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WHOLE SERIES.
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Poetry.

THE BOLTED DOOR.

Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me.—Rev. 3: 20.

God is knocking,
Ever knocking,
At the heart's thrice bolted door,
Which we're locking,
Ever locking,
As we oft have done before,
And we hear, yet hearing, heed not,
While we fester bolt the door.

He is calling,
Ever calling,
In a soft and gentle tone,
To the fallen,
And the falling,
To the weary and the lone,
Still they answer not the summons,
Till the spirit voice has flown.

He's entreating,
Ever entreating,
By His mercy, by His care,
Knocking, knocking,
And repeating,
Calling, calling, this His prayer:
"Let me enter!" Hear it, mortal,
Open wide the sin-locked portal.
Hear it, mortal, open quickly,
God is waiting at the door.

W. & R.

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE EARLY CONVERSION OF CHILDREN.

A SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE N. S. CENTRAL ASSOCIATION SABBATH SCHOOL CONVENTION AT GASPÉREAUX, ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1871.

By Rev. J. F. KEMPTON.

(Published by Request.)

"And they brought young children to Him that He might touch them; and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them: Suffer the little children to come unto me; and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God."—Mark x. 13-16.

There can be nothing in connection with Sabbath School work that is of greater importance or interest than *The early conversion of children*; and consequently, I have selected this for my theme to-day.

My own impression is that the conversion of children is not looked for as early as it ought to be among Christians, and, consequently, is not labored for with that earnestness which the word of God warrants and the welfare of the soul demands. Nor is this a new state of things in the church. The disciples of our Lord were in error here. They did not expect to see children converted to God while very young, or else they would not have rebuked those who brought them to Christ. Their views were greatly changed, no doubt, when they saw that their Master was much displeased with them; and said "Suffer the little children to come unto me; and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God."

If, then, the disciples, who were so much with Christ, and saw His works and heard His words, if they were mistaken in reference to this subject, may we not take it for granted that the disciples of Christ at the present day have need to give it a careful consideration?

In considering this subject, we remark—

I. That every encouragement is given, both in the Word of God and the history of the church to labor for the early conversion of children.

We may see this more clearly if we reflect upon—

1. Some of the examples of early conversion. The case of Samuel is a striking one. From his very infancy he was consecrated, by his pious parents to the service of God. This may be seen by reading I. Sam. 1: 24-28, where it is stated that when his mother had weaned him, she took him up with her, with

three bullocks and one ephod of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh. "And the child was young; and they slew a bullock and brought the child to Eli. And she said, oh, my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here praying unto the Lord; for this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him; therefore, also, I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord."

Thus dedicated by his parents, Samuel was left with Eli, the Priest, where he "ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod." (I. Sam. 2: 18.) And, just what might have been expected, the Lord heard prayer; and accepted the offering; and revealed Himself to Samuel, while very young.

Josiah is another example of early conversion. He was a child of only eight years, when he was made King in Jerusalem—and, when it is said of him that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David, his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." (II. Kings 22: 1, 2.) How few there are who look for the conversion of children at the early age of eight years!

It is said of John the Baptist, that he should be "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb"—(Luke 1: 15.) which very clearly teaches that God works in the hearts of very young children by His Spirit—and leads them to love and serve Him.

The case of Timothy is also a clear illustration of the point before us. The Apostle Paul, in writing to him, thus addresses him: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. iii. 14, 15.)

Thus, we are clearly taught that Timothy, while very young, even when "a child," was made "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Hundreds of examples of the early conversion of children could be given from the history of the church, in modern times. Almost every Christian may call to mind instances, in which the power and grace of God have been displayed, in a most wonderful manner, in the early conversion of children. A little girl, six or seven years old, while on her death-bed, requested her sister to read to her the text before us to-day. The passage being read, and the book closed, she said, "How kind! I shall soon go to Jesus; He will soon take me up in His arms and bless me too; no disciple shall keep me away." Her sister kissed her and said, "Do you love me?" "Yes," she replied, "but don't be angry, I love Jesus better."

I was once well acquainted with a little boy of eight years, who while he lived, was made very happy in the love of Christ—and whose death-bed scene was the most heavenly of anything I ever witnessed. He declared to all about his couch that Jesus had washed him from all his sins in His own blood; and that now He was coming to take him to Himself. He bade all his friends an affectionate farewell, and when they wept at the thought of his departure, he tried to console them by saying "It is much better for me to go and live with Jesus than to stay with you." And, with many words he comforted his weeping father and mother, brothers and sisters. Then, rising upon his knees in bed, and lifting his little hands and eyes upward, he repeatedly and emphatically exclaimed, "I see Jesus! Jesus is mine; and I am His!" And, after a short pause he again exclaimed, in a loud and distinct voice, "joy, joy, joy!" and quietly fell asleep in Jesus.

