

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A SERMON TO THE LORD'S LITTLE CHILDREN.

A Sermon

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"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." 1 John ii. 12.

"I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father." 1 John ii. 13. (Revised Version.)

PROBABLY you ask, "Why does John say first, 'I write,' and then, 'I have written'?" There is a beautiful touch of nature in this speedy change of tense. John was an extremely old man, and therefore while he says, "I write," he adds, "I have written," as if he felt that it might be the last time that he should take his pen in hand. Very soon with him the present tense would change into the past, and he indicates the fact by changing his mode of speech. Perhaps he even felt that possibly before the letter reached the brethren to whom he addressed it he would be no more among the sons of men. Therefore he says, "I write," indicating that while he was still with them, with warm and loving heart he solemnly exhorted them; and then he adds, "I have written," as if he had recorded his dying testimony, and left it as his last legacy of love. To us, to-day, John's words run altogether in the past tense,— "I have written;" but we need not therefore forget that they were the well-considered words of a venerated father in Christ, and that he wrote them as one so near to his departure that he regarded himself as already on the move, and therefore scarcely knew which tense to use. Ah, my brethren, how soon our "I speak" will change into "I have spoken:" let this invest every word with solemnity.

Remember also what order of man John was,—that disciple whom Jesus loved, whose head had leaned on Jesus' bosom, whose eyes had seen the King in his beauty, and whose strengthened gaze had looked within the gates of pearl. This is he who at one time saw the pierced heart of the Well-beloved pouring forth blood and water; and at another beheld the Lion of the tribe of Judah prevail to take the book and loose the seven seals thereof. It is the apostle of love who says to us, "I write to you," "I have written to you." Let us carefully note what the Spirit saith unto us by his servant John.

Observe that our text is addressed to the "little children." It is thought by many wise interpreters that under this term John includes

the whole church of God, and that afterwards he divides that church into two companies—the fathers and the young men: those who under one aspect are all “little children,” are under another regarded as young men or fathers. There is very much to support this view in several instances in this epistle. John is evidently addressing all the saints when he speaks of them as “my little children,” as, for instance, in the eighteenth verse of the third chapter, and also in the closing verse, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Surely, all the saints are included in these exhortations. There is a sense in which every Christian is still a little child, a sense in which he ought to be so,—ever dependent upon the great Father, ever ready to receive the word of the Father without questioning, ever teachable, ever restful in the Father’s care, and full of love to him who is his all in all. Of necessity we must ever be children before God; for our finite capacity is so limited that we are mere babes in knowledge in the presence of Infinite wisdom, and as very sucklings in understanding when contrasted with the great Father of spirits. We know enough to make us know that we know very little. The most advanced intellects in the church are but as infants compared with the Ancient of Days. We are of yesterday, and know nothing: with all our experience, with all our study, with all our meditation, with all our illumination, we remain “little children” when measured by the boundless knowledge of the Lord. Ay, I mean the fathers, the men who bring sinners to Jesus, the men who teach others, and are themselves taught of God, even these must each one cry out with Jeremiah, “Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.” I mean the young men who have overcome the wicked one, whose holy valour sets them in the forefront of the battle, where they turn to flight the armies of the aliens. “They are strong,” says John; and yet, in the presence of the mighty God of Jacob, what are our champions and our valiant men? Are they not still but as “little children”? It may do us all good to join the infant-class this morning, or, at least, to sit with the boys in the school of grace. Even those who have made the greatest advances in divine grace may do well to “become as little children,” that they may still more fully enter into the kingdom of heaven, and have closer fellowship with “the holy child Jesus.” It may even be an advance for some who have grown self-willed as they have advanced in knowledge if they will say with David, “Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.” Happy childhood! when it means entire submission to the Father, and sweet delight in his will.

