

ARTICLE II.

"SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN, AND FORBID THEM  
NOT, TO COME UNTO ME."

AN EXPOSITION OF MATTHEW XIX. 13-15.

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"It must not be dissembled that there are many real difficulties in the Christian Scriptures; whilst, at the same time, more, I believe, and greater, may justly be imputed to certain maxims of interpretation, which have obtained authority without reason, and are received without inquiry."—PALCY (from a sermon on 2 Peter iii. 15-16).

WITH a profound conviction that, notwithstanding the lavish use which has been made of this passage of Scripture, in theological controversy and otherwise, the Word of God can yet shed light upon it, we undertake the gathering together of the rays of that light, in order that, when brought to a proper focus, they may illuminate this text with the mind of the Spirit of God, and dispel the mists and darkness of vagueness and preconceived opinion which have heretofore clouded its interpretation. We may run the risk of being thought presumptuous, but will, nevertheless, venture the assertion that no other passage of Scripture, considering the immense frequency with which it has been cited from the fathers to the present time, has received such cursory and arbitrary treatment as has this one.

The fact that it was so early in the church's history taken as a ground for the baptism of infants, seems to have influenced all subsequent exegesis. "Ait Dominus, Nolite illos prohibere venire ad me," was the common expression of

satisfaction with the practice of infant baptism for centuries.<sup>1</sup> That custom prevailing for many centuries, and being universal, after the time of Irenæus, until the Reformation brought in the spirit of inquiry concerning the things of God, the passage seems to have acquired a supposititious meaning, one which sanctioned the baptism of infants, although baptism is not at all mentioned in either it or the parallel passages in the other Gospels, whilst the most ardent advocate of infant baptism would hardly contend that the little children here particularly referred to were brought to Jesus to be baptized; for John iv. 2 expressly tells us that "Jesus himself baptized not." The fact that "but his disciples" is added does not change the situation at all; for we read, also, "but the disciples rebuked them" (Matt. xix. 13).

We do not, however, wish it to be thought that we purpose writing upon the subject of baptism—a fruitful cause of strife and contention. We confine ourselves to the elucidation of a single incident in the life of our blessed Lord, and believe that our labor is not in vain. Our introductory references to baptism merely serve to indicate the probable cause of the obscurity of exegesis accorded this not unimportant passage of Scripture.

The passage itself is as follows:—

"Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and departed thence."

We have here seven facts stated, and we believe that each one will be found to contribute its quota to the establishment of our general proposition.

The *first* fact stated is that, "Then were there brought unto

<sup>1</sup> Apost. Const. vi. 15, p. 380.

him little children”; the *second*, “that he should put his hands on them”; the *third*, “and pray”; the *fourth*, “and the disciples rebuked them” (“that brought them,” adds Mark; but these words are omitted by the two oldest manuscripts and the Revised Version, although this does not alter the meaning at all); the *fifth*, “But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven”; the *sixth*, “And he laid his hands on them”; the *seventh*, “and departed thence.”

Each of the three synoptic Gospels gives us an account of this matter, the parallel narratives being Mark x. 13–16 and Luke xviii. 15–17. Mark says:—

“And 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, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.”

The only change worthy of note at this point which Luke’s narrative gives us is that the “little children” who were brought to him are called “infants,” in supposed correspondence to a difference in the Greek word used, which the Revised Version renders “babes.” We shall reserve our comments on this variation for another place; and merely remark now that it is not well to lay undue stress on this difference in the accounts, for reasons which will later appear.

As an additional preliminary, in order that all the facts may be fairly before us, it is proper to call attention to the slight changes of rendering of the Revised Version. Those worthy of notice are, in addition to the one noted *supra*, the insertion of the definite article before “little children” in

each case where the phrase "suffer little children" occurs, like the A.V. of Mark x. 14; the change, in Matt. xix. 13, from "put his hands on them" to "lay his hands on them"; and the change, in Mark x. 16, from, "And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them," to, "And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them."

For convenience, we will here divide our subject into two heads: (1) the literal meaning of this passage, and (2) the spiritual teaching. The general haziness concerning the spiritual sense of this portion of Scripture is, to a considerable degree, attributable to the inaccurate appreciation of the nature of the historical facts related, we believe.

### I.

We shall first endeavor to show the real nature of this incident in the life of our Lord. We believe that we have here, briefly described, one of our Lord's miracles of healing. Whatever blessing Jesus conveyed to the little children was in the fact that he cured physical disease with which they were suffering. Not all of the miracles worked by our blessed Lord whilst on earth are recorded in Scripture (John xxi. 25); and many of those recorded are given no special mention, details being omitted. The present instance is one of those miracles of healing where the details are omitted. Merely for example, and to show how numerous his works of healing undoubtedly were, and also to show the brevity of the account of some of them, we here quote Luke iv. 40: "Now, when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them." To the same effect is Matt. xii. 15, which says: "And great multitudes

followed him, and he healed them all"; and Matt. xix. 2 contains a like statement, there being a difference of only a word or two from the passage last quoted, although the events recorded are not the same, but are separate instances of the fact we are showing.

In view of the fact that multitudes were cured by our Lord, as in the three instances cited, and no detailed account thereof preserved by the inspired penmen, there is not *a priori* improbability in the view here advocated—i. e., that a miracle of healing is briefly and *sketchily* narrated in the passage we are considering. A sufficient reason for suppressing the details of the miracle, and pressing on to teach the lesson which, as we learn from the accounts in Mark and Luke, our Saviour drew from the incident (that of humility), is found in the fact that enough miracles are related in detail, whilst the moral lessons, both before and after this event, are plainer to our minds because not interrupted by a diversion stating the details of this miracle. This being the purpose of the narrative, it is not surprising that the miracle should be referred to rather by implication than expressly. This, however, is still only hypothesis, and must be proved. That we shall now undertake to do.

In the fact that the little children were brought unto him "that he should put his hands on them" ("lay his hands on them," R.V.), we get the first hint that a miracle was sought, and that those who brought the children desired that they might be healed. We deduce this from the fact that it was our Lord's custom, in all his miracles of healing, to lay his hands on the recipient of the blessing of health. This is shown by a passage already cited in another connection (Luke iv. 40). We there read that a large number of sick with divers diseases were brought unto him "when the sun

was setting" (late in the day), "and he laid his hands on every one of them." If it had not been his invariable custom to lay his hands on the sick when healing them, he would certainly have omitted it here where there were so many to be healed, and at such a late hour, and after the day's toil; but "He laid his hands *on every one of them.*" We may, in fact, readily infer that the laying on of our Lord's hands quickly became associated, in the mind of the people, with the thought of healing, so that, with the people, to speak of the one was to imply the other, as in our text.

