Christianity as applied to the Mind of a Child in the Sunday-School.

8

ANNUAL SERMON

IN BEHALF OF

The American Sunday-School Union

DELIVERED AT PHILADELPHIA, MAY 12, 1850,

By ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA:
AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
No. 146 CHESTNUT STREET.

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A SERMON.

"*In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*"—LUKE x. 21.

I HAVE been requested to address you in behalf of the AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION, and to lay before you the cause of Sunday-schools in this country. It is my duty to do this in the best way I can, rather with reference to the question, 'What *ought* to be said on the occasion?' than to the question, 'Whether the same things have not been as well, or better, said by those who have gone before me in this service.'

The sentiment of the text, so far as it bears on the subject on which I am to address you, is, that Christianity is applicable to children. In this view, it will be illustrated, if I am able to show that Sunday-schools are wisely adapted to secure such an application.

In order to bring before you the whole range of topics suggested by the subject, there are three points of remark:—The child, with reference to his capability of being influenced by religion;—the adaptation of the Christian religion to the capacity of the

child; and,—the Sunday-school as a means of applying it to the mind of the child.

I. *First*, The child, with reference to his capability of being influenced by religion.

Philosophers seem never to grow weary in studying the minds of children. When, twenty-five years ago, I first read the Lectures of Dr. Thomas Brown on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, it was difficult to resist the conviction that he always had a little child before him, and that he studied the developments of his mind with as much diligence and as much docility, as the painter, seated at his easel, studies the features of his subject; or as Newton studied the properties of light developed by the prism. Nor can one resist the impression, that a great part of the accuracy of the science of intellectual philosophy, in modern times, has been owing to a careful study of the mental developments of childhood, and of the efforts of the infant to become acquainted with that external world where his lot is cast, and which is to be his temporary residence.

The child, as he comes into the world, knows not any thing. He has not yet learned to speak, to handle things, to walk. He knows not that a candle will burn his finger if he puts it there; he knows not how to distinguish one sound from another, nor whence any sound comes. He knows not the use of eye, or ear, or hand, or foot. He knows not the name of one rock, or plant, or animal, or human being; not even what is meant by the name *father* and *mother*. He can neither walk, nor stand, nor creep. By slow degrees, he first learns to creep. Then, sustained by the hand of a parent, he begins to stand. Then, assuming boldness, to the delight of father and mother, he ventures off half a dozen

steps alone. He begins to utter sounds, which are kindly construed into language. He lisps, and hesitates, and then achieves a great victory in mastering a few monosyllables.

Childhood is a little world in itself, with its own laws, its own hopes, its own plans, its own pastimes, its own joys and sorrows: a world as distinct as is that of full-grown men, and substantially the same in every age. The marble, the hobby-horse, the top, the hoop, the mud dam—the baby house, and the doll, have probably been known in every land, suggesting the aim and the employments of the different sexes in early years; as the plough, the loom, and the anvil—the cradle and the needle, have those of more advanced years. He that would understand man, must remember that he was himself a child, and must study the minds of children still. And he that would influence children must be acquainted with the habits and laws that govern in this little world. We, as we advance in years, and become stronger and wiser, are prone to forget that we were once children; and all the laws that influenced us then, pass away from the recollection, or are remembered only to be reckoned with the things that are childish in their nature and which we strive to make it appear never influenced us. Not so the true philosopher; not so, we shall see, the Saviour of the world in the system of religion which he came to communicate to the race. The laws which govern children are as worthy of study as those which control empires. The one will never be ordered aright, unless the other be appreciated and understood.

Here the study of mental philosophy begins:—to mark the methods by which, in its first years, the child learns to talk, to think, to ascertain the shapes of things,

the distances of objects, the nature and source of sounds, the meaning of words, the properties of matter, the beauties of the world around him. Here education begins:—to develop the mind, to give it a right direction, to form it to correct habits, to imbue it with knowledge, to prepare it for the future citizen and philosopher. And here religion begins:—to counteract the already perceived bad tendencies of the heart, to mould and cultivate the conscience, to acquaint the soul with God, to prepare it for the eternity of its career.

There are two things in regard to the child thus ushered into the world, and placed amidst the influences which are to develop and to mould its powers, which are the basis of all our operations and calculations in every proper system of education and religion.