Still, I am inclined to think that in this case John really does divide the entire church into three classes—the babes in grace, or the children, or as one of the words might properly be translated, the boys—those who have not long been born into the family: these are an interesting company. Then follow the young men: these are the second class, and a valued body of Christians they are, in the fulness of their vigour; strong in faith, giving glory to God; mighty in prayer; vehement in action, bold in testimony. May the Lord muster among our hosts a grand array of these vigorous heroes who shall earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. The fighting power of the church militant must come out of them: these are they that turn the battle to

the gate. Blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them. Then there is the third class; the fathers, the mature, the experienced: these do not quite so much delight in war as the young men do, but at home they diligently care for the household of faith, watching over the feeble, strengthening and comforting them: these are able by their experience to answer gainsayers, to edify the untaught, and to guide the ignorant. Their knowledge is deep, and they are, therefore, able to become teachers of others; they are men of spiritual force, and have come to the full stature of men in Christ Jesus, therefore they are the solid strength of the church. If the young men are the church's arm, these are the church's backbone. We need to have many such, though alas, it is to be feared that our churches are much like the apostolic ones, of which Paul said, "Ye have not many fathers."

This morning I am going to say nothing at all to the young men, nor to the fathers, except so far as they are willing to include themselves under the term of "little children;" and, as we have already said, there is just reason why they should do so. Little children, it is to you I speak this day: I mean you that have newly been converted, whose first cries of repentance are still in our ears. You, I mean, whose grace is feeble; who are new to everything in the house of God, and as yet need to be fed with the milk of simple elementary truth: you are the little children, dear to the whole family. You, I mean, who are but little in Israel as yet—little in knowledge, little in faith, little in strength, little in service, little in patience; you cannot as yet keep the watch of the house of the Lord, for you yourselves need to be watched over; you tremble when you try to stand, and your unaccustomed feet can scarcely bear you along the road without a helping hand; you are very apt to tumble down, and probably will do so many times before you learn to walk with the fathers, or run with the young men. You little children may by some be thought to be a burden, but the wise among us count you a blessing: the more of you the merrier in the church of God, for ye are the blessed of the Lord, and we are glad to hear your youthful voices in the streets of the New Jerusalem. To you I shall speak this morning, as the Holy Spirit shall enable me. I would say these things to you: First, observe *your privilege*—"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you." Then, note *your knowledge*—"I have written unto you, little children, because ye know, or have known, the Father." And thirdly, consider *the precepts addressed to you*. When we get to that point I shall ask you to refer to your Bibles that we may run through the whole of this epistle and see what John has to say to little children. May we receive the word with meekness, that we may grow thereby.

I. First, I want the babes in grace, the weak in faith, the lambs of the flock, to notice **THEIR PRIVILEGE**. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." This is a privilege *extremely desired* by the little children. They have but lately felt the burden of guilt; they still smart under the lashes of conscience; the Spirit of God has but newly convinced them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; and, therefore, above everything, their prayer is, "Father, forgive me." To them the remission of sins stands out as the first and most desirable of all blessings; and truly they are right in their

estimate; for what possession is there which can be called a blessing at all until sin be forgiven? It matters not how healthy a man may be; if his conscience be worried with his sin his inmost heart is sick. It is small comfort to him to have all the comforts of this life if his heart feels the gnawings of the undying worm of conscious guilt. "God be merciful to me a sinner," comes often from his breast as he beats upon it in the deep humiliation of his soul; for joy and rest there can be none to him till he hears the word, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." To the freshly saved it is a joy worth worlds to have their sins forgiven; it is a bliss akin to the heaven of angels; and this joy belongs of right to all the saints, yea, even to the little children in the family of God. You were only born again last Sunday, but your sins are forgiven you. Perhaps it is only this morning that you have sought your Saviour's face and have come to believe in him, but your sins are forgiven you. This assurance is as sweet to you as a seraph's song. I could not have told you a better piece of news. The pardon of sin is as the pearl of great price to you in your present stage of spiritual life; you would have sold all that you had in order to procure it; and now that you have it your heart is aglow with gratitude. The wound in your conscience, so lately raw and bleeding, makes you set so high a price upon the healing balm of free and full forgiveness. Far be it from me to stay your holy joy, and yet the Lord will show you greater things than these.