In the New Testament, there are five classes of references to the laying on of hands:—

a. Meaning personal violence; as, when we read that the ungenerous servant "laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest" (Matt. xviii. 28); or, when it is said: "Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him (Matt. xxvi. 50). Herod, likewise, "laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison" (Matt. xiv. 3). The other occurrences of this phrase, in this sense, in the New Testament, are: Matt. xxi. 46; Mark xiv. 46; Luke xx. 19; xxi. 12; John vii. 30, 44; viii. 20; Acts iv. 3; v. 18; xxi. 27.

b. With relation to the separation to some special work; as, Acts vi. 6; xiii. 3.

c. The casual reference to the Old Testament doctrine of the laying on of hands (Heb. vi. 2).

d. In connection with the impartation of the Holy Ghost and spiritual gifts; as, Acts viii. 17-19; xix. 6; 1 Tim. iv. 14; v. 22; 2 Tim. i. 6.

e. For the purpose of healing. In this latter sense, it occurs more frequently than in all the others combined, while it is manifest that the first three of the above-named uses have

absolutely no bearing on our present subject. The fourth use can have no relation to our subject for several reasons, of which it will probably be sufficient now to specify one, to wit, "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; *for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified*" (John vii. 39). The instances in which laying or putting on of hands (sometimes called "touching") for the purpose of curing the sick or raising the dead is mentioned in the New Testament are the following: Matt. viii. 3, 15; ix. 18, 25, 29; xx. 34; Mark i. 31, 41; v. 23, 41-42; vi. 5 (see ver. 2); vii. 32-33; viii. 22-25; ix. 27; xvi. 18; Luke iv. 40; v. 13; viii. 54; xiii. 13; xxii. 51; John ix. 6, 11, 15; Acts v. 12; ix. 17; xiv. 3; xix. 11; xxviii. 8.

A survey of these passages will show that, in the four Gospels, there are but two kinds of references to the laying on of hands, i. e., those above designated *a* and *e*. The references to violence by the expression "laid hands on him" being easily understood as having no possible bearing on our subject, we are able to affirm that, in every relevant instance in the Gospels where laying on of hands is mentioned, it is in connection with a work of healing.

From all this, it is evident that, when they brought little children unto him, "that he should put his hands on them" ("lay his hands on them," R.V.), the thought that the children were in some way sick, and that they sought a cure at his hands, is plainly implied, due to the intimate connection between his cures and the touch or laying on of his hands. But, not to stop at this, we have clear accounts of three other instances where the sick or dead were expressly called to his attention, "that he should lay his hands on them," where the object of the laying on of his hands cannot be questioned,

and which serve to establish our proposition that, in bringing the sick to him for help, they were in the habit of doing it "that he should lay his hands on them," well knowing that blessing and recovery immediately followed the imposition of his hands. The three instances just referred to are recorded in Mark v. 23; vii. 32; viii. 22. In Mark v. 22-23, we read that Jairus came to him, "and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death; I pray thee, *come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed, and she shall live.*" Mark vii. 32-33 says: "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; *and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.* And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit and touched his tongue." Mark viii. 22-25, which gives us the third instance, besides the one in the passage the subject of this exposition, where the people brought the afflicted that he might touch them, instead of saying "that he might cure them," tells us that he came to Bethsaida; "and they bring a blind man unto him, and *besought him to touch him.* And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and, when he had spit on his eyes, *and put his hands on him,* he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that, he *put his hands again upon his eyes,* and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly."

Enough Scriptures have been cited to show reason for the people's associating Christ's works of healing with the laying on of his hands; also, to show that they asked him to lay his hands on them as a synonymous expression with asking to be healed ( Mark v. 23), made clean (Matt. viii. 2; Mark i. 40; Luke v. 12), or made whole (Mark v. 28). Jesus himself



spoke of forgiveness of sins as synonymous with healing, and asked, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk?" (Mark ii. 9; Matt. ix. 5). In view of the works wrought by the hands of Jesus, the association of their thoughts of healing by him with the imposition of his hands is not surprising; but it appears, furthermore, that the ancient prophets of God, with the accounts of whose lives the people were more or less familiar, had some similar form which they used in working miracles; for "Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord, his God, *and strike his hand over the place*, and recover the leper" (2 Kings v. 11).

In addition to the touching with the hand by the prophets, a "calling on the name of the Lord, their God," seems, also, to have been part of their usual procedure in working miracles, as we see above and in the following passages of Scripture: Ex. viii. 12, 30; xv. 25; 1 Kings xvii. 20; xviii. 30-37; 2 Kings iv. 33; vi. 17-18; xx. 11.

In like manner, the apostles, when working miracles of healing, both prayed and laid their hands on the sick person, as in the case of the father of Publius; "to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him and healed him" (Acts xxviii. 8), and in the case of Tabitha, or Dorcas, who was raised from the dead in response to the prayer of Peter (Acts ix. 40). See, also, Mark xvi. 18; Jas. v. 14-15; 1 John v. 16.

Prayer was not omitted even by Christ, and, from what the Scriptures expressly state on the subject, we can readily infer that our Lord prayed unto the Father in connection with each of his miracles—because of the people which stood by, that

they might believe that the Father had sent him (John xi. 42). At the grave of Lazarus, we have recorded probably the longest address to the Father in connection with a miracle, it being stated as follows: "And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou *hast heard me*. And I knew that thou hearest me *always*, but because of the people which stand by *I said it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (John xi. 41-42). Strictly speaking, this is not the prayer itself, no request being herein contained, and being thanksgiving rather than prayer, the italicized words showing that his prayer had already been offered up. But it is just as pertinent as a proof of his practice of praying in connection with his miracles as if it were the prayer itself, because it refers to the prayer. Our Lord's custom in this respect is shown not only by his words, "I knew that thou hearest me *always*," coming in such a connection, nor alone by Martha's evident reference to his custom at the working of miracles, when she, entreating him to raise up her brother from the dead, says: "But I know that, even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (John xi. 22). It is shown, also, by a number of other actual instances where he prayed in connection with his works of healing. The other passages where our Lord's prayers in connection with his miracles are recorded are: Matt. xiv. 19; Mark vi. 41; vii. 34; Luke ix. 16; John ix. 31. Each one of these passages relates to one of our Lord's miracles; and, in each (except John ix. 31, of which we shall presently treat separately), do we read that Jesus "lifted up his eyes to heaven." That this indicates the act of prayer cannot be doubted, since we are told, as above quoted, of his lifting up his eyes to heaven in connection with his prayer at the grave of Lazarus. In addition, we read, at the beginning of his beautiful prayer in

the seventeenth of John, that "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son, also, may glorify thee," etc. The Pharisee *stood* and prayed, undoubtedly with his eyes upturned to heaven, whilst the publican, by way of contrast, "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven" (Luke xviii. 13).

