing for it. The days are dark and ominous; and this eventide may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before; but God's cause is safe in God's hands. His work will not tarry for want of men. Put not forth the hand of Uzzah to steady the ark of the Lord; it shall go safely on in God's predestined way. Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. God buries His workmen, but His work lives on. If there be not in the palace a king who honours God there shall yet be found there a governor who fears the Lord from his youth, who shall take care of the Lord's prophets, and hide them away till better days shall come. Wherefore be of good courage, and look for happier hours. Nothing of real value is in jeopardy while Jehovah is on the throne. The Lord's reserves are coming up, and their drums beat victory.

## Obadiah's Early Piety

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### Obadiah's Early Piety

OBADIAH POSSESSED early piety—"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Oh, that all our youth who may grow up to manhood and womanhood may be able to say the same! Happy are the people who are in such a case!

If he had no gracious parents, I cannot tell how Obadiah came to be a believer in the Lord in those sad days, unless he fell in with some kind teacher, tender nurse, or perhaps good servant in his father's house, or pious neighbour, who dared to gather little children round about him and tell of the Lord God of Israel. Some holy woman may have instilled the Law of the Lord into his young mind before the priests of Baal could poison him with their falsehoods. No mention is made of anybody in connection with this man's conversion in his youth, and it does not matter, does it? You and I do not want to be mentioned if we are right-hearted servants of God.

You do not need that I should speak to you at large upon the advantages of early piety. I will, therefore, only sum them up in a few sentences. To be a believer in God early in life is to be saved from a thousand regrets. Such a man shall never have to say that he carries in his bones the sins of his youth. Early piety helps us to form associations for the rest of life which will prove helpful, and it saves us from those which are harmful. The Christian young man will not fall into the common sins of young men, and injure his constitution by excesses. He will be likely to be married to a Christian woman, and so to have a holy companion in his march towards Heaven. He will select as his associates those who will be his friends in the church and not in the tavern; his helpers in virtue, and not his tempters to vice. Depend upon it, a great deal depends upon whom we choose for our companions when we begin life. If we start in bad company, it is very hard to break away from it. The man brought to Christ early in life has this further advantage, that he is helped to form holy habits and he is saved from being the slave of their opposites. Habits soon become a second nature; to form new ones is hard work; but those formed in youth remain in old age. There is something in that verse,—

"'Tis easier work if we begin

To serve the Lord betimes;

But sinners who grow old in sin

Are hardened in their crimes."

I am sure it is so. Moreover, I notice that, very frequently, those who are brought to Christ whilst young grow in grace more rapidly and readily than others do. They have not so much to unlearn, and they have not such a heavy weight of old memories to carry. The scars and bleeding sores which come of having spent years in the service of the devil are missed by those whom the Lord brings into His church before they have wandered far into the world.

"As to early piety in its bearing upon others, I cannot too highly commend it. How attractive it is! Grace looks loveliest in youth. That which would not be noticed in the grown-up man, strikes at once the most careless observer when seen in a child. Grace in a child has a convincing force: the infidel drops his weapon and admires. A word spoken by a child abides in the memory, and its artless accents touch the heart. Where the minister's sermon fails, the child's prayer may gain the victory. Moreover, religion in children suggests encouragement to those of riper years; for others seeing the little one saved say to themselves, "Why should not we also find the Lord?" By a certain secret power it opens closed doors, and turns the key in the lock of unbelief. Where nothing else could win a way for truth, a child's love has done it. It is still true, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength because of Thine enemies, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger."

## Obadiah and Elijah

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### Obadiah and Elijah

YOUTHFUL PIETY LEADS on to persevering piety. Obadiah could say, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Time had not changed him: whatever his age may have been, his religion had not decayed. We are all fond of novelty, and I have known some men go wrong, as it were, for a change. It is not burning quick to the death in martyrdom that is the hard work; roasting before a slow fire is a far more terrible test of firmness. To continue gracious during a long life of temptation is to be gracious indeed. For the grace of God to convert a man like Paul, who is full of threatenings against the saints, is a great marvel; but for the grace of God to preserve a believer for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, is quite as great a miracle and deserves more of our praise than it usually commands. Obadiah was not affected by the lapse of time; he was found to be when old what he was when young.