The one relates to its mental capacities; the other to its moral tendencies.

In regard to the former, facts show, and a just process of reasoning shows, that we cannot overrate it. You look at a child, and there is nothing which you can discern by which you can determine the limits to which his mind may expand in the present life. You allow the thoughts to rove on to eternity, and you see that there are no limits this side the infinite.that will fix the boundaries of the possible development of its powers there. In this little helpless being that can neither walk, nor stand, nor creep; that can measure no distance, and call no name; that is as likely to put himself into a condition of danger as of safety; that has as yet only what pertains also to the lowest of the animal creation to govern him—the laws of unconscious instinct, you have embryo powers which are yet to expand beyond any assignable limits, and which *must* be in a condition to develop themselves for ever.

There are the attributes of an intellectual and moral being that shall soon show a marked distinction between themselves and the whole of the inferior creation. There may be powers that shall surpass, on earth, those which distinguished Milton, Newton, and Bacon; there are powers that will, in their eternal development, certainly surpass what the most gifted of mortals have been here below. There is a mind capable of contemplating God and his works for ever; there is a soul which, yet scarce midway in its developments, may reach a point far in advance of what Gabriel now is. In endeavouring to mould that intellect, we are endeavouring to determine what the next generation in science, in poetry, in the mechanic arts, in statesmanship, and scholarship shall be—what the character of the Republic shall be in the next age—what influences shall bear on the destinies of the nations when we are laid in our graves.

In regard to the latter of these things—the moral tendencies of the mind of the child to be trained—there is a class of facts which forbid us to entertain but one opinion. In the Sunday-school enterprize, and in all our religious efforts and plans, we regard him as belonging to a race that is fallen, and under a condition of being which makes it certain that he will be a sinner as soon as he becomes capable of moral action, and a sinner to the extent in which he is not restrained by an influence from on high. We think that neither the Bible nor facts warrant us in the belief that there is in the soul of the child any germ of goodness that may, by cultivation, be expanded into true religion; that there is any principle which, by mere growth, will become holiness; that there is any element of the original righteousness of the race that

is retained by the infant, that may be relied on as a basis of calculation in our efforts to train up the child for heaven. There is no lingering spiritual life that can be warmed and nourished into a vigorous growth. There are no covered embers of piety in the soul that we can fan into a flame. There is no germ, as in the kernel of wheat or barley, though long hidden in the earth, or entombed in the mummy, that can be made to sprout. There is no vitality, as in the decayed root of a fallen tree, that can be made to spring up and flourish. Spiritual life, if it ever exists in the soul of man, is to have a *beginning* as really as life would if the dead were raised from their graves, or as if there should be again the process of a creation of worlds.

It is not by mere expansion and growth that we hope to be successful; but it is by an expected blessing from on high, which, accompanying our efforts, shall implant good principles, and counteract bad tendencies, and give life to a soul that is 'by nature dead in trespasses and sins.' Our efforts, in this respect, are not to cultivate plants already sown that will produce good fruit; we come to a soil barren of all plants of righteousness, and over which the seeds of error and sin have been already sown with a bountiful hand, ready to spring up into a harvest of evil. That is, while in the Sunday-school effort, we see before us minds capable of expansion and growth beyond any now assignable limits, we see at the same time no germ of goodness, no seed of holiness, no surviving principle of love to God, that may be cultivated until it ripens into angelic purity. In one word, we have before us a soul that is fallen.

This being, thus feeble, thus ignorant, thus capable of an expansion of its powers beyond any limit which

we can now affix to them, and thus destitute of any tendency to such holiness as shall fit for heaven, is capable of being moulded into any kind of character, and the character will, to a great extent, be determined by the influences by which he is surrounded. The same child, born where he might be, and under any 'star' that you may imagine—the son of a philosopher, the son of a saint, or an heir to a throne; a child of poverty or an heir of fortune; with a black, a red, a yellow, or a white complexion; of the Caucasian, the Ethiopian, the Mongolian, the Malayan, or the American race—it is possible to conceive, would, in certain circumstances, grow up to be a wild and wandering barbarian; that in others he might develop powers which would qualify him to shine in lands most distinguished for civilization and refinement. Among the Fejee Islanders he would be a wretched cannibal; in Spain he would be proud, dark, revengeful; in India he would be a victim of wretched superstition; in lands where the religion of Islam prevails, he might be among the most devoted followers of the Prophet of Mecca; in China he might become a priest of Buddh; in civilized Europe, and under certain influences, he might occupy a throne; and in our own land might be qualified to preside over fifty millions of Christian freemen. We know of nothing that, in its ultimate state and condition, is so much the fruit of cultivation as the human mind. The tree remains substantially the same wherever cultivated; the lion, the leopard and the panther are the lion, the leopard and the panther still; the birds of the air and the dwellers in the waters are the same everywhere: man is civilized or savage, a victim of abject superstition, or enlightened in the true knowledge of God—a