At your stage of experience pardon is *the most prominent blessing* of the covenant. A newly converted man does not know much about sanctification or union to Christ; perhaps he does not know much about election, calling, or sealing; but the principal point he dwells upon is pardon. It is written in the Creed,—“I believe in the forgiveness of sins”; and the man who has newly found peace with God by Jesus Christ repeats that article of the Creed with solemn emphasis. “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” says he; for he has just realized it; and to him it is a boon so great that like the moon amid the stars it shines as a queen among the blessings of grace. Pardon of sin seems to the “little children” to comprehend the whole work of Jesus, and the whole work of the Holy Spirit too: vast favours lie beyond; but to him who has newly crossed the Jordan this one valley of Eschol fills all the range of vision, and the soul hardly dreams of any further benediction. The newly-pardoned does not yet see the innumerable other blessings which come in the train of forgiveness; he is for the present absorbed in the hearing of that one sentence, “Go in peace; thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee.” Well, beloved child, many more blessings await you; pardon is but an entrance blessing, a welcome at the doorstep: there are rarer joys within the house. You have become an heir to a boundless inheritance: all things are yours; heaven, and Christ, and God are yours; yet I marvel not that at present all your heart is taken up with a sense of pardoned sin. I will not disturb you, but I will rejoice with you. I will even sit down and sing with you: let this be our hymn:—

“Now, oh joy! my sins are pardon'd,
 Now I can, and do believe;
 All I have, and am, and shall be,
 To my precious Lord I give.”

Even the full-grown child of God highly values this boon so dear to little children, and although he has received many other mercies beside, yet still it is a chief part of his joy that he has been cleansed from sin and clothed with righteousness. Ay, and our elder brothers, who are now in the king's country, this is a chief point even with them, that they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. Yes, dear little children, you have obtained a most precious favour in which you do well to rejoice; "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."

Here let me observe that the forgiveness of sins is *assuredly the possession of the new beginner* in the divine life. He is as certainly forgiven as he ever shall be. The forgiveness of sins is not a matter of degrees or of growth. It is done in an instant, and done for ever, never to be reversed. The child of God who was born but yesterday is not as completely sanctified as he will be; he is not as completely instructed as he will be; he is not as completely conformed to the image of Christ as he will be; but he is as completely pardoned as the full-grown saint. He that just now passed the gate of pearl,—did you not hear the shout as he entered, like a shock of corn fully ripe that cometh in his season?—he, I say, was not more truly pardoned than you who but an hour ago believed in Christ unto the salvation of your soul. The dying thief had not many minutes found mercy, and yet the Lord Jesus said to him, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise": it is plain, therefore, that he had been perfectly cleansed in a moment. To wash in the fountain filled with blood is not a business of weeks and months and years, nor is it to be repeated many times and often; but he that is washed is there and then made whiter than snow, and there is henceforth no defilement upon him. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you": they are all gone: grace has most effectually removed them from you as far as the east is from the west. The Egyptians at the Red Sea were not destroyed by little and by little; they were not swallowed up in the flood a regiment at a time; the eager depths which had by miracle been divided for a time leaped together, and Pharaoh and his hosts, all of them, were covered, to be seen no more for ever. Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously. "The depths have covered them; there is not one of them left." The Israelites had but barely set their foot upon the other side of the Red Sea, and yet all their enemies were as completely drowned as when the people entered into the Promised Land: it is even so with you who have believed in Christ but newly, your sins are cast into the depths of the sea. Your iniquities are subdued by the Lord Jesus, who has come to save his people from their sins. Therefore, little children, praise your God, and sing unto his name with all your might,—“Who forgiveth all our iniquities; who healeth all our diseases.”

