

TO THE CHRISTIAN READER, ESPECIALLY HEADS OF FAMILIES.

As we cannot but with grief of soul lament those multitudes of errors, blasphemies, and all kinds of profaneness, which have in this last age, like a mighty deluge, overflowed this nation; so, among several other sins which have helped to open the flood-gates of all these impieties, we cannot but esteem the disuse of family instruction one of the greatest. The two great pillars upon which the kingdom of Satan is erected, and by which it is upheld, are ignorance and error, the first step of our manumission from this spiritual thralldom consists in having our *eyes opened, and being turned from darkness to light*, Acts 26:18. How much the serious endeavours of godly parents and masters might contribute to an early seasoning the tender years of such as are under their inspection, is abundantly evident, not only from their special influence upon them, in respect of their authority over them, interest in them, continual presence with them, and frequent opportunities of being helpful to them; but also from the sad effects which, by woeful experience, we find to be the fruit of the omission of this duty. It were easy to set before you a cloud of witnesses, the language of whose practice hath been not only an eminent commendation of this duty, but also a serious exhortation to it. As *Abel, though dead, yet speaks* by his example to us for imitation of his faith, etc., Heb. 11:4, so do the examples of Abraham, of Joshua, of the parents of Solomon, of the grandmother and mother of Timothy, the mother of Augustine, whose care was as well to nurse up the souls as the bodies of their little ones; and as their pains herein was great, so was their success no way unanswerable.

We should scarce imagine it any better than an impertinency, in this noon-day of the gospel, either to inform or persuade in a duty so expressly commanded, so frequently urged, so highly encouraged, and so eminently owned by the Lord in all ages with his blessing, but that our sad experience tells us, this duty is not more needful, than it is of late neglected. For the restoring of this duty to its due observance, give us leave to suggest this double advice.

The *first* concerns heads of families in respect of themselves; That as the Lord hath set them in place above the rest of their family, they would labour in all wisdom and spiritual understanding to be above them also. It is an uncomely sight to behold men in years babes in knowledge; and how unmeet are they to instruct others, who need themselves to be taught *which be the first principles of the oracles of God*, Heb. 5:12. Knowledge is an accomplishment so desirable, that the devils themselves knew not a more taking bait by which to tempt our first parents, than by the fruit of the tree of knowledge; *So shall you be as gods, knowing good and evil*. When Solomon had that favour shewed him of the Lord, that he was made his own chuser what to ask, he knew no greater mercy to beg than wisdom, 1 Kings 3:5, 9. The understanding is the guide and pilot of the whole man, that faculty which sits at the stern of the soul: but as the most expert guide may mistake in the dark, so may the understanding, when it wants the light of knowledge: *Without knowledge the mind cannot be good*, Prov. 19:2; nor the life good, nor the eternal condition safe, Eph. 4:18. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*, Hos.4:6. It is ordinary in scripture to set profaneness, and all kind of miscarriages, upon the score of ignorance. Diseases in the body have many times their rise from distempers in the head, and exorbitancies in practice from errors in judgment: and indeed in every sin there is something both of ignorance and error at the bottom: for, did sinners truly know what they do in sinning, we might say of every sin what the Apostle speaks concerning that great sin, *Had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*; did they truly know that every sin is a provoking the Lord to jealousy, a proclaiming war against Heaven, *a crucifying the Lord Jesus afresh, a treasuring up wrath unto themselves against the day of wrath*; and that, if ever they be pardoned, it must be at no lower a rate than the price of his blood; it were scarce possible but sin, instead of alluring, should affright, and instead of tempting, scare. It is one of the arch devices and principal methods of Satan to deceive men into sin: thus he prevailed against our first parents, not as a lion, but as a serpent, acting his enmity under a pretence of friendship, and tempting them to evil under an appearance of good; and thus hath he all along carried on his designs of darkness,

by transforming himself into an angel of light, making poor deceived men in love with their miseries, and hug their own destruction. A most sovereign antidote against all kind of errors, is to be grounded and settled in the faith: persons unfixed in the true religion, are very receptive of a false; and they who are nothing in spiritual knowledge, are easily made any thing. *Clouds without water are driven to and fro with every wind*, and ships without ballast liable to the violence of every tempest. But yet the knowledge we especially commend, is not a brain-knowledge, a mere speculation; this may be in the worst of men, nay, in the worst of creatures the devils themselves, and that in such an eminency, as the best of saints cannot attain to in this life of imperfection; but an inward, a savoury, an heart knowledge, such as was in that martyr, who, though she could not dispute for Christ, could die for him. This is that spiritual sense and feeling of divine truths the Apostle speaks of, Heb. 5:14, *Having your senses exercised*, etc.