Pagan, a Mussulman, or a Christian, according to the culture bestowed on him. In training a child, then, we feel that every thing in the ultimate result may depend on the direction that shall be given to its expanding powers.

Yet in every child, with all this destitution of native holiness, and all this propensity to evil in our common nature, there is, in his very constitution, a foundation for our efforts to train him up for virtue and for God. We have seen, indeed, if the remarks already made are correct, that there is no germ of native goodness which we can so cultivate that it shall be expanded into true piety; but in entire consistency with this view is the remark which I now proceed to make, and which constitutes an encouragement to our efforts not less decidedly than if there were. There is in the mental constitution of the child what may be properly called a *religious susceptibility;* there is that in his mind, considered with reference to religion, which is to be found only in the human being, and which, though the child is now destitute of religion, effectually distinguishes him as susceptible of religious and moral culture. There is in the constitution of the child, a folding up of susceptibilities and powers, having an ultimate reference to true religion, as distinct and definite as the organization of the lungs for breathing are before the birth of a child, or the adaptedness of the heart for propelling the blood through the arteries, or the fitness of the eye for light, or of the ear for sounds. What I mean by this is, that the one as much as the other shows design, and has reference to a contemplated end; that there are things in the mental constitution of every child which would no more have been formed unless a religious end had been contemplated,

than the lungs would have been formed if it had never been contemplated that the embryo child would breathe; or the eye, or the ear, if it had not been contemplated that he would see and hear. Among those things, having such an origin and such an end, are the understanding—adapted to contemplate religious truth, and to be expanded by religious truth, and never to be satisfied till it embraces religious truth; the conscience—whose origin and operations can never be explained except on the supposition that man is placed as a religious being under law; the power of remembering, and being affected by past sin—a power which is designed to recall from the ways of error, and to lead in the ways of truth; the desire found in every human being, and in no other, to live for ever—a desire whose origin and use can be explained only by the supposition that it was intended that the soul should aspire to immortality; hope—never satisfied with what is offered to it of the pleasures, the gains, and the honors of this world, and wholly disproportionate to any thing which this world has to furnish, and yet easily explained on the supposition that there is an immortal crown; and fear—creating alarm in regard to the future beyond any thing to be dreaded in this world, and deriving no small part of its terrors from the world beyond the grave, and only to be explained, therefore, by the supposition that there *is* a world beyond the tomb, and that man is to live hereafter. These things have reference to religion. No philosopher can explain them except on the supposition that man is designed to be a religious being, and that he is placed here to prepare him for a higher state of existence.

In the operations of the Sunday-school system,

we have our own views, and very definite views, of what the child should be trained for, and all our arrangements are intended to be adapted to that end. We have a purpose which we are seeking, and which we intend, to the extent of our ability, to accomplish, in reference to each and every child that we can, by any means, bring under the influence of the system. We aim to make him an *intelligent* being, doing what we can, in connection with other influences, to unfold his powers in the best manner, and especially to apply to the development of his powers, the best and the highest kind of religious truth. We aim to make him a *religious* being; to bring out what there is in him, that has its origin in the supposition that there is an eternal world and a God; that raises him above the irresponsible brute creation; that is implanted in the soul because it is immortal. We aim to make him *a Christian.* We have no disguises on this subject. We do not seek to bring out the religious tendencies in *some* shape, but in a *definite* shape. We design to give such a direction to all the tendencies of the soul; so to apply truth to the understanding, the conscience, the heart, the memory, and the imagination; so to appeal to the hopes and the fears of the child, that the result will be, that, by the grace of God, he will become thoroughly imbued with the Christian doctrine, and influenced by Christian principles. With this purpose we go before our fellow-men, be they believers, or be they infidels; be they moral, or be they corrupt; be they reverent, or be they scoffers; whatever may be their own opinions, and whatever may be their own lives; and ask that their children may be placed under our care, that we may do all that we can, and bring to bear upon them all the influence that we