It may seem almost a work of supererogation to prove that the passages above cited, in which Jesus is said to have lifted up his eyes to heaven in connection with his miracles, indicate his attitude of prayer in those cases; but we have done so because we wish to assume nothing in this exposition, and to "prove all things" (1 Thess. v. 21). We have not exhausted the proofs from Scripture on this point, but will not cite more, deeming the foregoing sufficient.

The remaining instance of Jesus' praying in connection with a miracle is related in John ix. 31, which says: "Now, we know that God *heareth not* sinners; but, if any man be a worshiper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

This was the comment of the man born blind upon the miracle of having his sight given him. He shows that Jesus worked this miracle by the power of God by referring to a point of Old Testament teaching with which all those who weekly heard those Scriptures read in the synagogue were familiar, i. e., that God *heareth not sinners* (in prayer). "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," says the Psalmist (Ps. lxvi. 18). Now, "this man" (ver. 33) had been heard of God, as evidenced by the miracle, and was, therefore, not a sinner, reasons this erstwhile blind man. That he had been heard of God, manifestly indicates that he had prayed to the Father for the sight of this blind man, and it is clear, too, that he had done so in the presence and hearing

of the man himself; for he argues, from the fact that that prayer had been heard and answered, that the One who had thus been heard was not a sinner, because "we know," said he, "that God heareth not sinners."

The custom of Jesus being to pray before each miracle, for the reason he himself gives in John xi. 42, *supra*, as established by the passages of Scripture we have cited, another link is added to the chain of proof that, when there "were brought unto him little children that he should put his hands on them *and pray*," those children were brought to him, not for some vague, mystical, perchance magical, and intangible spiritual influence, of an unknown nature, but for the definite and tangible purpose of being healed of disease, according to his usual form of laying on of hands and prayer.

We now come to a third point: "And he laid his hands on them, *and departed thence*" (ver. 15).

Immediately after performing the miracle and teaching the brief lesson of humility recorded by Mark and Luke in that connection, the crowds gathering, he "departed thence." This, too, was in accordance with his custom. After many of his miracles, he withdrew himself from the people, he was hidden from their view, or he departed thence. Under this head, for example, we will quote the following: "And he that was healed wist not who it was; *for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place*" (John v. 13). Here we have stated not only the fact that multitudes gathered after his miracles (a thing obviously to be expected), but that his reason for withdrawing himself after his miracles was to avoid the crowds. He might merely have desired to be alone (Mark vii. 24); but his reason for avoiding the people after his miracles plainly was that they desired to make him their king, which was not in accordance with God's purpose

or Christ's mission at that time. Thus, after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (John vi.), we read: "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle which Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus, therefore, perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John vi. 14-15). More needs not to be said on this point, and it only remains to refer to the record of instances where Jesus "departed thence" after certain of his miracles, which instances are recorded as follows: Matt. ix. 7, 27; xii. 15; xv. 29; Mark i. 35; vi. 1; ix. 30; Luke v. 16; John v. 13; vi. 15. Besides this, there are numbers of passages telling of injunctions to secrecy, for the same reason, concerning our Lord's miracles, "charging them straitly that no man should know it," which are as follows: Matt. viii. 4; ix. 30; xii. 16; Mark i. 43-44; v. 43; vii. 36; viii. 26; ix. 9; Luke v. 14; viii. 56.

We now turn to the *possible* objections to this view, which are but two in number: (1) That it is said (Matt. xix. 13; Mark x. 13; Luke xviii. 15) "but the disciples rebuked them," it seeming improbable, it may be said, that the disciples would rebuke those that brought their children unto Christ, if they were afflicted with disease and sought a cure; (2) that Mark adds to the narrative of the other evangelists the additional detail that "he blessed them" (Mark x. 16).

We freely grant that the first of these objections is a fair one and should be fairly met. At first sight, it would seem well-nigh incredible that any one could ever have objected to children afflicted by disease being brought to the Great Physician for healing. We believe, however, that we have something more to offer than the mere asseveration that that

is the fact. The forwardness of the disciples in administering their rebukes is well illustrated by Peter's Satan-inspired rebuke to our ever-blessed Lord (Matt. xvi. 22; Mark viii. 32-33). But the depths of the meanness of the human heart are as unknowable as its deceitfulness and wickedness (Jer. xvii. 9), and approach in unsearchableness to the judgments and ways of God, which are past finding out (Rom. xi. 33). Under these circumstances, the citation of other and like examples of interference with those who sought Christ for healing is all that can fairly be demanded of us, in reply to this objection. These examples we produce forthwith: Matt. xx. 31; Mark x. 48; Luke xviii. 39; Mark ix. 38-39; Luke ix. 49-50; Matt. xv. 22-23; see, also, 2 Kings iv. 27.

In the first instance cited, "two blind men, sitting by the wayside, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. *And the multitude rebuked them*, because they should hold their peace."

In the second instance referred to above, the disciples saw one casting out devils in the name of Jesus; and, because he followed not the disciples, they forbade him. O human perversity! O sectarianism personified! He followed not after them, and, therefore, they forbade him to work miracles for the alleviation of suffering humanity. Consider the condition of the man who had his dwelling in the tombs (Mark v. 1-16), and judge whether or not any disease could be half so dreadful as demon possession, and whether or not the men who could forbid the casting out of devils (for the reason given by them) were not equally capable of rebuking those who brought little children to their Master to be healed, interrupting, as the disciples thought, his preceding discourse with the Pharisees.