But, alas, we may say of most men's religion what learned Rivet* speaks concerning the errors of the fathers, "They were not so much their own errors, as the errors of the times wherein they lived." Thus do most men take up their religion upon no better an account than Turks and Papists take up theirs, because it is the religion of the times and places wherein they live; and what they take up thus slightly, they lay down as easily. Whereas an inward taste and relish of the things of God, is an excellent preservative to keep us settled in the most unsettled times. Corrupt and unsavoury principles have great advantage upon us, above those that are spiritual and sound; the former being suitable to corrupt nature, the latter contrary; the former springing up of themselves, the latter brought forth not without a painful industry. The ground needs no other midwifery in bringing forth weeds than only the neglect of the husbandman's hand to pluck them up; the air needs no other cause of darkness than the absence of the sun; nor water of coldness than its distance from the fire; because these are the genuine products of nature. Were it so with the soul, (as some of the philosophers have vainly imagined,) to come into the world as an *abrasa tabula*, a mere blank or piece of white paper, on which neither any thing is written, nor any blots, it would then be equally receptive of good and evil, and no more averse to the one than to the other: but how much worse its condition indeed is, were scripture silent, every man's experience does evidently manifest. For who is there that knows any thing of his own heart. and knows not thus much, that the suggestions of Satan have so easy and free admittance into our hearts, that our utmost watchfulness is too little to guard us from them? whereas the motions of God's Spirit are so unacceptable to us, that our utmost diligence is too little to get our hearts open to entertain them. Let therefore the excellency, necessity, difficulty of true wisdom stir up endeavours in you somewhat proportionable to such an accomplishment; *Above all getting, get understanding*, Prov. 4:7; and *search for wisdom as for hidden treasures*, Prov. 2:4. It much concerns you in respect of yourselves.

Our *second* advice concerns heads of families, in respect of their families. Whatever hath been said already, though it concerns every private Christian that hath a soul to look after; yet, upon a double account, it concerns parents and masters, as having themselves and others to look after: some there are, who, because of their ignorance, cannot; others, because of their sluggishness, will not mind this duty. To the former we propound the method of Joshua, who first began with himself, and then is careful of his family. To the latter we shall only hint, what a dreadful meeting those parents and masters must have at that great day, with their children and servants, when all that were under their inspection shall not only accuse them, but charge their eternal miscarrying upon their score.

Never did any age of the Church enjoy such choice helps as this of ours. Every age of the gospel hath had its Creeds, Confessions, catechisms, and such breviaries and models of divinity as have been singularly useful. Such forms of sound words (however in these days decried) have been in use in the Church ever since God himself wrote the Decalogue, as a summary of things to be done; and Christ taught us that prayer of his, as a directory what to ask. Concerning the usefulness of such compendiary systems, so much hath been said already by a learned divine** of this age, as is sufficient to satisfy all who are not resolved to remain unsatisfied.

Concerning the particular excellency of these ensuing treatises, we judge it needless to mention those eminent testimonies which have been given them from persons of known worth, in respect of their judgment,

learning, and integrity, both at home and abroad, because themselves spake so much their own praise; gold stands not in need of varnish, nor diamonds of painting: give us leave only to tell you, that we cannot but account it an eminent mercy to enjoy such helps as these are. It is ordinary in these days for men to speak evil of things they know not; but if any are possessed with mean thoughts of these treatises, we shall only give the same counsel to them that Philip gives Nathanael, *Come and see*, John 1:46. It is no small advantage the reader now hath, by the addition of scriptures at large, whereby with little pains he may more profit, because with every truth he may behold its scripture foundation. And, indeed, considering what Babel of opinions, what a strange confusion of tongues, there is this day among them who profess they speak the language of Canaan, there is no intelligent person but will conclude that advice of the prophet especially suited to such an age as this, Isa. 8:20, *To the law, and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*. If the reverend and learned composers of these ensuing treatises were willing to take the pains of annexing scripture proofs to every truth, that the faith of people might not be built upon the dictates of men, but the authority of God, so some considerable pains hath now been further taken in transcribing those scriptures; partly to prevent that grand inconvenience (which all former impressions, except the Latin, have abounded with, to the great perplexing and disheartening of the reader,) the misquotation of scripture, the meanest reader being able, by having the words at large, to rectify whatever mistake may be in the printer in citing the particular place; partly, to prevent the trouble of turning to every proof, which could not but be very great; partly, to help the memories of such who are willing to take the pains of turning to every proof, but are unable to retain what they read; and partly, that this may serve as a Bible commonplace, the several passages of scripture, which are scattered up and down in the word, being in this book reduced to their proper head, and thereby giving light each to other. The advantages, you see, in this design, are many and great; the way to spiritual knowledge is hereby made more easy, and the ignorance of this age more inexcusable.