Note, also, that your sins are forgiven you *on the same terms as those of the Apostle*, and the greatest of the saints: "Your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake"; that is, for the sake of Jesus, for the sake of his glorious person, for the sake of his honourable offices, for the sake of his blood-shedding and atoning death, for the sake of his glorious

resurrection, for the sake of his perpetual intercession before the throne of God. Your sins are not forgiven you because of anything you are or hope to be, nor because of anything that you have done or have suffered; you are forgiven for Christ's name's sake, and all the saints of God can say the same. This is a sure ground of hope. Quicksand there is none, but a solid rock is under our foot. Had the pardon been granted for our own work's sake, it might have been reversed upon our disobedience; but as sin is pardoned for Christ's sake, the pardon is irreversible, since there is no change in Christ. Is not this a dainty sweet for the little children. How gladly do I come and sit at the children's table when I see such food placed thereon.

Now notice that *this is the reason why John wrote to you, little children*. People do not generally write letters to little children; but John does, because of these special little ones it can be said, their sins are forgiven them. The moment, then, that a man has his sins forgiven, he is old enough to begin to understand that which is written, and he should become a Bible reader and a Bible searcher: the moment that his sins are forgiven him for Christ's name's sake, he becomes capable of exhortation, and it is his business to attend to what is written to him. If pardoned as criminals we are enlisted as workers. Why, methinks if my sins have been forgiven me, my heaven-born instincts make me ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Hast thou done so much for me? Then set me about doing something for thyself. Give me as a privilege the opportunity of serving thee." Therefore, John, knowing that the little children would be eager to obey, has written to them in this epistle certain commands, of which I will speak to you further on. Only, little children, be on the alert to begin at once your work of faith and labour of love.

II. Secondly, I have to speak of THE KNOWLEDGE of these little children. "I have written unto you, little children, because ye have known, or know, the Father." The tiniest babe in the family of God knows the Father. For, first, as we have seen, *his sins are forgiven him*. By whom is that pardon given? Why, by the Father; and, therefore, he that has had his sins forgiven him necessarily knows the Father. When the poor prodigal felt the kisses of his father's love, and saw the best robe adorning his person, then he knew the Father. All the philosophers in the world do not know so much of the Father God as a forgiven sinner knows. I go a little further: if there be any that have never fallen into sin, but are like the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance, or like the elder brother who had never at any time transgressed his father's commandment, I say that these do not know and cannot know the Father as the forgiven child does; for the Father's heart comes out most fully and expressly when he says, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Then, as he looks up through his tears and sees the ineffable smile of the Father's affection, the forgiven child knows the Father. The very least child of grace, having received the forgiveness of sin, knows the Father in this most important sense.

Moreover, this is a piece of knowledge, dear friends, which the child of God obtains *very early in his spiritual life*; for, whatever a child does

not know, he knows his father. Think of your dear little one at home: he cannot as yet read a letter in the book; he knows nothing of the things which his elder brother studies; but he knows his father. He may not know very much about his father; he could not certainly speak to others about his father's business or his father's wealth, but yet he knows him. The child cannot help his father, or understand what his father does; but he knows his father, and would choose him out from among a thousand. See how his eyes twinkle now that father has come home: see him stretch out his little hands: see how eager he is to get into these dear arms! He knows his father, and never forgets that knowledge. Dear child of God, this is a piece of knowledge which you have also; and in this you will yield to none of all the sacred family. Benjamin knows his father with an absolute certainty: he is as sure of it as Reuben the firstborn. We go to school and college, but long before that we know our father: the fear is lest we overlay that precious knowledge with something not worth half as much. Little children, you know God now in your spiritual childhood. You could not preach about him; you could not write a treatise upon his attributes; you could not describe his mighty acts; but you know him by the instinct of a child; and in you is the promise fulfilled, "Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee."

Little children, the result of your knowing God as your Father is that when he is away from you you are in the habit of crying after him. If you cannot feel your Father's love shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost you are miserable, and you hasten to your closet and begin to pray, "Come to me, my Father; manifest thyself to me, for I cannot live without thee." On the other hand, when you do get to your Father you show that you love him by the perfect restfulness of your spirit. In God you are at home. Once get into your Father's arms, you feel quite safe, quite peaceful, quite happy. The presence of God is the paradise of the believer. God is the ultimatum of our desires: we speak of him as "our exceeding joy." If in my Father's love I share a filial part, I ask no more than to know and enjoy it. We say, "Our Father which art in heaven"; we might as truly say, "Our Father, thou art our heaven." Hence we seek after him. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee." Here, then, we have a token that we know the Father, when we weep because he is absent, or rejoice because he is present.