can, to train them up to be Christians; albeit the result may be, that they may be led to differ wholly from their parents, and may yet carry back into their own households, a decided rebuke of the way in which an ungodly father and mother may live. And we aim, on the basis of this method of training, to make them good citizens of the Republic, believing, as we do, that a country will be more worthy of love in proportion as we can diffuse abroad the principles of true religion, and that they will be fitted to discharge the duties of American citizenship just in proportion as we can imbue their hearts with the pure principles of the gospel of Christ.

II. Our second inquiry relates to the adaptation of the Christian system to mould the mind of the child.

The question which is now before us is, whether there is any thing in the Christian system that is peculiarly adapted to the mind of a child; any thing which, supposing it had no other end, would look as if the training of a child were contemplated by it, and which was inserted and shaped for that end. You will see the point of this inquiry, and its bearing on the subject of Sunday-schools, by asking whether there is any evidence of an adaptedness of this kind in the New Testament, which would not be found in the Phædo of Plato, in the Novum Organum, in Newton's Principia, in Blackstone's Commentary on the Laws of England, or in Kent's Commentary on American Law. Any or all of these books may be useful to the man, and may be useful to any child when he grows to be a man; but the point of inquiry is, whether there is any distinct arrangement in them to adapt them to the mind of a child, or which has been inwoven there with such a view. I suppose that

to this inquiry there would be but one answer, that no such distinct arrangement was contemplated by the authors of these works, and that, in fact, in their composition, children were not in their eye.

In the Sunday-school we undertake to teach to children the principles of a system of religion, which we think to be every way adapted to the highest developments of such minds as those of the authors of the Phædo, the Novum Organum, the Principia, and the Commentaries on the Laws of England and on American Law; and the inquiry is, whether, in consistency with that high object, there has been introduced, of design, such an arrangement as would be adapted to those minds in their earliest developments, and to the minds of all children alike. We think that we see such an independent arrangement, and that the skill with which it is introduced is such as we must believe that it would be on the supposition that the system had a divine origin. It is necessary for me, at this stage of my discourse, to refer to some of those things—things which justify us in our attempt to apply the principles of Christianity to the minds of children.

I refer, then,

(*a*) To the statement in my text. This is an utterance of prayer:—'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes;—even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.' You will observe here that the idea in the mind of the Saviour seems to have been, that his gospel was rather adapted to those whom he calls '*babes*,' than to those whom he calls '*wise and prudent;*' that is, 'wise and prudent' in the sense in which they were who then claimed to be sages and philoso-

phers. It would be an unfair application of this passage, to suppose that he meant that the system would not be adapted to truly philosophical minds; for no public teacher would be likely to make such an avowal. The evident meaning is, that while the system was in itself adapted to the mind of the 'babe,' that mind was in a state, in reference to its reception, which could not be expected to be found in the class denominated 'wise and prudent.' The passage thus demonstrates the truth of the point for which I adduce it:—that the gospel is adapted to the mind of the child. At the same time it demonstrates that there were reasons why, while it would be thus appreciated by the child, it would *not* be by those who are called 'wise and prudent.' That reason is not, however, stated to be that the system is not in itself fitted to the higher classes of mind; but it is implied that there *were* causes preventing its reception in the one case which there were not in the other. These causes are not stated to be, nor can it be proved that they were, founded in any thing in the system itself, or in the capacities of the two classes; but all that is affirmed, and all that exists, in the case, would be explained by suppositions wholly irrespective of this. If it be true that the mind in the one case is free from any prejudice that would array it against a system of spiritual religion, and that in the other there were prejudices that would be opposed to such a system, then all that is implied in the text is expressed by such facts, and then it may be true that the system in its original arrangement was equally adapted to both. I need hardly say that the Saviour has here alluded to a truth which has been abundantly illustrated in the history of religion. Numerous instances have oc-