If, therefore, there be any spark in you of love to God, be not content that any of yours should be ignorant of him whom you so much admire, or any haters of him whom you so much love. If there be any compassion to the souls of them who are under your care, if any regard of your being found faithful in the day of Christ, if any respect to future generations, labour to sow these seeds of knowledge, which may grow up in after-times. That you may be faithful herein, is the earnest prayer of,

Henry Wilkinson D.D. <i>A.M.P.</i>	John Fuller	George Griffiths	Matthew Haviland
Roger Drake.	James Nalton	Edward Perkins	William Blackmore
William Taylor.	Thomas Goodwin	Ralph Venning	Richard Kentish
Samuel Annesley.	Matthew Pool	Jeremiah Burwell	Alexander Pringle
Thomas Gouge.	William Bates	Joseph Church	William Wickins
Charles Offspring.	John Loder	Has. Bridges	Thomas Watson
Arthur Jackson	Francis Raworth	Samuel Smith	John Jackson
John Cross	William Cooper	Samuel Rowles	John Seabrooke
Samuel Clerk.	William Jenkin	John Glascock	John Peachie
Samuel Slater.	Thomas Manton	Leo. Cooke	James Jollife
Willinm Whittaker.	Thomas Jacomb	John Sheffield	Obadiah Lee

*Rivet. Crit. Sacr.

** Dr Tuckney in his Sermon on 2 Tim. 1:13.

MR THOMAS MANTON'S EPISTLE TO THE READER

CHRISTIAN READER,

I cannot suppose thee to be such a stranger in England as to be ignorant of the general complaint concerning the decay of the power of godliness, and more especially of the great corruption of youth. Wherever thou goest, thou wilt hear men crying out of bad children and bad servants; whereas indeed the source of the mischief must be sought a little higher: it is bad parents and bad masters that make bad children and bad servants; and we cannot blame so much their untowardness, as our own negligence in their education.

The devil hath a great spite at the kingdom of Christ, and he knoweth no such compendious way to crush it in the egg, as by the perversion of youth, and supplanting family-duties. He striketh at all those duties which are publick in the assemblies of the saints, but these are too well guarded by the solemn injunctions and dying charge of Jesus Christ, as that he should ever hope totally to subvert and undermine them; but at family-duties he striketh with the more success, because the institution is not so solemn, and the practice not so seriously and conscientiously regarded as it should be, and the omission is not so liable to notice and publick censure. Religion was first hatched in families, and there the devil seeketh to crush it; the families of the Patriarchs were all the Churches God had in the world for the time: and therefore. (I suppose,) when Cain went out from Adam's family, he is said to go out from the face of the Lord, Gen. 4:16. Now, the devil knoweth that this is a blow at the root, and a ready way to prevent the succession of Churches: if he can subvert families, other societies and communities will not long flourish and subsist with any power and vigour; for there is the stock from whence they are supplied both for the present and future.

For the present: A family is the seminary of Church and State; and if children be not well principled there, all miscarrieth: a fault in the first concoction is not mended in the second; if youth be bred ill in the family, they prove ill in Church and Commonwealth; there is the first making or marring, and the presage of their future lives to be thence taken, Prov. 20:11. By family discipline, officers are trained up for the Church, 1 Tim. 3:4, *One that ruleth well his own house*, etc.; and there are men bred up in subjection and obedience. It is noted, Acts 21:5, that the disciples brought Paul on his way with their wives and children; their children probably are mentioned, to intimate, that their parents would, by their own example and affectionate farewell to Paul, breed them up in a way of reverence and respect to the pastors of the Church.

For the future: It is comfortable, certainly, to see a thriving nursery of young plants, and to have hopes that God shall have a people to serve him when we are dead and gone: the people of God comforted themselves in that, Ps. 102:28, *The children of thy servants shall continue*, etc.

Upon all these considerations, how careful should ministers and parents be to train up young ones whilst they are yet pliable, and, like wax, capable of any form and impression, in the knowledge and fear of God; and betimes to instil the principles of our most holy faith, as they are drawn into a short sum in Catechisms, and so altogether laid in the view of conscience! Surely these seeds of truth planted in the field of memory, if they work nothing else, will at least be a great check and bridle to them and, as the casting in of cold water doth stay the boiling of the pot, somewhat allay the fervours of youthful lusts and passions.

I had, upon entreaty, resolved to recommend to thee with the greatest earnestness the work of catechising, and, as a meet help, the usefulness of this book, as thus printed with the Scriptures at large: but meeting with a private letter of a very learned and godly divine, wherein that work is excellently done to my hand, I shall make bold to transcribe a part of it, and offer it to publick view.