We know the Father, brothers, even we who are but little in Israel, for we love him. Do you not feel that you love God this morning? You might not dare to say so in public, and yet you would die for him. Sooner than renounce your God would you not give up all that you possess? It may be you will never be tried as the martyrs have been; but if you were, can you suppose it possible that you could part with your God? No, your inmost heart loves him; you know it does; and loving him, you are united to him by bonds which cannot be severed. Moreover, we know the Father, for we trust him. Is it not written, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee"? Can you not trust God with everything? A child has no cares: his father cares for him. A child knows no anxiety: his father bears all the anxiety on his behalf. Is it not so with you? Though you are babes in grace, do

you not trust?—trust for time, trust for eternity, trust for your bodies, and trust for your souls? I am sure you do. If you are what you should be, you know the Father, for your faith rests upon him.

This also is true, that you seek to imitate him. It is wonderful how little children imitate their father, perhaps more than grown-up children do, though the influence of example is seen upon them also. The very little ones will try to do everything exactly like father. It must be right, it must be perfect, if father does it; they make us smile as we see in them ourselves in miniature. Is not this the very thing which you try to do? Though you were converted but a very little while ago, yet you wish to be like Jesus; you long to be like the Father. Would you not be perfect if you could? If you could, would you not be rid of every sin? If some painful surgical operation could take away from you the black drops of indwelling sin, would you not cheerfully bare your breast to the keenest knife? I know you would. You would die to be rid of sin; for that is the thing you hate. This proves that you know your Father in heaven, for you are trying to be like him.

And do you not glory in him? Little children when they begin to talk, and go to school, how proud they are of their father! Their father is the greatest man that ever lived: there never was the like of him. You may talk to them of great statesmen, or great warriors, or great princes, but these are all nobodies: their father fills the whole horizon of their being. Well, so it certainly is with us and our Father God.

“Since no works are like to thine,
None so glorious, so divine,
Since whatever gods there be,
None, O Lord, are like to thee;
Let me bow before thy throne,
And exalt thy name alone.”

We cannot make enough of our God. We extol him with all our might. With the blessed virgin we sing, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” What does “magnify” mean? Why, to make great. We feel as if we would make God’s name great, and would greatness in the minds of men, and make them think what a blessed Father we have.

Now, hearken! This is the reason why John has written to you, little children, because he says, “They know enough to understand my letter, for they know the Father.” We do not think of writing a letter to a little child. “Ah,” says John, “but the Lord’s children know their Father”; and he that knows God is capable of any kind of knowledge. He who knows God is a fit person to be accepted as a disciple of the beloved apostle. I cannot desire a better congregation than a congregation of men that know the Father. What, if they be little children? Well, they can understand anything that I, another child, can have to say, for they know the Father; and therefore they have an unction from the Holy One, and are able to know spiritual things. To know God is the centre and the circumference of all knowledge. If you know the Father, do you not see the reason why John writes to you? Because, now that you know him, you are bound to love him, to trust him, and to serve him. Having received such knowledge as this, you are bound to impart it as far as you can; you are bound to live up to it, and to show to all around you what a child of God is, and how

different he is from the children of darkness. Thus, then, out of your privilege, and out of your knowledge, there arises an obligation which I trust you will be not slow to acknowledge. Here is a prayer for you :—

“ If I've the honour, Lord, to be
 One of thy happy family,
 On me the gracious gift bestow
 To call thee “ Abba, Father ” too.

So may my conduct ever prove
 My filial piety and love !
 Whilst all my brethren clearly trace
 Their Father's likeness in my face.”

III. Now we come to our third division. Will you kindly follow me with your Bibles, especially you that are “ little children,” while I commend to you THE PRECEPTS which John has written for your guidance.