curred, indeed, in which Christianity has been embraced in mature life by minds of the highest order—instances in sufficient numbers to show that the system is adapted to such orders of intellect; but no one can be ignorant of the fact that one of the main obstructions to Christianity has been found in minds wedded to philosophical systems, and elated with the triumph of supposed or real discovery in the sciences. It has been true from the beginning, that Christianity has made its way, mainly, by its appeals to those in early life: and it is true, also, that where it has achieved a triumph over any mind, it has been by bringing that mind into a state closely resembling that of a child; for 'whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein,' Mark x. 15. But how often has it been seen to be true in our world that God '*has* hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes;' that men have been learned in the sciences and skilled in the tongues; profound in argument, eloquent in debate, skilful in diplomacy, and accomplished in the arts, and yet ignorant of the very elements of religion;—nay, how often has it been true that even *such* men, when brought by the Spirit of God to see that they are sinners, and who 'in the sparks which they themselves have kindled' see now no light, would be glad to obtain the knowledge of the way of salvation possessed by many a child in a Sunday-school!

(*b*) In further illustration of the fact that the Christian system is adapted to the mind of the child, I refer to the peculiar representations in the system respecting the Saviour himself. It is a remarkable circumstance in the Scripture account of the Incarnation of the Son of God, that he did not at once assume the

human form in its mature and manly proportions; that the second Adam did not appear on the stage as the first did, already a man, in shape and stature the most noble and beautiful of the race; that his first utterances were not those amazing declarations of wisdom which, when he grew to the stature of a man, so clearly showed that he was more than any human being had been; but that he appeared as a child, with all the innocent characteristics and sympathies of a child; and that his manhood was but the proper development of what he was in his earliest years. True, little is known of him then; but what is known, is just adapted to illustrate the point before us. He was pure and truthful; he was obedient to his parents; (Luke ii. 51;) he was respectful to the teachers and doctors of religion; (Luke ii. 46, 47;) he 'grew in wisdom and in stature,' and 'in favour with God and man.' (Luke ii. 52.) The imagination easily fills up the remainder; for when these things take root in the heart of a child—when you find in him purity and truthfulness; when you see him obedient to parents; when you perceive a spirit of inquiry on the great subject of religion, you have all the elements of character that will, in their combinations and developments, produce eminent virtue. Now the circumstance to which I am adverting, looks *as if* the system was intended for the mind of a child. It creates the feeling in the mind of a child, that religion is designed for him; that he has an interest in what the Saviour did; that he has not been left out in the arrangement for salvation; and that the earliest feelings, hopes, and joys, and perhaps the pastimes and the amusements of the Saviour of the world were like his own. Then there is to be added to this the thought, that the life

of the Saviour was the proper development of what he was in childhood, and of what every child should be. We carry with us, in our study of the New Testament, the recollection that, from being a child, he *grew up* to be what he was; not that he appeared at first on the earth in the full form and majesty of the Son of God.

And here also we may notice the interest which the Saviour himself took in children, and his own character and manner of instruction as adapted to interest children. Nothing was more surprising or offensive to the scribes and Pharisees, or more embarrassing to his own disciples, than the interest which he took in children. He astonished his disciples, who saw not the depth of the principle involved, by the readiness with which he allowed them to be brought to him; by his laying his hands on their heads; by his taking them up in his arms and blessing them. He probably astonished them no less by his solemn thanksgiving in the words which constitute my text:—'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' He excited no less astonishment when the children cried hosanna in the temple, rousing the indignation of the priests and the scribes, and when he coolly silenced their murmurs by repeating the passage of Scripture, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise.' And he evinced his interest in children, and probably excited their astonishment no less, when he placed a little child among his disciples, and said, 'Except ye be converted, and become like little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

In regard to his own instructions, as adapted to in-

terest children, or as contemplating them in the application of the principles of religion to them, there are two things to be said: one relates to the manner of his personal intercourse with others; the other to the nature of his instructions.