Added to this, there were the difficulties of his position. He was chamberlain of the palace. If he had pleased Jezebel and worshipped Baal he might have been much easier in his situation, for he would have enjoyed her royal patronage; but there he was, governor in Ahab's house, and yet fearing Jehovah. He must have had to walk very delicately, and watch his words most carefully. I do not wonder that he became a very cautious person, and was a little afraid even of Elijah, lest he was giving him a commission which would lead to his destruction. He came to be extremely prudent, and looked on things round about so as neither to compromise his conscience nor jeopardise his position. It wants an uncommonly wise man to do that, but he who can accomplish it is to be commended. He did not run away from his position, nor retreat from his religion. If he had been forced to do wrong, I am sure he would have imitated the priests and Levites and have tied into Judah, where the worship of Jehovah continued; but he felt that without yielding to idolatry he could do something for God in his advantageous position, and therefore he determined to stop and fight it out. When there is no hope of victory you may as well retire; but he is the brave man who when the bugle sounds retreat does not hear it, who puts his blind eye to the telescope and cannot see the signal to cease firing, but just holds his position against all odds, and does all the damage he can to the enemy. Obadiah was a man who did in truth "hold the fort," for he felt that when all the prophets were doomed by Jezebel it was his part to stay near the tigress and save the lives of at least a hundred servants of God from her cruel power. If he could not do more he would not have lived in vain if he accomplished so much. I admire the man whose decision was equal to his prudence, though I should greatly fear to occupy so perilous a place. His course was something like walking on the tight rope with Blondin. I should not like to try it myself, nor would I recommend any of you to attempt a feat so difficult. The part of Elijah is much safer and grander. The prophet's course was plain enough; he had not to please, but to reprove Ahab; he had not to be wary, but to act in a bold outspoken manner for the God of Israel. How much the greater man he seems to be when the two stand together in the scene before us. Obadiah falls on his face and calls him "My lord Elijah;" and well he might, for he was far his inferior. Yet I must not fall morally into Elijah's vein myself, lest I have to pull myself up with a sharp check. It was a great thing for Obadiah that

he could manage Ahab's household with Jezebel in it, and yet, for all that, win this commendation from the Spirit of God, that he feared the Lord greatly.

Obadiah, with his early grace and persevering decision, became a man of eminent piety, and this is the more remarkable considering what he was and where he was. Eminent piety in a Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab's court! This is a wonder of grace indeed. This man's religion was intense within him. If he did not make the open use of it that Elias did, he was not called to such a career but it dwelt deep within his soul, and others knew it. Jezebel knew it, I have no doubt whatever. She did not like him, but she had to endure him; she looked askance at him, but she could not dislodge him. Ahab had learned to trust him and could not do without him, for he probably furnished him with a little strength of mind. Possibly Ahab liked to retain him just to show Jezebel that he could be obstinate if he liked, and was still a man.

Obadiah's early religion became comfortable piety to him afterwards. When he thought Elijah was about to expose him to great danger he pleaded his long service of God, saying, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth"; just as David, when he grew old, said, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works; now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." It will be a great comfort to people, when old, to look back upon a life spent in the service of God. You will not trust in it, you will not think that there is any merit in it; but you will bless God for it. A servant who has been with his master from his youth ought not to be turned adrift when he grows grey. A right-minded master respects the person who has served him long and well. Suppose you had living in the family an old nurse who had nursed you when you were a child, and had lived to bring up your children, would you turn her into the street when she was past her work? No; you will do your best for her; if it is in your power you will keep her out of the workhouse. Now, the Lord is much more kind and gracious than we are, and He will never turn off His old servants.