First, look at 1 John ii. : “ My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not.” That is the first precept,—Little children, *sin not*. Children are very apt to get into the mire. Most mothers will tell you, I think, that if there is a pool of mud anywhere within a mile, her first-born joy and comfort will find it out and get into it if he possibly can ; and no matter how often a child is washed he seems always to need washing again : if there is a method by which he can foul his hands and his face, your pretty cherub is most ingenious to find it out. I am afraid this is too much the case with the children of God. There is so much of carnality about us, so much of the old Adam, that the question is not into which sin we fall, but into which sin we do not fall. Alas ! we are apt to be proud, though we have nothing to be proud of ; we are prone to despond and doubt our Father, though he never gave us any cause to do so : we are inclined to be worldly, though there is nothing in the world worth loving ; and we have a tendency to grow cold and chill towards God, though he is altogether lovely, and ought to win our warmest affection. We are apt to speak unadvisedly with our lips ; we are apt to be full of foolish thoughts ; we are apt to be self-willed. We find an angry temper rising against some brother of ours whom we ought to love ; and we have not long got over that before we are half afraid to utter a word of rebuke lest we should incur the laughter of the ungodly. Thus do we glide from one sin to another, even as a waterfall descends from rock to rock. As weeds multiply in the soul so do sins spring up in our hearts. We are a mass of faults. Like the pendulum, we swing to the right hand and then to the left : we err first in one way and then in another ; we are ever inclined to evil, and hence the apostle sweetly puts it, “ My little children, I write unto you, that ye sin not.” Avoid every sin : forsake it altogether. Ask for the grace of God to sanctify you wholly, spirit, soul, and body. Though you are only newly born, yet, my little children, sin not. You will soon lose your comfort if you do. Little children, sin will hurt you, damage you, grieve you, and displease your heavenly Father : it will raise a cloud, behind which his presence will be hidden from you : it will stop your heavenly growth : it will prevent your usefulness. My little children, I earnestly entreat you that ye sin not. Burnt child, dread the fire ! You have just been plucked out of it, do not go back to it. Do not play

with sparks; keep clear of every kind of match that might create a flame. Seek after holiness with all your might. Though born but yesterday do not sin to-day. God help you to fulfil this holy precept.

Further on in this second chapter the apostle writes to them again, and tells them (verse 18) that it is the last time, and that there are many antichrists abroad. You will have to run your eye right down the chapter till you come to verse 24, for that is what he says to little children, because there are many antichrists in the world that would seduce them; "*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.*" Little children are very fickle. The toys which they cry for one day they break the next: young minds change with the wind. So, little children, there are many evil ones who will endeavour to seduce you from the truth of God, and as you have a natural instability of mind as yet, for you are only newly converted, it is well to be on your guard against those who would mislead you. Till we are rooted and grounded in the truth, new things have great charms for us, especially if they have about them a great show of holiness and zeal for God. Listen, then, dear children but newly born into the Saviour's family: "*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.*" Alas, even those who are older in grace than you are have shown a sad readiness to be duped by plausible persons who have invented fresh notions and methods. I have lived long enough to have seen a considerable variety of follies and manias in the religious world. They have sprung up, grown great, declined, and vanished. One day it has been one thing, another another. I have lived to see those things justly ridiculed which a few years before were cried up as the wonders of the age. I thank God I have not been moved by any of these periodical fits of frenzy, but have been content to keep to the one old truth which I have gathered from the Scriptures and made my own by experience, and by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. I have not had to tuck about, for I have been enabled to steam ahead; and I hope I shall do so to the end. I have no respect for these upstart inventions; but I regard them as so many phases of human delusion. One never knows what will come next; but of this we are pretty sure, that every now and then a new doctrine is brought forth which turns out to be an old heresy with a fresh coat of varnish on it; or else some new method of saving souls is found out, and the work blazes away like a house on fire till it dies out in smoke. Let us not be carried off our feet by every wind of doctrine. We may live to see the present craze ended and another or two after it; only be it ours to be steadfast, immovable. "*Little children, let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning:*" leave to others the soon-exhausted novelties and do you keep to the eternal unchangeable truth which is taught you in God's word and in your own soul's experience.