In the third instance given, however, the reason advanced by the disciples probably reaches the lowest plane, being simple selfishness, of the grossest type. "And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, *Send her away, for she crieth after us.*"

Another instance of the same nature is that of Gehazi (2 Kings iv. 27), "who came near to thrust away" the Shunamite woman from Elisha's feet, when she had come to him to beg that the life of her son might be restored.

With all this before us, it is believed that it is no longer incredible that the disciples were quite capable of rebuking those that brought little children unto Christ for healing, when, according to their notions, their pragmatistical interference was necessary to save the Lord from interruption in his conversation with the Pharisees who came to tempt him, the little children being brought to him "then" (*tote*—"at that time"), according to Matt. xix. 13, i. e., immediately after Jesus had spoken the words recorded in Matt. xix. 12 to the Pharisees.

The second objection has intrinsically little in it, and would not merit notice, were it not that the common view makes so much of it. It is alleged that there was a custom among the Jews, at that period, of bringing children to their famous teachers or rabbins, or any eminent person, in order that such dignitary might pronounce a benediction or blessing upon them, and that, in so doing, the words of blessing were accompanied by the imposition of hands on the child's head, "by this rite" (in the present instance), says Lightfoot, "to admit them into the number of his disciples, or to own them

as belonging to his kingdom." Of course, this is a mere *dictum* on the part of Lightfoot. With a unanimity which would be beautiful, were its foundation scriptural, Lightfoot, Calmet, Clarke, Scott, Porteus, Edwards, Newman, Jacobus, Andrews, Farrar, Geikie, Ewald, Strauss, Keim, and others too numerous to name, from the most diverse, and even opposite, schools of Christian and unchristian doctrine, all *assume* the existence of such a custom at that time. With almost equal unanimity, these commentators seem to have thought it superfluous to *prove* its existence, whilst Whitby argues against the existence of such custom, saying that, if such custom had then obtained, the disciples would have known it, and would not have rebuked them. Geikie, it is true, gives us an irrelevant quotation from the Talmud<sup>1</sup> in an endeavor, which few seem to have thought it necessary to make, to substantiate his assertion; but an examination of all the facts will show that that quotation has no relation whatever to the incident under discussion. The only authority cited by Keim is the passage in Buxtorf referred to by Geikie, whilst the others merely *assume* its existence, without any citations.

The only *scriptural* proof that such a custom was then in vogue ever attempted is the citation of Gen. xxvii. and xlviii. 14-20, which relate to events which took place, the one (*circa*) 1797 years, and the other 1726 years, before, in a different age, patriarchal in its character, in which primitive customs continued in full force.

An explanation of the first of those instances (Gen. xxvii.) is not far to seek nor hard to find. Isaac's "eyes were dim, so that he could not see" (Gen. xxvii. 1); and, therefore, Jacob, "a smooth man," could easily palm himself off on him

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Buxtorf's *Synagoga Judaica*.



as and for Esau, who was a "hairy man" (ver. 11), even though Isaac felt him (ver. 12), by means of the simple trick of putting "the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck" (ver. 16), which, together with the "goodly raiment of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house," which Rebekah put upon Jacob her younger son (ver. 15), produced the smell and feeling of Esau (ver. 22, 27), and deceived the sightless old man, in spite of the fact that he thought the voice was that of Jacob (ver. 22). Thus, we see that no custom of laying on of hands in connection with a benediction or blessing is here implied, it being most natural that Isaac, whose "eyes were dim, so that he could not see," should endeavor to determine the identity of the person presenting himself for a blessing by feeling his hands and neck, especially when he noted a difference in the voice and knew that the one he desired to bless was a hairy man (ver. 11, 22).

Besides, as well said by a writer in Kitto's "Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature," "the patriarchal blessings of sons were, in fact, prophecies rather than blessings."

Waiving any objection that might be urged against the use of an incident of patriarchal times to prove the existence of a rabbinical custom in the time of our Lord, we admit that, at first sight, the fact that Jacob laid his hands on the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh when blessing them (Gen. xlviii. 14-20) seems to have greater pertinency.

This being the sole instance in Scripture, however, where a blessing was connected with the laying on of hands, we are induced to scrutinize the matter more closely. At this time, Jacob was one hundred and forty-seven years old (Gen. xlvii. 9, 28); moreover, he was sick (Gen. xlviii. 1), dim-sighted, "so that he could not see" (xlviii. 8, 10), and unable

to stand, but able only, by a special effort ("Israel strengthened himself," ver 2), to *sit* upon the bed (Gen. xlviii. 2). Thus did he receive Joseph and his two sons, everything betokening the very greatest degree of weakness and physical incapacity on the part of Jacob. Is it surprising, then, if Jacob, instead of "spreading forth his hands to heaven," i. e., holding them aloft over the lads' heads (as we shall shortly show to have been the custom in blessing from then to the time of our Lord's sojourn on earth), suffered them to droop, or purposely did not undertake to spread them forth to heaven, but laid them on the lads' heads as a rest or support for them, feeling and well-knowing his inability to sustain them in the air, without some sort of support for them, while pronouncing his blessing? (It should be noted, also, that, inasmuch as Jacob was *sitting* on his bed, according to verse 2, the lads' heads were, in this instance, at just about the height where his feeble hands would naturally come if stretched out in the most natural and comfortable position.) This is by no means an isolated instance of hands being upheld by extraneous support. When Israel contended with Amalek, Moses, in the mount, held his hands aloft until weariness caused them to droop. Whilst his hands were aloft, Israel prevailed; but, when they drooped, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur, therefore, in order that Israel might gain the day, stood beside Moses, and Aaron supported one hand, and Hur the other (Ex. xvii. 11-12). See, also, Job iv. 3; Isa. xxxv. 3; Heb. xii. 12.

It cannot be said that our Lord "blessed" the children in the sense of pronouncing a benediction upon them, as is claimed, this thought being negatived by the very fact that "he laid his hands on them" (Matt. xix. 15). It was not the customary form in which a benediction or blessing was be-

stowed for the dignitary to lay his hands upon the person he blessed, but to lift them up, as we read in Luke xxiv. 50 (the only occasion when our Lord is said to have pronounced a blessing on any one): "And he *lifted up his hands* and blessed them." This was the ordinary priestly form of benediction, such as the people awaited from Zacharias (Luke i. 21), as we see from Lev. ix. 22, where its institution is recorded: "And Aaron *lifted up his hand towards* the people." (The words of blessing are to be found in Num. vi. 22-27.) The hands were spread up to heaven in pronouncing the benediction or blessing (1 Kings viii. 54-55), which is a form in use in benedictions up to the present day.