No believer could witness such a scene as that and not be encouraged by it to labor for the early conversion of children.

2. The general teaching of the Bible; as well as the examples given, encourage us to labor for the conversion of little children. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it," said Solomon. "Out of the mouth of the babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength," said David. In Matt. 21: 15, 16, we read "And when the Chief Priests and Scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the Temple and saying 'Hosannah to the Son of David!' they were sore displeased, and said unto Him, Hearst thou what these say? And Jesus said unto them, 'Yea, have ye never read 'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?'"

These passages, taken together, teach that God does, sometimes, lead children, while young, to love and praise Him, that He accepts of their tributes of praise and is honored thereby.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right," was the injunction of the Apostle Paul to children who had become believers in Christ at Ephesus. Paul, then, was one who believed in and looked for the conversion of children to God. If not, he would have had no such directions as these for them after they were converted.

3. The doctrine of this text, in particular, encourage us to believe that little children will find a hearty welcome in Christ. Were this not the case, Christ would not have been so "much displeased" with his disciples for rebuking those who brought them to Him. He would not forbid them, though His disciples did. He would have them come to Him; and would "take them up in His arms, put His hands on them and bless them." He would give them a hearty welcome to His heart and, hence, the manifestation of His displeasure when those who brought them to Him received a rebuke. He promptly and firmly replied, "Suffer the little children to come unto me; and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God." By these words He threw open the door of access to Himself as widely for the little children as for any. Even the little ones who stood before Him, not knowing what to do, would understand these plain and loving words, and would be encouraged, by them, to come unto Christ, of their own accord.

Said a little child of six or eight years, to her mother after hearing a sermon preached from this passage, "Oh, ma, I have heard the child's gospel to day!"

No doubt could possibly linger in the minds of Christ's disciples, with reference to the little children being welcome to Him; after He gave utterance to the words, "Of such is the Kingdom of God." Here is a positive declaration that the Kingdom of God is composed, in part, at least of little children. Some one may reply that the statement is not "of little children; but of such as, i. e., of those who are like children, who have the disposition of children. If this be the meaning—if persons find admittance to the Kingdom of God simply because they are like children, then, surely, children themselves will receive a hearty welcome there. Here again, we have encouragement to labor for the early conversion of children.

We are plainly told also, by the text, that the Lord Jesus at that time received those that were brought to Him. In the very presence of His disciples, who had just rebuked those who brought the children to Him, Christ lifted up His voice, stretched out His arms and called the children to come unto Him. Now did he treat them coldly when they approached Him; but took them up in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them. What a rebuke was this to those who would hinder the little ones from coming to Christ! What encouragement for all to bring them to Him! What an assurance that when they do so, they will be rewarded by seeing them welcomed to the Saviour's kind embrace!

II. We remark, again, that little children are more easily induced to

come to Christ than adults. Because

1. In the first place, they are more susceptible of impressions. Their hearts and consciences are not yet "seared with a hot iron." Their minds are open to conviction. A little child is easily convinced that he is a sinner; and that God is angry with him on account of sin. He readily comprehends the picture of Christ in the garden and on the cross. His heart is touched and his eyes fill with tears as he listens to the gospel story. He admits that he has done wrong, and is sorry for it; and, without hesitancy calls on God for pardon.

It must be remembered, however, that the work of conversion is of God, in the case of a little child quite as certainly as in that of the adult. But it is a blessed truth that whenever the heart is inclined towards God; whenever the sinner cries to him for mercy; whether young or old, he will find acceptance. And since the little child is more susceptible of impression than others, and, consequently, more easily induced to call on God for mercy, there is greater encouragement to look for and expect the conversion of children than of older persons.

2. Children are more teachable than adults. They make no pretensions to a knowledge of religious things. Their minds are not clogged with error and prejudice as the result of false teaching and sin. The soil of their hearts is all in readiness to receive the good seed of divine truth, without the tedious and painful process of rooting up and casting out the noxious weeds of error. Their discernment is clear. Their minds have not been clouded and darkened by a long course of sin. The subject of religion has only to be placed before them, in the plainest language and they will grasp it in a moment. It is a sad mistake to conclude that little children do not think of and cannot comprehend truths of the Gospel. "Ma," said a little boy of four years, "how was it wicked for them to kill Christ when God sent Him to die for sinners?" thus proving not only that he thought about religious things, but that he understood the object of the Saviour's advent to the world; and the only way of the sinner's escape from the consequences of his guilt.