Little children, here is a third precept for you, and I want you to put it into your bosom, and carry it home (verse 28). "*And now, little children, abide in him.*" There is a Sabbath portion for you: "*Abide in him.*" Let the truth abide in you, and do you abide in Christ, who is the truth. Little children are very apt to stray: I have known them tempted away from home, to play the truant: they have gone into the fields after pretty flowers, or down by the brook to fish for minnows, and then they have fallen into all sorts of trouble. The best place for

a child is at home; and for a babe in grace the best shelter is the Saviour's bosom. "Little children, abide in him." If you forget everything else, I say this morning, lay this up in your hearts, and let none tempt you away from simply trusting your Saviour, sweetly resting in his love, and humbly following on to know more and more of him. "And now, little children, abide in him."

What next? Read on to chapter iii. verse 7:—"Little children, *let no man deceive you.*" Children are very credulous: they will believe any idle tale if it be told them by a clever and attractive person. Little children, believe your Saviour, but be not ready to believe anybody else. Believe God's word, and stand fast to that; but if sinners entice you, do not consent to them; and if antichrist would teach you false doctrine, close your ear to it. Be as the sheep of whom Jesus said,—“A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.”

Further on (iii. 18) we read: “My little children, *let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*” Little children are apt to let their angry passions rise till they have to be told by Dr. Watts that their—

“Little hands were never made
To tear each other's eyes.”

And truly we have some Christian children who have been all too quick about this tearing of each other's eyes. They have seen a truth, and some friend they meet with does not see it; therefore they have tried to knock his eyes out to make him see it. That is a faithful description of many Christian controversies. It is idle to attempt to compel another to think as I think by scolding him, and heaping wrath upon him. Let us never do that. Let us love. If you cannot expect anything else of a child you do expect love; and love never seems to be more suitably enshrined than in the heart and mind of a little child. Come, you that are newly brought to Christ, love with all your might. If you cannot fight as soldiers, or work as labourers, yet love the brotherhood; love Christ; love God; love the souls of men; and by love seek to win them to the Saviour who has saved you. Love not in word only, but in deed and in truth. †

You have the next word in chapter iv. verse 4—“Ye are of God, little children, *and have overcome them*: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” Little children are frequently timid: they are sometimes terrified when left alone: they are generally afraid of strangers. Hear, then, ye little children, you are very weak and feeble, but do not be dismayed because of that, for there is a power dwelling in you which is mightier than the power which dwells in the world. Satan dwells in the world, and he is mighty; but God dwells in you, and he is almighty; therefore be not afraid.

“A feeble saint shall win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way.”

Hold you on to faith in the eternal Lord who dwells in you, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hand.

The last precept to little children is at the end of the epistle. Carefully read the last verse—“Little children, *keep yourselves from idols.*”

Little children are naturally fond of toys and pretty pictures. Anything like pomp and show is sure to please children. How fond they are of soldiers, and banners, and processions, and bands of music, and all that is gay : these are their idols. That is the tendency of many grown-up children that I know of. They admire a fine religion, tasteful, striking, artistic. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." I would like this text printed over the altars of our Ritualistic neighbours. I need scarcely mention others who have no taste or care for the beautiful, but their toys are all for noise-making, and glitter and flash, a sort of fifth of November all the days of the year. Do not become fascinated with their playthings. Be not led away from the church of God by armies or navies. Alas, the children must now have their play toys in the church, and their toys in the chapel, and some must have their toys in the streets, till one would think with their trumpets and drums that they had just come home from the fair. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." I do not think you are likely to fall in love with the idols of the heathen and bow down to them ; but there are plenty of other gods which are the idols of one period and the derision of the next. Keep you to Christ. Ask not for pomp and show ; ask not for noise and bluster : ask for nothing but that your sins may be forgiven you, that you may know the Father, and then that you may abide in Christ, and be full of love to all the family of God. Little children, may the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and may you grow in grace till you come unto the fulness of the stature of men in him. May his grace be upon all them that love him, and wait for his appearing.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 John ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—909, 728, 248.