## Abijah's "Some Good Thing"

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### Abijah's "Some Good Thing"

JEROBOAM HAD PROVED FALSE to the Lord who had placed him upon the throne of Israel, and the time was come for his overthrow. The Lord, who usually brings forth the rod before He lifts the axe, sent sickness into his house: his son Abijah was sore sick. Then the parents bethought them of an old prophet of God, and desired to know through him what would happen to the child. Fearful lest the prophet should denounce plagues upon him and his child if he knew that the enquirer was the wife of Jeroboam, the king begged the Egyptian princess whom he had married to disguise herself as a farmer's wife, and so get from the man of God a more favourable answer. Poor foolish king, to imagine that a prophet who could see into futurity could not also see through any disguise with which his queen might surround herself! So anxious was the mother to know the fate of her son, that she left his sick-chamber to go to Shiloh to hear the sentence of the prophet. Vain was her clever disguise! the blind prophet was still a seer, and not only discerned her before she entered the house, but saw the future of her family. She came full of superstition to be told her fortune, but she went away heavy, having been told her faults and her doom.

We are going to look into the little that we know of the young prince Abijah. His name was a suitable one. A good name may belong to a very bad man; but in this case a gracious name was worthily worn. He called God his Father, and his name signifies that fact. Ab, you know, is the word for Father, and Jah is Jehovah—Jehovah was his Father. I would not have mentioned the name had not his life made it true. Oh, you who bear good Bible names, see that you do not dishonour them!

It was not merely a good inclination which was in him, nor a good desire, but a really good, substantial virtue. There was in him a true and substantial existence of grace, and this is far more than a transient desire. What child is there that has not at some time or other, if it has been trained in the fear of God, felt tremblings of heart and desires towards God? Such goodness is as common as the early dew; but alas! it passeth away quite as speedily. The young Abijah possessed something within him sufficiently real and substantial to be called a "good thing"; the Spirit of God had wrought a sure work upon him, and left within him a priceless jewel of grace. Let us admire this good thing, though we cannot precisely describe it.

This "good thing" is described in a certain measure. It was a "good thing toward Jehovah, the God of Israel." The good thing looked towards the living God. In children there often will be found good things towards their parents: let these be cultivated—but these are not sufficient evidences of grace. In children there will sometimes be found good things towards amiability and moral excellence: let all good things be commended and fostered, but they are not sure fruits of grace. It is towards God that the good thing must be that saves the soul. Remember how we read in the New Testament of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The way the face of the good thing looks is a main point about it. There is life in a look. If a man be travelling away from God, every step he takes increases his distance from Him; but if his face be toward the Lord,

he may be only capable of a child's tottering step, but yet he is moving nearer and nearer every moment. There was some good thing in this child towards God, and that is the most distinguishing mark of a truly good thing. The child had love, and there was in it love to Jehovah. He had faith, but it was faith in Jehovah. His religious fear was the fear of the living God; his childlike thoughts, and desires, and prayers, and hymns, went towards the true God. This is what we desire to see not only in children, but in adults; we wish to see their hearts turned to the Lord, and their minds and wills moving towards the Most High.

"In this dear child, that "good thing" wrought such an outward character that he became exceedingly well beloved. We are sure of that, because it is said "all Israel shall mourn for him." He was probably the heir to his father's crown, and there were godly but grieved hearts in Israel that hoped to see times of reform when that youth should come to the throne; and perhaps even those who did not care about religion, yet somehow had marked the youth, and observed his going in and out before them, and had said, "He is Israel's hope; there will be better days when that boy becomes a man;" so that when Abijah died, he alone of all his race received both tears and a tomb; he died lamented, and was buried with respect, whereas all the rest of Jeroboam's house were devoured of dogs and vultures. It is a very blessed thing when there is such a good thing in our children that they come to be beloved in their little spheres. They have not all the range which this young prince enjoyed so as to secure universal admiration; but still the grace of God in a child is a very lovely thing, and it draws forth general approbation. Youthful piety is a very touching thing to me; I see the grace of God in men and women with much thankfulness, but I cannot perceive it in children without shedding tears of delight. There is an exceeding beauty about these rosebuds of the Lord's garden; they have a fragrance which we find not in the fairest of earth's lilies. Love is won for the Lord Jesus in many a heart by these tiny arrows of the Lord, whose very smallness is a part of their power to penetrate the heart. The ungodly may not love the grace which is in the children, but since they love the children in whom that grace is found, they are no longer able to speak against religion as they otherwise would have done. Yea, more, the Holy Spirit uses these children for yet higher ends, and those who see them are often impressed with desires for better things.