3. They are more truthful also than those of mature age. Who has not noticed how easy a thing it is to gain the confidence of a little child? A smiling countenance, a kind word and an arm outstretched are all that is needed to induce him to trust himself to your embrace. He has not yet learned the falsity of human nature; and is, therefore, prepared to trust without a trial.

This prominent principle of a child's nature is very encouraging, when we think of the subject of his early conversion. Genuine conversion is hearty trust in God; and this, I believe, is more readily exercised by the little child than the adult.

4. Once more; children are more affectionate than older persons. Their dispositions are not soured and cooled by a heartless and unsympathizing world. Their affections are easily won and strongly attached.

Two little girls were conversing together one day about the happiness of heaven and, their hopes of enjoying it, when one said to the other—"If you should die, and go to heaven before I do, I want you to promise that you will be the first to meet me when I come." "Well," said the other, "if you will promise not to come till I have been in heaven a thousand years, I will be the first to meet you; and not without; for I want a thousand years to look straight at Jesus." Language could not more forcibly portray the strength of that child's affectionate regard for the dear Redeemer. And this is but a fair example of what may be found in the hearts of little children.

In conclusion, a remark or two may be made.

1. To professing Christians. (a.) Be sure that you do and say nothing to hinder little children from coming to Christ. Do not be impatient with a

child when he asks questions about God and Christ and heaven, do not tell him that he is too young to understand these things. Do not turn his attention to another subject; and, thus lead him to think that he has no right to speak of Christ and heaven; and so hinder him from coming to Christ for a blessing.

Again, do not discourage or rebuke others when they would bring the little ones to Christ. Do not do as the disciples did when Christ said "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God." Do not think your Pastor or Sabbath School Teacher is doing wrong, or acting foolishly, when he tries to persuade your children, though very young, to come to Jesus. Do not discourage and grieve the minister of Christ when he would take your little child by the hand and lead him into the church; after he believes him to be a child of God. Remember the words of Jesus to His disciples, "Suffer the little children to come unto me; and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God."

(b.) Be sure that you do all you can to bring little children to Christ. Answer their questions and encourage them still to enquire. Tell them what you know about Christ yourself—how he came to the world—why He came—who sent Him—how He loved little children while here—that He took them up in His arms and blessed them—how He suffered and died to save them—where He is now and what He is doing. Tell them how willing He is to receive little children and bless and save them. In one word, be sure and make direct, personal effort to bring little children to Christ, remembering all the while those words of the Master "Suffer the little children to come unto me; and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God."

2. A closing remark to the little children themselves. My dear young friends, let nobody and nothing hinder you from coming to the dear Saviour. You are sinners. You have done and said many wicked things; but Jesus is a loving and mighty Saviour. He is willing and able to pardon all your sins; make you very happy while you live and take you to heaven when you die. He suffered great pain and died a dreadful death that He might save little children when they come to Him repenting of sin and asking for pardon. He is now all ready to take you up in the arms of His love and bless you. He wants you all to come to Him—and sends me to ask you to come. Will you not come? Will you not be sorry for your sins and ask the dear Saviour to take them all away and save you, forever, in heaven? If you will do this He will bless you as he did the little children spoken of in the text; and, then, by and by, you will join the thousands of little children now in heaven and about whom the poet sings—

"Around the throne of God in heaven;
Thousands of children stand;
Children, whose sins are all forgiven,
A holy, happy band,
Singing, glory, glory,
Glory be to God on high."

Amen

"A TIME TO DANCE."

A few weeks since the Rev. Dr. M., pastor of the High church Baptist congregation in one of the thriving cities of New Jersey, received the following note—"Dear Doctor, —You would greatly oblige one of your parishioners if, at an early day, you would preach on Ecclesiastes iii., last clause of the third verse—'A time to dance.'" On the following Sabbath evening the doctor created quite a sensation in his congregation by reading the note, and adding:—"When I shall have become fully satisfied that the important duty of dancing is neglected in my congregation, rest assured I will give all needed admonition on the subject."

It is announced that Father Hincinthe intends to preach a series of sermons in Paris.