Having shown from the Holy Scriptures the form in which blessings were bestowed among the Jews, there can be no objection to the insertion of a few quotations from the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Talmud, and one or two other ancient sources of information concerning Jewish *customs*, giving us slightly more detail concerning the custom in question. And first we will quote Eccus. i. 20: "Then he went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to rejoice in his name."

In the Talmud, we find the following:—

"In what way is the sacerdotal blessing performed? . . . In the provinces, the priests raise their hands on a level with their shoulders, but in the temple above their heads, except the high-priest, who does not raise his hands above the diadem [or, perhaps, rather a plate of gold worn on his forehead, the reason of the prohibition in this case being the presence on the plate of the Sacred Name]" (Mishna Sota, vii. 6).

The commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy known as Sifree gives the following directions: (1) the blessing to be

pronounced in Hebrew; (2) the blesser to stand; (3) *with outstretched hands*, etc.

The ancient commentary on Numbers, Bammidbar Rabbi (chap. xi.), tells us:—

"At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron and his sons, 'Thus shall ye bless,' etc., Israel said to the Holy One, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou tellest the priests to bless us; we want only Thy blessing and to be blessed from Thy mouth, according as it is said, Look from the abode of Thy holiness, from heaven' (Deut. xxvi. 15). The Holy One said, 'Although I commanded the priests to bless you, I am standing with them and blessing you.' Therefore, the priests *stretch forth their hands* to indicate that the Holy One stands behind us, and, therefore, it says, 'He looks from the windows' (Cant. ii. 9) [i.e., from between the shoulders of the priests]. 'He peeps from the lattice work' [i.e., from between the fingers of the priests, the fingers being arranged in pairs: forefingers with middle fingers, ring fingers with little fingers, with the tips of the two thumbs and of the two forefingers, respectively, touching each other, thus arranging the whole ten fingers in six divisions. Lekach Tob of R. Eleazer b. Tobiah (the so-called Pesikta Zotarta) on Numbers]."

In ancient art, the act of blessing was always so represented. Our Lord's hands are extended *over* the demoniac's head in the bas-reliefs of a sarcophagus at Verona<sup>1</sup> and, also, over a kneeling figure in an arcosolium of the cemetery of St. Hermes.<sup>2</sup>

From the foregoing, it would appear to be conclusively established that the very fact that we are told that Jesus "laid his hands on them" negatives the thought that he pronounced a benediction, or blessing, on them, because, if "he laid his hands *on* them," he necessarily did not "lift up his hands" *over* them, or "spread forth his hands to heaven."

So far from the Jews having had a *custom* of laying hands on the head of a person in blessing, that act seems to have been especially connected, in so far as any *custom* is con-

<sup>1</sup> Maffei, Verona Illustrata, pars lii. p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Bottari, Pitture e Sculture, cixxxvii. No. 2.

cerned, with that which was very different from blessing, i. e., stoning. So far as the Old Testament affords information on the subject of the *customs* of the Jews as regards the laying on of hands, it appears that there were but three *customs* in which the imposition of hands played a part. There was the undoubted custom of laying the hand or hands on the offerings in connection with the sacrifices. The following are all the passages in the Old Testament in which that custom is mentioned: Ex. xxix. 10, 15, 19; Lev. i. 4; iii. 2, 8, 13; iv. 4, 15, 24, 29, 33; viii. 14, 18, 22; xvi. 21; Num. viii. 10-12; 2 Chron. xxix. 23. Another such custom was in connection with the prophets' miracles of healing (*vide supra et infra*). The only other such custom was that of laying hands on the head of a person in connection with stoning, referred to in the following passages: Lev. xxiv. 14; Deut. xiii. 9; xvii. 7; Acts vii. 57-58: "Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all the people that heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him." This may be said to be the opposite of blessing. Besides the passages above cited, there are, in the Old Testament (we have already discussed the New Testament references), a large number of references to the laying on of hands, or the hand, but chiefly in a figurative sense; as, in violence (Gen. xxii. 12; xxxvii. 22, 27; xlix. 8; Josh. ii. 19; 1 Sam. xviii. 17; xxiv. 12-13; 2 Kings xi. 16; 2 Chron. xxiii. 15; Neh. xiii. 21; Esther ii. 21; iii. 6; vi. 2; viii. 7; ix. 2, 16; Job xli. 8; Isa. xi. 14; Obad. 13); judgment (Ex. vii. 4-5; ix. 3; 1 Sam. vi. 3, 5, 9; 1 Chron. xxi. 17; Ezra viii. 18, 22, 31; Jer. li. 25; Ezek. vi. 14; xxv. 13, 16; xxxix. 2, 21; Zeph. i. 4; Zech. ii. 9); discipline or trial (testing) (Job i. 11; ii. 5; ix. 33; xix. 21; Ps. xxxii. 4; lxxx. 17); as an expression for filling with, or direction by, the Holy Spirit in service (1 Kings xviii.

46; 2 Kings iii. 15; Ezek. i. 3; iii. 14, 22; viii. 1; xxxiii. 22; xxxvii. 1; xl. 1). Twice do we read in the Old Testament of the laying on of hands to heal (2 Kings iv. 34; v. 11); twice of the person's own hand being laid on her or his head, as a token of shame or sorrow (2 Sam. xiii. 19; Jer. ii. 37); and once of an angel's hand being laid upon a man to awaken him from sleep (Dan. x. 10). We do not find that hands were laid on Aaron, his sons, or any of the priests in their consecration (Ex. xxviii.; xxix.; Lev. viii.); but we do read that the Lord commanded Moses to lay his hand upon Joshua, in designating him as his successor; and that Moses did so (Num. xxvii. 18, 23); furthermore, that a spirit of wisdom filled Joshua as a result thereof (Deut. xxxiv. 9), the Spirit being in him prior to the laying on of Moses' hands (Num. xxvii. 18). In other words, God caused the mantle or spirit of wisdom which had been Moses' to pass to Joshua, as, in like manner, the mantle and power of Elijah passed to Elisha at a later day, and "the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha" (2 Kings viii. 13-15). The other passages in the Old Testament which, more or less remotely (and generally figuratively), refer to the laying on of hands, or the hand, in any sense, are the following: Gen. xlvi. 4 (cf. Num. xxii. 5, margin, 11); 2 Sam. vi. 6; 2 Kings xiii. 16; 1 Chron. xiii. 9-10; Esther ix. 10, 15; Job xxi. 5; xxviii. 9; xxix. 9; xl. 4; Ps. cxxxix. 5; Prov. xxx. 32; xxxi. 19; Isa. xi. 8; Micah vii. 16; Zech. xiii. 7.