The author having bewailed the great distractions, corruptions, and divisions that are in the Church, he thus represents the cause and cure:

“ Among others, a principal cause of these mischiefs is the great and common neglect of the governors of families, in the discharge of that duty which they owe to God for the souls that are under their charge, especially in teaching them the doctrine of Christianity. Families are societies that must be sanctified to God as well as Churches; and the governors of them have as truly a charge of the souls that are therein, as pastors have of the Churches. But, alas, how little is this considered or regarded ! But while negligent ministers are (deservedly) cast out of their places, the negligent masters of families take themselves to be almost blameless. They offer their children to God in baptism, and there they promise to teach them the doctrine of the gospel, and bring them up in the nurture of the Lord; but they easily promise, and easily break it; and educate their children for the world and the flesh, although they have renounced these, and dedicated them to God. This covenant-breaking with God, and betraying the souls of their children to the devil, must lie heavy on them here or hereafter. They beget children, and keep families merely for the world and the flesh: but little consider what a charge is committed to them, and what it is to bring up a child for God, and govern a family as a sanctified society.

O how sweetly and successfully would the work of God go on, if we would but all join together in our several places to promote it! Men need not then run without sending to be preachers; but they might find that part of the work that belongeth to them to be enough for them, and to be the best that they can be employed in. Especially women should be careful of this duty; because as they are most about their children, and have early and frequent opportunities to instruct them, so this is the principal service they can do to God in this world, being restrained from more publick work. And doubtless many an excellent magistrate hath been sent into the Commonwealth, and many an excellent pastor into the Church, and many a precious saint to heaven, through the happy preparations of a holy education, perhaps by a woman that thought herself useless and unserviceable to the Church. Would parents but begin betimes, and labour to affect the hearts of their children with the great matters of everlasting life, and to acquaint them with the substance of the doctrine of Christ, and, when they find in them the knowledge and love of Christ, would bring them then to the pastors of the Church to be tried, confirmed and admitted to the further privileges of the Church, what happy, well-ordered Churches might we have ! Then one pastor need not be put to do the work of two or three hundred or thousand governors of families, even to teach their children those principles which they should have taught them long before; nor should we be put to preach to so many miserable ignorant souls, that be not prepared by education to understand us, nor should we have need to shut out so many from holy communion upon the account of ignorance, that yet have not the grace to feel it and lament it, nor the wit and patience to wait in a learning state, till they are ready to be fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. But now they come to us with aged self-conceitedness, being past children, and yet worse than children still; having the ignorance of children, but being overgrown the teachableness of children, and think themselves wise, yea wise enough to quarrel with the wisest of their teachers, because they have lived long enough to have been wise, and the evidence of their knowledge is their aged ignorance; and they are readier to flee in our faces for Church-privileges, than to learn of us, and obey our instructions, till they are prepared for them, that they may do them good, like snappish curs that will snap us by the fingers for their meat, and snatch it out of our hands; and not like children, that stay till we give it them. Parents have so used them to be unruly, that ministers have to deal but with too few but the unruly. And it is for want of this laying the foundation well at first, that professors themselves are so ignorant as most are, and that so many, especially of the younger sort, do swallow down almost any error that is offered them, and follow any sect of dividers that will entice them so it be but done with earnestness and plausibility. For, alas ! though by the grace of God their hearts may be changed in an hour, (whenever they understand but the essentials of the faith,) yet their understandings must have time and diligence to furnish them with such knowledge as must stablish them, and fortify them against deceits. Upon these, and many the like considerations, we should entreat all Christian families to take more pains in this necessary work, and to get better acquainted with the substance of Christianity. And, to that end, (taking along some moving treatises to awake the heart,) I know not what work should be fitter for their use, than that compiled by the Assembly at Westminster; a Synod of as godly, judicious divines, (notwithstanding all the bitter words which they have received from discontented and self-conceited men,) I verily think, as ever England saw. Though they had the unhappiness to be employed in calamitous times, when the noise of wars did stop men’s ears, and the licentiousness of wars did set every wanton tongue and pen at liberty to reproach them, and the prosecution and event of those wars did exasperate partial discontented men to dishonour themselves by seeking to dishonour them; I dare say, if in the days of old, when

councils were in power and account, they had had but such a council of bishops, as this of presbyters was, the fame of it for learning and holiness, and all ministerial abilities, would, with very great honour, have been transmitted to posterity.

I do therefore desire, that all masters of families would first study well this work themselves, and then teach it their children and servants, according to their several capacities. And, if they once understand these grounds of religion, they will be able to read other books more understandingly, and hear sermons more profitably, and confer more judiciously, and hold fast the doctrine of Christ more firmly, than ever you are like to do by any other course. First, let them read and learn the Shorter Catechism, and next the Larger and lastly, read the Confession of Faith.”

Thus far he, whose name I shall conceal, (though the excellency of the matter and present style, will easily discover him,) because I have published it without his privily and consent, though, I hope, not against his liking and approbation. I shall add no more, but that I am,

Thy servant,

in the Lord’s work,

THOMAS MANTON.