## Abijah's "Some Good Thing,"—II

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Abijah's "Some Good Thing,"—II

HE DID NOT WEAR the broad phylactery, but he had a meek and quiet spirit. He may not have been much of a speaker, else it might have been said "He has spoken good things concerning the God of Israel;" he may have been a timid, retiring, almost silent boy, but the good thing was "in him." And this is the kind of thing which we desire for every one of our friends, a work of grace within. The grand point is not to wear the garb, nor use the brogue of religion, but to possess the life of God within, and feel and think as Jesus would have done because of that inner life. Small is the value of external religion unless it be the outcome of a life within. True grace is not as a garment, to be put on and taken off; but it is an integral part of the person who possesses it. This child's piety was of the true, personal, inward kind: may all our children have some good thing in them!

Still, the expression does bear another shade of meaning: it implies that when God, the strict heart-searcher, who trieth the reins of the children of men, visited this child, He found in him somewhat unto praise and glory: "some good thing" was discovered in him by those eyes which cannot be deceived. It is not all gold that glitters, but that which was in this child was genuine metal. Oh, that the like may be true of each of us when we are tried as by fire! It may be that his father was angry with him for serving Jehovah; but whatever his trial may have been, he came out of it unharmed. The expression suggests to me somewhat of the idea of surprise. How did this good thing get into the child? "In him there is found some good thing,"—as when a man findeth a treasure in a field. The farmer was thinking of nothing but his oxen, and his acres, and his harvest, when on a sudden his plough laid bare a hidden treasure: he found it where it was, but how it came to be there he could not tell. So in this child, so disadvantageously placed, to the surprise of everybody there was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel. His conversion, you see, is veiled in mystery. We are not told of the grace in his heart what it was, nor whence it came, nor what special actions it produced, but there it was, found where none expected it. I believe that this case is typical of many of the elect children whom God calls by His grace in the courts and alleys of London. You must not expect that you shall jot down their experience, and their feelings, and their lives, and total them all up; you must not reckon to know dates and means specifically, but you must take the child as we have to take Abijah, rejoicing to find in him a little wonder of grace with God's own seal upon him. The old prophet, in the name of the Lord, attested the young prince as a true-hearted follower of the Most High; and in like manner the Lord sets His attesting mark of grace on regenerated children, and we must be content to see it, even if some other things be wanting. Let us welcome with delight those works of the Holy Spirit which we cannot precisely describe.

We are apt to overlook "some good thing" in a bad house. This was the most wonderful thing of all, that there should be a gracious child in Jeroboam's palace. The mother usually sways the house, but the queen was a princess of Egypt and an idolater. A father has great influence, but in this