An examination of all these passages (which are all in the Old Testament which even remotely refer to the subject) will make it clear that the laying on of hands was a custom in use among the Jews: (1) in connection with their sacrifices, and (2) in connection with the stoning of one who had broken the law of God, and (3) in connection with works of

healing; *but not in connection with blessing.* This practice in connection with the two things first mentioned continued until the destruction of Jerusalem, by the Romans under Titus, and dissolution of the Jewish state, because it was an integral and important part of their written law with relation to the two things named; and we have already shown that Jesus himself continued the use of the third of the above-named customs, the laying on of hands in connection with works of healing.

If, then, no custom of laying on of hands in blessing existed at that time, why does Mark inform us that Jesus "blessed them" (Mark x. 16)? This is a fair question, and shall be fairly answered. To answer it, it will be necessary to ascertain what light the Scriptures elsewhere throw upon the subject of blessing.

Whilst the primary idea connected with blessing is, undoubtedly, that which is conveyed by the accounts of Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, still the term "bless" early received the secondary sense of "salute," as is most clearly shown by Gen. xlvii. 7 and 10, and is occasionally so rendered in the A.V. (1 Sam. xiii. 10; xxv. 14; 2 Kings iv. 29; x. 15), though not so frequently, as has been said by others, as it might have been (e. g., Gen. xxvii. 23; xlvii. 7, 10; 1 Kings viii. 66).

This secondary signification of the term "bless" arose from the fact that salutations consisted of various expressions of blessing; as, "God be gracious unto thee" (Gen. xliii. 29); "The Lord be with you"; "The Lord bless thee" (Ruth ii. 4); "Blessed be thou of the Lord" (Ruth iii. 10; 1 Sam. xv. 13); "The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord" (Ps. cxxix. 8). The salutation at parting consisted originally of simple blessing

(Gen. xxiv. 60; xxviii. 1; xlvii. 10; Josh. xxii. 6; 2 Sam. vi. 18); but, in later times, we are told, the term *shalom* was introduced (it had long theretofore been used in the greeting) in the form "go in peace," or, rather, "farewell" (1 Sam. i. 17; xx. 42; 2 Sam. xv. 9). This was current at the time of our Saviour's ministry (Mark v. 34; Luke vii. 50; Acts xvi. 36), and was, possibly, adopted by him in his parting address (John xiv. 27), the Hebrew term being carried over into the Greek.<sup>1</sup>

The Hebrew term "bless" (*barak*), after acquiring its secondary significance, spoken of above, was likewise carried over, through the Septuagint, into the Greek, and is represented by the word *εὐλολέω* in the passage before us (Thayer). As a writer in Kitto remarks, "The word *barak*, which originally signified 'to bless,' meant, also, 'to salute,' or 'to welcome,' and 'to bid adieu' (Gen. xlvii. 8-11; 2 Kings iv. 29)."

To say, therefore, that "he blessed them" (Mark x. 16) and "departed thence" (Matt. xix. 15) is the equivalent of saying that he bade them adieu, by saying to them "Go in peace," or using some similar form of parting salutation, and, possibly, lifting up his hands *over* them (not specifically mentioned in the passage) after the manner of oriental salutations, as, in like manner, we read that, at Bethany, our Lord blessed the disciples and was "carried up into heaven," this being his parting salutation to the disciples on his departure from them (Luke xxiv. 50). See, also, for other New Testament instances of the merging of blessing and salutation,

<sup>1</sup>W. L. Bevan, on this, says: "The Greek expression [Go in peace] is evidently borrowed from the Hebrew, the proposition *על* not betokening the state into which, but answering to the Hebrew *ב* in which the person departs" (Smith, Bible Dictionary, p. 1098).



Matt. xxiii. 39; Luke xiii. 35; Matt. xxi. 9; Mark xi. 9; Luke xix. 38; John xii. 13; Ps. cxviii. 26.

Summing up, we are justified, we think, in repeating that the parents of these particular children brought them to Jesus "that he might lay his hands on them," to the end that they might be cured of disease, and that "he laid his hands on them," curing them, and saluted them, and "departed thence."

## II.

We now turn to the other branch of our subject—the spiritual signification; for, undeniably, there is a spiritual significance to the words of our Lord, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." We shall now endeavor briefly to show what that meaning, according to Scripture, is. We believe that a prevalent misconception concerning the nature of the historical fact has obscured this spiritual teaching. If we have in the foregoing shown the true character of this incident, and shown it to be devoid of mystical, imaginary, or undefined meaning, we can with the fewer words point out what is implied in the invitation to come unto him which Christ here extends to little children. We do not limit that invitation to the particular children then in his presence, although the words, especially as rendered in the R.V., might seem to *allow* such interpretation: "Suffer *the* little children," etc., in every occurrence of the phrase. We believe that there is more in it than that, and that we miss teaching of value unless we see in these words an invitation to come unto him to children of all time. He who had said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28), here tells little children that the same gracious invitation holds good for them. Neither years

nor righteousness are requisite for *coming unto him*; all, whether old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, are possessed of the one qualification which enables them to know that this invitation is addressed to them. They all are sinners. If the Saviour says to all mankind, toiling in the slavery of sin, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*" etc., and we understand by that invitation (as we must) that he invites all men to believe on him, and (Rom. v. 1), "being justified by faith, have peace with God" ("rest"), what shall we understand when the Saviour speaks of little children, saying: "*Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me,*" etc.? If the *coming* in the one case is by faith, is it not equally so in the other? In the first instance, all men are invited to come to Christ, manifestly in a spiritual sense and by faith in him; in the other, those who had shown that spirit which would prevent the little ones' believing on him, were expressly instructed to suffer them to come unto him. The invitation which had theretofore been general to all mankind is here defined to include the little children. Such little children as sought to know him were to be allowed to acquaint themselves with him and be at peace (Job xxii. 21); for "this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). Notwithstanding their youth, no one was to say them nay.