In respect to the former—his simplicity, gentleness, kindness, courtesy, would be likely to be eminently attractive to children. Is it not true, that, valuable as courtesy and politeness are everywhere, they *go farther* with children than they do with those of riper years? Is it not true that children are more repelled by harshness, by incivility, by unkindness or abruptness of manner, by a frown, than we are in maturer life? So artless and guileless themselves, they expect the same things in others; and they have not yet learned, by intercourse with the world, to find a want of this in others, so as to be a rule of action for themselves, or so to discipline their mind as to get along with others, notwithstanding the roughnesses and unevennesses to be encountered. We, in maturer life, are obliged to learn to make our way amidst much that is rough and repelling, and the expectation of meeting that, constitutes an element in our calculations. Children do not; and when there is not, on our part, gentleness and kindness of manner, there is no way of access to their hearts. Now it was a characteristic, perhaps we might almost say, a *peculiarity*, of the Saviour, that, when he entered on the employments of manhood and the Messiahship; when he engaged in the great work of redeeming a world; when, with matchless eloquence, he addressed thousands and tens of thousands; when he gave utterance to the profoundest sentiments that ever fell from human lips, he still retained all the simplicity of character which he

had when a child, and evinced in his manner all that would meet the sympathies of a child, and go at once to his heart.

In respect to the other point—his instructions. No other discourses are so remarkable for simplicity as those of the Saviour. Nothing was more wonderful in him—evincing the highest characteristic of a great mind—than the ease with which he clothed the profoundest doctrines in the plainest language, or, by some apt illustration, so presenting it that it could be comprehended by minds of the humblest order. He had, too, an eye for natural beauties. He abounded, in his teachings, in illustrations drawn from flowers, and birds, and plants, and fountains. He was fond of narrative and parable. When he had a great truth to communicate, he had a parable at command, that would illustrate it better by far than any abstract theological or metaphysical statement; and it is easy to conceive how his method might be interesting to children. What could have been made more interesting to them than the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or of the Good Samaritan, as told by himself?

(*c*) In further illustration of the point now before us, I refer to the Bible itself, as a book adapted to be put into the hands of children. With all that is valuable in the Novum Organum, or the Principia; in a treatise on Conic Sections, Fluxions, or Chemistry; it it is plain that they cannot be put with profit into the hands of children. The same may be said of Edwards on the Will; of Dwight's Theology, and of Paley's Moral Philosophy. They are all too abstruse, too profound, too argumentative; they presuppose too high a mental capacity, and too much knowledge, to make them of value to a child; nor is there any way

by which they could be so simplified as to make them interesting or intelligible to a child. The question now is, whether the same difficulty exists in regard to the Bible; or whether, while unfolding truths far in advance of what any human mind could have originated, or can yet fully apprehend, there has been inwoven any arrangement *as if* the minds of children were contemplated, and their capacities and mental habits were consulted; or any thing which will justify us in putting the Bible into their hands, with the expectation that they will be interested in it and will understand it.

Two things, so far as this point is concerned, were demanded in a book of revealed truth designed for mankind. One was, that it should be so simple as to be adapted to children; to youth; to the ignorant; to those in humble life; to slaves; to those whose minds are interested by narrative, by incident, by thrilling stories, by proverbs, and by parables—for these classes compose the great mass of the human family. The other was, that it should contain truths that would interest minds of the highest order; that in its disclosures it should go beyond all that the profoundest human intellect could discover; and that, whatever point the race might reach in its onward progress, the truths revealed in the Bible should be still in advance of all the attainments which man could otherwise make. These things have been blended only in a very imperfect degree in any books of human composition. It has not yet been found easy, to any very considerable extent, to make a book at once *childish*—using that term in the best sense—and *philosophical*. With all that has been done to elevate the literature of children—while it still retains

its characteristic of being the literature of children—it is still true that the mature and the cultivated mind turns away from it as not attractive or instructive to itself; and with all that has been done to simplify the works of science, of jurisprudence, and of political economy, it is still true that they cannot be made attractive to children. You cannot make Blackstone's Commentaries interesting to children; nor can you 'impose upon a little child's understanding the propositions of Euclid, or a theory of the tides.' It has been demonstrated, indeed, long since, that simplicity is not incompatible with sublimity, with depth of thought, with profound and far-reaching doctrines. Homer is among the most simple of poets; Demosthenes among the most simple of orators; Blackstone has done all that man could do, to simplify the complicated principles of the common law; Franklin is among the most simple of writers; and the profoundest discoveries of modern science are often conveyed in most simple and modest language. But the art of so blending these things as to make them at the same time attractive to the minds of children and instructive to scientific and cultivated minds, is an art which man has not yet reached. Whenever men have attempted to address the minds of children and the minds of philosophers, they have gone off into separate departments of literature, and you have on the one hand a set of books fitted for children, and only for them, and on the other a literature for philosophers, and only for them.