case Jeroboam sinned and made Israel to sin. It strikes me as a wonder that he should make Israel to sin, but could not make his child to sin. All the land feels the pestilent influence of Jeroboam, and yet close at his feet there is a bright spot which sovereign grace has kept from the plague; his firstborn child, who naturally would imitate his father, is the very reverse of him—there is found in Jeroboam's heir "some good thing toward Jehovah, God of Israel." In such a place we do not look for grace, and are apt to pass it by. If you go to the courts of our great cities, which are anything but palatial, you will see that they swarm with the children of the poor, and you hardly expect to see grace where sin evidently abounds. In the fever-dens and pestilent alleys of the great city you hear blasphemy and see drunkenness on all sides, but do not therefore conclude that no child of God is there; do not say within yourself, "The electing love of God has never pitched upon any of these." How do you know? One of those poor little ragged children playing on a dustheap may have found Christ in the Ragged-school, and may be destined to a place at Christ's right hand. Precious is that gem, though cast amidst these pebbles. Bright is that diamond, though it lie upon a dunghill. If in the child there is "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel," he is none the less to be valued because his father is a thief and his mother is a gin-drinker. Never despise the most ragged child. A clergyman in Ireland, ministering to a little Protestant congregation, noticed for several Sundays, standing in the aisle near the door, a very ragged boy, who listened to the sermon most eagerly. He wished to know who the boy could be, but he always vanished as soon as the sermon was over. He asked a friend or two to watch, but somehow the boy always escaped, and could not be discovered. It came to pass one Sunday that the minister preached a sermon from this text, "His own right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory," and after that time he missed the boy altogether. Six weeks elapsed, and the child did not come any more, but a man appeared from the hills, and begged the minister to come and see his boy, who was dying. He lived in a miserable hovel up in the mountains. A six-mile walk in the rain, through bogs and over hills, and the minister came to the door of the hut. As he entered, the poor lad was sitting up in bed, and as soon as he caught sight of the preacher he waved his arm and cried out, "His own right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory." That was his closing speech on earth, his dying shout of triumph. Who knows but in many and many a case the Lord's right hand and holy arm have gotten Him the victory, despite the poverty and the sin and the ignorance that may have surrounded the young convert? Let us not therefore despise grace, wherever it is, but heartily prize what we are apt to overlook.

There is something more remarkable still, and that is that some of God's dearest children should die while they are yet young. I should have said let Jeroboam die and his wife too, but spare the child. Ay, but the child must go: he is the fittest. His departure was intended to give glory to God's grace in saving such a child, and making him so soon perfect. It was to be the reward of grace, for the child was taken from the evil to come; he was to die in peace and be buried, whereas the rest of the family would be slain with the sword and given to the jackals and the vultures to tear in pieces. In this child's case his early death was a proof of grace. If any say that converted children ought not to be taken into the church, I answer, How is it the Lord takes so many of them into heaven? If they are fit for the one, they surely are fit for the other? The Lord, in infinite mercy, often takes children home to Himself, and saves them from the trials of long life and temptation; because not only is there grace in them, but there is so much more grace than usual that there is no need for delay, they are ripe already for the harvest. It is wonderful what great grace may dwell in a boy's heart: child piety is by no means of an inferior kind, it is sometimes ripe for heaven.

## The Shunammite Woman's Son

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### The Shunammite Woman's Son

LET me call your attention to a most instructive miracle wrought by the prophet: Elisha, as recorded in the Book of Kings. The hospitality of the Shunammite woman had been rewarded by the gift of a son; but, alas! all earthly mercies are of uncertain tenure, and after certain days the child fell sick and died.

"Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out."—2 Kings 4:29-37.

Resurrection, then, is our aim! To raise the dead is our mission! How is so strange a work to be achieved? If we yield to unbelief we shall be staggered by the evident fact that the work to which the Lord has called us is quite beyond our own personal power. We cannot raise the dead. We are, however, no more powerless than Elisha, for he of himself could not restore the Shunammite's son. Need this fact discourage us? Does it not rather direct us to our true power by shutting us out from our own fancied might? I trust we are all of us already aware that the man who lives in the region of faith dwells in the realm of miracles.