Plain as all this is, we do not rest content until we have examined all passages of Holy Scripture where coming to Christ is mentioned, in order that Scripture itself may determine the meaning of the expression. The fact is that, in every case where such invitation to come to him is extended, or the matter in any way referred to, the *coming* is plainly by faith in him, and not otherwise. Strange it would be,

therefore, if, in this single passage of the Word of God, coming to Christ should mean going to Sunday-school; baptism; the infantile saying of formal prayers in spite of the fact that the prayers of believers only are heard of God (John ix. 31; Ps. lxvi. 18); etc. The passages where coming to Christ is referred to are as follows: Matt. xi. 28-30; John v. 40; vi. 35, 37-40, 44-45, 65; vii. 37-39; xiv. 6. (Cf. John xiii. 33, which may be of some importance as showing that "little children," whether that term be used in a literal or a figurative sense, cannot *now* come to Christ in any but a spiritual sense.) In order that the full force of these passages may be realized, some of them will be here quoted:—

"And ye will not *come unto me* that ye might have life" (John v. 40).

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life. He that *cometh to me* shall never hunger, and he that *believeth on me* shall never thirst. . . . All that the Father hath given me shall *come to me*; and him that *cometh to me* I will in no wise cast out. . . . No man can *come to me*, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. . . . Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, *cometh unto me*" (John vi. 35, 37, 44-45).

"But there are some of you that *believe not*. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that *believed not*, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore, said I unto you, that no man can *come unto me*, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John vi. 64-65).

From the passages already quoted, it will be seen that the expression "come unto me" is used as and for, and as synonymous with, "believe on me"; they are used interchangeably; and they are so used as to indicate that all who had "come" to Christ, in the special sense indicated by these passages, had "believed" on him, the expressions being synonymous as used in these Scriptures. That spiritual coming, by faith, is meant, is plainly to be seen, from the fact that there were some, like Judas Iscariot, who had *come*, so

far as their bodies were concerned, but who are expressly said to be unable to *come* (by faith), because not given to them of the Father (see John vi. 64, 65, 66, 70-71).

We merely refer to the passage (John xiv. 6) where we read that Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man *cometh* unto the Father but by me" (which can certainly be taken in none but a spiritual sense), and pass on to the final quotation on this point:—

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him *come unto me* and drink. *He that believeth on me*, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that *believe on him* should receive" (John vii. 37-39).

Nothing could make plainer the usage of our Lord and Scripture, that they speak of coming to Christ and believing in him as one and the same thing, both resulting in the gift of the Holy Ghost, the two expressions being used interchangeably in the passage just quoted and in others.

With this many would agree. All we maintain is, that, when Christ says, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me," the expression "come unto me" means the same thing as we have shown that it elsewhere in Scripture always means. This thought is confirmed, if it need confirmation, by the language of our Lord, when he speaks of "little ones which believe in me" (Matt. xviii. 6). It is unnecessary to discuss how any one could forbid the children to believe in him, or the likelihood of their doing so. That it could be done, and that stumbling-blocks could be placed in the way of children on account of their youth, is apparent and well known to all. It has, moreover, been done. Tertullian, for instance, says: "Why should the innocent [?] age hasten to the forgiveness of sins? How can

we think of entrusting heavenly things to that age to which we cannot entrust earthly things?" Children are often relegated to a supposed limbo, whence it is not expected they will emerge until they have reached years (not of discretion, but) of maturity. They are, in the meantime, the recipients of a certain amount of instruction about the Bible, perchance, but generally none about Christ as a divine Saviour for them, to whom they may come by faith, any tendency towards spiritual awakening being quenched by stock phrases, such as: "You are probably mistaken"; "You are too young to understand such things"; "Wait until you are older"; etc. This, some euphemistically call "bringing up the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"; but we fear it rather falls short of the scriptural injunction to that effect (Eph. vi. 4). We should rather say that, in addition, distinct teaching concerning Christ as a personal Saviour for the little children would come within the scriptural requirement. This teaching could be beautifully enforced by an express appeal to the Saviour's own special invitation to the little children to come unto him (believe on him), and the safeguard which he had mercifully provided for those "little ones which believe" in him, in the announcement of a special woe to such as should cause one such little one to stumble. The children may come to Christ, because the terms of his invitation to all mankind are so broad that they include children. He says: "Come unto me, *all* ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He assures us, furthermore, that "him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Both these blessed statements include children; but we can go further. Lest any one might misunderstand the breadth of his offer of salvation, which extends even to the man whose sins may be "as scarlet," and to the woman whose guilt may be "red

like crimson" (Isa. i. 18), and say, "Children are too young and are not included," he expressly invites the little ones to believe on him, saying, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

It is certainly a misuse of this beautiful invitation to personal faith in the crucified Redeemer to say that this text sanctions the baptism of unbelieving (because unintelligent) infants; that it sanctions the practice of teaching unbelieving (because unintelligent) infants to repeat formal prayers, when those prayers necessarily cannot be heard by God, because not "mixed with faith"; or to say that the children are thereby invited to come to Sunday-school. Far be it from us to decry that instrumentality for bringing souls to Christ; but, for the sake of scriptural accuracy, we merely wish to say that, to come to Sunday-school is not the same thing as to come to Christ; and the passage we have been considering is an invitation to come to Christ.

It only remains to consider the objections which may be raised to the view we have here advocated.

Briefly stated, they turn upon the age of the children brought to Christ "that he should put his hands on them and pray"; because Mark and Luke make it appear that the lesson of humility illustrated by a little child was given in connection with the miracle of healing above discussed and the Saviour's words, "Suffer little children," etc. This, then, connects the disjoined narratives of Matt. xviii. 1-6 and Matt. xix. 13-15, and gives us this fact, that the little ones brought to Christ at this time are used by him as examples of "little ones which believe" in him, even if he does not expressly affirm that those particular little ones did believe in him, as we may fairly take it he does, when he says: "*this*

little child" (Matt. xviii. 4); "one *such* little child" (ver. 5); and, "whoso shall offend one of *these* little ones which believe in me" (ver. 6).