Perhaps, in all the works of human origin, the blending of these objects has been best accomplished in the Pilgrim's Progress, and in Dr. Watts's Divine Songs for Children. The former, I need not say how

interesting always to children—how interesting at the same time it may be to minds of highest genius, let any one see by what Dr. Johnson, Cowper, and Macaulay have said of it. The latter, always still interesting to children, and perhaps not less so, and not less instructive to those of maturer years; for who, when a man—when he has studied the things of religion even till gray hairs are upon him, ever begins to read—

'Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,'

without reading it all through—as he will, (though he has read it a thousand times,) 'Chevy Chase,' the 'Elegy in a country church-yard,' 'John Gilpin,' or the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'? And where, after all, will he find the great central truth of his religion expressed so that it will go more directly to his heart, than in those familiar words sung to him in childhood?—

'Twas to save thee, child, from dying,
Save my dear from burning flame,
Bitter groans and endless crying,
That thy blest Redeemer came.

May'st thou live to know and fear him,
Trust and love him all thy days,
Then go dwell for ever near him,
See his face and sing his praise.'

But these things, we think, are blended in the happiest proportions in the Bible. After the labor which Newton employed in the explanation of the Bible, when he had completed those great discoveries which placed his name at the head of the race; after the study which Locke devoted to the New Testament, when he had sounded the utmost depths of the human mind; after the interest which Addison, and Boyle, and Bacon, and Milton, and Jonathan Edwards have

felt in the Bible, I should deem it unnecessary to attempt to show that it is a book adapted to high and cultivated orders of intellect. And yet with all this, it is so simple, so full of thrilling incident, so replete with history, parable, poetry, apothegms, and biography, as to be, more than any other volume, a book that can be permanently interesting to children; a book that can be introduced among all the children of a land, so as to be made more attractive than any other book; a book almost the only one which they have—which they will not *outgrow*, and lay aside as they go to college, or study a profession, or become public men; a book which the boy will still feel, as he becomes a man, and engages in the active employments of life, is still in advance of him, and must still be his guide. It is for reasons such as these that we suppose that the Christian system, with all that is great and profound in it, has contrived to inweave into itself an arrangement contemplating the mind of a child.

III. The third inquiry relates to the Sunday-school as designed to bring this system to bear on the minds of children. The question is, whether it is well adapted to this end; or whether in the Sunday-school system we are using the wisest and best means to secure this end.

The Sunday-school system is the growth of modern times. It was not known in the apostolic age; it was not prophetically referred to by the Saviour; nor did any hint ever fall from his lips which showed that he had it in his eye. For the church was then scarcely organized; it had not, as yet, that complete arrangement which would embrace families as a part of the organization; the art of printing, on which the

success of Sunday-schools so essentially depends, was then unknown; there were as yet few or none who could be employed as teachers; the labours of the apostles were demanded more particularly to bring religion before adult minds by itinerant efforts to propagate it; and it was not the manner of the Saviour to anticipate coming ages by giving rules for what would spring up spontaneously in the church as the world should advance. This he left to be regulated in future times; and, therefore, the friends of the Sunday-school system are bound to show that this is a safe and fair way of applying the gospel of Christ in this period of the world, and is, so far as we can argue, a system which would have been started or approved by the Saviour, if he had lived amidst the appliances of the present age.

In illustrating this, there are four subordinate remarks to be made to show the exact place which the Sunday-school system is designed to occupy, and to determine its proper field of agency in applying Christianity to the children of this age, and its bearing on the general interests of religion.

(1.) The first has reference to its relation to parental duty, or to the bearing of the Sunday-school on the discharge of the duty of parents in training up their children in the ways of religion. This point, it cannot be denied, is of unspeakable importance in regard to the general interests of religion; for there is a divine arrangement on this subject which is not to be set aside, and there is some danger that, in the actual operation of the Sunday-school system, this arrangement may be disturbed. The only question, therefore, which can be raised on this point is, whether the religious training of children can be best secured by

leaving this instruction in the hands of parents, or by calling in the aid which can be furnished in the Sabbath-school.