It would have been well if Elisha had recollected that he was once the servant of Elijah, and had so studied his master's example as to have imitated it. If so, he would not have sent Gehazi with a staff, but have done at once what at last he was constrained to do. In 1 Kings 17 you will find the story of Elijah raising a dead child, and you will there see that Elijah, the master, had left a complete example to his servant; and it was not till Elisha followed it in all respects that the miraculous power was manifested. It had been wise, I say, if Elisha had, at the outset, imitated the example of the master whose mantle he wore. With far more force may I say to you that it will be well if, as teachers, we imitate the modes and methods of our glorified Master, and learn at His feet the art of winning souls. Just as He came in deepest sympathy into the nearest contact with our wretched humanity, and condescended to stoop to our sorrowful condition, so must we come

near to the souls with whom we have to deal, yearn over them with His yearning, and weep over them with His tears, if we would see them raised from the state of sin. Only by imitating the spirit and manner of the Lord Jesus shall we become wise to win souls. I am afraid that very often the truth which we deliver is a thing which is extraneous and out of ourselves; like a staff which we hold in our hand, but which is not a part of ourselves, We take doctrinal or practical truth, as Gehazi did the staff, and we lay it upon the face of the child, but we ourselves do not agonise for its soul. We try this doctrine and that truth, this anecdote and the other illustration, this way of teaching a lesson and that manner of delivering an address; but so long as ever the truth which we deliver is a matter apart from ourselves and unconnected with our innermost being, so long it will have no more effect upon a dead soul than Elisha's staff had upon the dead child. We are not sure that Gehazi was convinced that the child was really dead; he spoke as if it were only asleep, and needed waking. God will not bless those teachers who do not grasp in their hearts the really fallen estate of their children. If you think the child is not really depraved, if you indulge foolish notions about the innocence of childhood and the dignity of human nature, it should not surprise you if you remain barren and unfruitful.

"Observe carefully what Elisha did when thus foiled in his first effort. When we fail in one attempt, we must not therefore give up our work. If you have been unsuccessful until now, you must not infer that you are not called to the work, any more than Elisha might have concluded that the child could not be restored. The lesson of your non-success is not—cease the work, but—change the method. It is not the person who is out of place, it is the plan which is unwise. If your first method has been unsuccessful, you must improve upon it. Examine wherein you have failed, and then, by changing your mode, or spirit, the Lord may prepare you for a degree of usefulness far beyond your expectation. Elisha, instead of being dispirited when he found that the child was not awake, girded up his loins, and hastened with greater vigour to the work before him.

## The Shunammite Woman's Son—II

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### The Shunammite Woman's Son—II

NOTICE WHERE THE DEAD CHILD was placed: "And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed." This was the bed which the hospitality of the Shunammite had prepared for Elisha, the famous bed which, with the table, the stool, and the candlestick, will never be forgotten in the church of God.

After praying, Elisha adopted the means. Prayer and means must go together. Means without prayer—presumption! Prayer without means—hypocrisy! There lay the child, and there stood the venerable man of God! Watch his singular proceeding; he stoops over the corpse and puts his mouth upon the child's mouth. The cold dead mouth of the child was touched by the warm living lips of the prophet, and a vital stream of fresh hot breath was sent down into the chill, stonelike passages of the dead mouth and throat and lungs. Next the holy man, with loving ardour of hopefulness, placed his eyes upon the child's eyes, and his hands upon the child's hands; the warm hands of the old man covered the cold palms of the departed child. Then he stretched himself upon the child, and covered him with his whole body, as though he would transfer his own life into the lifeless frame, and would either die with him, or would make him live. We have heard of the chamois hunter acting as guide to a fearful traveler, who, when they came to a very dangerous part of the road, strapped the traveler firmly to himself, and said, "Both of us or neither," that is to say, "Both of us shall live, or neither of us, we are one." So did the prophet effect a mysterious union between himself and the lad, and in his own mind it was resolved that he would either be chilled with the child's death, or warm the child with his life. What does this teach us? The lessons are many and obvious. We see here, as in a picture, that if we would bring spiritual life to a child, we must most vividly realize that child's state. It is dead, dead. God will have you feel that the child is as dead in trespasses and sins as you once were. God would have you come into contact with that death by painful, crushing, humbling sympathy. In soul-winning, we should observe how our Master worked; now how did He work? When He would raise us from death, what did it behove Him to do? He must needs die himself: there was no other way. So it is with you. If you would raise that dead child, you must feel the chill and horror of that child's death yourself. A dying man is needed to raise dying men. I cannot believe that you will ever pluck a brand from the burning, without putting your hand near enough to feel the heat of the fire. You must have, more or less, a distinct sense of the dreadful wrath of God and of the terrors of the judgment to come, or you will lack energy in your work, and so lack one of the essentials of success. I do not think the preacher ever speaks well upon such topics until he feels them pressing upon him as a personal burden from the Lord. "I did preach in chains." said John Bunyan, "to men in chains." Depend upon it, when the death that is in your children alarms, depresses, and overwhelms you, then it is that God is about to bless you. Thus realising the child's state, and putting your mouth upon the child's mouth, and your hands upon its hands, you must next strive to adapt yourself as far as possible to the nature, and habits, and temperament of the child. Your mouth must find out the child's words, so that the child may know what you mean; you must see things with a child's eyes; your heart