The alleged force of the objection under consideration is said to reside in this, that, whilst Matthew and Mark merely speak of "little children" ( *παιδία* ) being brought to our Lord, Luke speaks of "infants," or "babes," as the R.V. has it ( *βρέφη* ), this objection being urged by Whitby as conclusive on the subject. Strength is added to this argument, it is claimed, by the fact that we read (Mark x. 16) that "he took them up in his arms," implying, it is said, that they were very little, indeed—mere babes, in fact. But we read, also, that he took up in his arms the child mentioned in Mark ix. 36 and Matt. xviii. 3 (who Nicephorus supposes, probably incorrectly, to have been Ignatius, afterwards bishop of Antioch). This last-named child was certainly no new-born babe, as is distinctly shown by the fact that it could walk. The child could walk, we know, because it is written, "Jesus *called* a little child *unto him*" (Matt. xviii. 2). As for the age of the "little children" ( *παιδία* ), it is sufficient to call attention to the fact that the same word here translated "little children" is rendered "damsel" in Mark v. 39-42. That "damsel," when raised from the dead, was able to walk: "and straightway the damsel arose and walked, for she was of the age of twelve years" (ver. 42). In other words, the "little children" of Matt. xviii. 1-6; xix. 13-15; and Mark x. 13-16, may have been as much as twelve years old, like the "damsel" of Mark v. 39-42, both "little children" and "damsel" being represented by the same Greek word. We merely comment, in passing, that a child is certainly at years of discretion and responsibility at the age of twelve years, and susceptible to conviction of sin, and capable

of personal faith in Christ.

No difficulty being presented by the expression "little children," we hasten to take up that of "infants," or "babes" (*βρέφη*), in Luke. It may, in the first place, not be amiss to call attention to the fact that, having determined the possible age of the "little children," *supra*, our work is done, so far as the objection in question is concerned; for Christ does not say, even in Luke's narrative, "Suffer the infants" (or "babes") "to come unto me," but concurs with the accounts of Matthew and Mark in saying, "Suffer little children," etc., which is enough for our exposition, the Greek word here in Luke being *παιδια*, as in Matthew and Mark, and not *βρέφη*, the word translated "infants," or "babes." Even the English word "infant" has a rather extended signification, and, in one sense, covers an age of more than twenty years. The Greek word which is here so translated is not narrowly limited in its meaning, it would seem, being variously translated in the A.V., "babe," "infant," "young child," and "child." But a most significant fact is that the word applied to Timothy in 2 Tim. iii. 15 is the same which is here translated "infants" (A.V.), or "babes" (R.V.). In that passage, Paul says to Timothy, "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." It is needless to say that "a mere babe" (Whitby) is hardly capable of knowing the Scriptures, and that probably even Timothy's knowledge of the Holy Scriptures did not begin much prior to his arrival at what we should term years of discretion, a period subject to considerable variation in different children.

But, even allowing this objection the fullest force that can be claimed for it, it does not militate against our view.



Luke says that "infants" ("babes," R.V.—*βρέφη*) were brought to him; Matthew and Mark, "little children" (*παιδία*). Why may not *both* have been brought to him? When Matthew and Mark tell us that "little children" were brought to him, they do not say that "babes," also, were *not* brought to him. On the other hand, Luke, in saying that "babes" were brought to him, does not deny that "little children," also, may have been brought with the others. "In ordinary cases," says Rawlinson, "and more particularly in cases where brevity has been studied, mere silence proves absolutely nothing." It must not be forgotten that different eye-witnesses of the same event notice different details of the attendant circumstances. Infidels have made use of this kind of argument in their endeavors to discredit the historical character of the narratives of the four Gospels, pretending that the mere omission by one evangelist of a fact mentioned by another is a discrepancy; as, here, Matthew and Mark affirm that "little children (*παιδία*) were brought to him, whilst Luke says that still smaller children, "babes" (*βρέφη*), were brought to him. There is here, however, no contradiction or discrepancy; for Luke does not deny the presence there of "little children" older than the "babes" he mentions; nor do Matthew and Mark affirm that "babes" were not there as well as "little children." "The weak character of the argument *a silentio* is now admitted by all tolerable critics," again says Rawlinson, though Strauss's "Life of Jesus" is full of just such fallacious reasoning in his elaborate attempt to prove Christianity to be founded on a myth. Thus, if we take, for example, the second of the sections in which Strauss expressly undertakes the consideration of the (alleged) "disagreements of the canonical gospels," we shall find, among other things, the following enumeration of so-

called discrepancies in relation to the Annunciation:—

"1. The individual who appears is called, in Matthew, an angel of the Lord; in Luke, the angel Gabriel. 2. The person to whom the angel appears is, according to Matthew, Joseph; according to Luke, Mary. 3. In Matthew, the apparition is seen in a dream; in Luke, while awake. 4. There is a discrepancy with respect to the time at which the apparition took place. 5. Both the purpose of the apparition, and the effect, are different."

The obvious explanation of all this is, that both Joseph and Mary had visions; Matthew records the one, and Luke, the other. The silence of Matthew cannot be taken to mean that Mary saw no vision; nor can Luke's silence disprove the fact that an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. Both accounts are true and accurate, but refer to separate and distinct events.

In like manner, we say, we cannot assume that all the children brought to Christ at this time were "babes," on the authority of Luke, any more than we can be allowed to ignore the "babes," mentioned by Luke, and say that they were all "little children," on the authority of Matthew. What we do say is, that *both* may have been brought to our Lord.

It is not germane to our subject to discuss the lesson of humility given by our Lord and illustrated by a little child, though we may, in conclusion, briefly refer to it.

"Children are proper emblems of the humble, unambitious, submissive, and dependent spirit which is the essence and excellence of genuine Christianity [Christian character]," says Scott. And there is an evident connection between the words of our Lord, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3), and the words of our Lord, "Except ye become converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3). "Men in understanding," "in malice

children" (1 Cor. xiv. 20), children of God, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. ii. 2), remembering that there are but two things mentioned in God's most holy and perfect Word which are said, by him, to be "of great price"; namely, "the pearl of great price" (Matt. xiii. 46), the inexpressible preciousness of which to Christ we all know, and "a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price" (1 Pet. iii. 5).