must feel a child's feelings, so as to be his companion and friend; you must be a student of juvenile sin; you must be a sympathiser in juvenile trials; you must, so far as possible, enter into childhood's joys and griefs. You must not fret at the difficulty of this matter, or feel it to be humiliating. If anything difficult be required, you must do it, and not think it difficult. God will not raise a dead child by you if you are not willing to become all things to that child, if by any possibility you may win its soul.

We see, then, in Elisha, a sense of the child's death and an adaptation of himself to his work, but above all we see sympathy. While Elisha himself felt the chill of the corpse, his personal warmth was entering into the dead body. This of itself did not raise the child; but God worked through it—the old man's heat of body passed into the child, and became the medium of quickening. Let every teacher weigh these words of Paul. "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." God will bless by His Spirit our hearty sympathy with His own truth, and make it do that which the truth alone coldly spoken would not accomplish. Here, then, is the secret. You must impart to the young your own soul; you must feel as if the ruin of that child would be your own ruin.

"Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro." Notice the restlessness of the man of God; he cannot be easy. The child waxes warm (blessed be God for that), but he does not live yet; so, instead of sitting down by the table, the prophet walks to and fro with restless foot, disquieted, groaning, panting, longing, and ill at ease. He could not bear to look upon the disconsolate mother, or to hear her ask, "Is the child restored?" but he continued pacing the house as if his body could not rest because his soul was not satisfied. Imitate this consecrated restlessness. When you see a boy getting somewhat affected, do not sit down and say, "The child is very hopeful, thank God; I am perfectly satisfied." You will never win the priceless gem of a saved soul in that way; you must feel sad, restless, troubled, if you ever become a parent in the church.

Elisha stretched himself on the bed again with many a prayer, and many a sigh, and much believing, and at last his desire was granted him. "The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes." Any form of action would indicate life, and content the prophet. The child "sneezed," some say, because he died with a disease of the head, for he said to his father, "My head! my head!" and the sneeze cleared the passages of life which had been blocked up. This we do not know. The fresh air entering afresh into the lungs might well compel a sneeze. The sound was nothing very articulate or musical, but it betokened life. This is all we should expect from young children when God gives them spiritual life. Some church members expect a great deal more, but for my part I am satisfied if the children sneeze—if they give any true sign of grace, however feeble or indistinct.

"Perhaps if Gehazi had been there he would not have thought much of this sneezing, because he had never stretched himself upon the child, but Elisha was content with it. Even so, if you and I have really agonised in prayer for souls, we shall be very quick of eye to catch the first sign of grace, and shall be thankful to God if the token be but a sneeze. Then the child opened its eyes, and we will venture to say Elisha thought he had never seen such lovely eyes before. I know not what kind of eyes they were, the hazel or the blue, but this I know, that any eye which God helps you to open will be a beautiful eye to you.

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