Now, in reference to this, it cannot be denied that there *are* families where the religious training of children would be as well secured, and I know not why I may not say *better* secured, than it would be in the Sunday-school; nor is it to be held that the institution of the Sunday-school is in any way to be construed as releasing the parent from his just responsibility. For, with all that can be said in favour of Sunday-schools, and all the qualifications that can be relied on in the teachers, and all that is favourable in these institutions to interest the minds of the young, it cannot be denied that there *are* Christian fathers and mothers better qualified to give religious instruction than Sunday-school teachers ordinarily are; and that there are advantages furnished in a family organization which cannot be found in any Sunday-school. The one, though the advantages are often not secured, is a divine institution eminently adapted to the inculcation of the lessons of religion. The other, with all that there is in it that is wise and excellent, is of human origin, and can never have such superiority as to displace the other. It is not to be denied, that all along in the church, there has been, in numberless instances, a careful training of children in the ways of religion; and the fruits of such instruction have been seen in those who have been added to the churches as private members, or who have become eminent ministers of the gospel in Christian lands, or who have gone forth as heralds of salvation to the heathen. Valuable as is the Sunday-school as an auxiliary to piety, and much as we may labour to extend its in-

fluence, we are not *so* to argue for it as to forget the service done to the church, in the long track of ages, by pious parents, nor to leave the impression that nothing was done, and that nothing could be done but in the Sunday-school. Among the means of promoting true religion on earth, it is to have, ever onward, a most honoured place; but it should be its *true* place, alike in reference to the supremacy of an institution having a divine appointment, to the honour due to those who have gone before us, and to the obligations still resting on Christian parents.

But in considering the question about training the young in the ways of piety, we are to look at things as they are; and we are to ask what has been the fact, and what will continue to be the fact until the aspect of the world is changed, in reference to the prevailing qualifications of parents for training up the young in the ways of piety? We are to remember, respecting those parents who are professedly pious, what a melancholy proportion of them there is who are very illy qualified to give any correct religious instruction; we are to remember how many there are—so slight is their sense of the obligations of religion—who would give no such instruction; we are to remember, that in many professed Christian families there is such a degree of worldliness, that it would be quite desirable, if it could be done, to remove their children from such influences, and to place them under instruction of a different kind; and we shall see, that even were all the families of the land professedly Christian families, there would be quite an ample field for such an institution as the Sunday-school.

But there is a much more important consideration than this. We are to remember the large number of

families where there is no religion; the large number where the parents wholly disregard the Sabbath, neglect the sanctuary, and forget God; the large number that are infidels, or that have embraced some form of opinion quite at variance with true religion; the large number that are wholly gay, or worldly, or unprincipled; and we are to consider what would be the kind of instruction which children would receive in such habitations. It is not to be concealed, it cannot be concealed, that in the establishment of Sunday-schools we seek to draw away children from such influences; to impress upon their minds lessons which their parents never would inculcate; to train them in the belief of opinions which, perhaps, their parents discard, and to return them from week to week to their parents' dwellings with sentiments in their hearts, and books in their hands, such as they would never find in their own homes. And we do not disguise the fact, that we consider it as so much proportionate gain to Christianity when we can induce such unbelieving and worldly parents to place their children under Christian instruction by committing them to the care of those who will endeavour to train them in the belief of the Christian doctrines, and in the fear of God. And as the number of such families in the land is lamentably great; as there are thousands of families where there is no prayer, no praise, no religious instruction whatever; as into such families no religious influence would ever enter if it were not for the Sunday-school; and as this opens a way to such families by which the gospel may be made to bear directly on the children, and through them on the parents themselves; we claim for the Sunday-school system that it is one of the most important means of diffusing reli-

gion throughout the land; and we ask, what would be the probability that such families would ever be brought under religious influence at all, if this way of access to them were closed? In reference to this destitution in the land, I copy a statement made to me by one of the officers of the American Sunday-school Union, as embodying the results of more than twenty years' observation and effort in establishing Sunday-schools in our land. It is in these words: "That a majority of all the children of a teachable age have never been blessed with the proffers of the Sunday-school, and these are, for the most part, destitute of parental and pastoral religious training. The destitution in some few of the States may be thus stated: Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri, four-fifths; Michigan, two-thirds; Maine, Illinois, Indiana, and Western Pennsylvania, three-fourths. By the best estimate that can be made, it is supposed that there are not far from two millions of children in the land that would not receive any religious instruction if it were not for that received in the Sunday-school."

Yet it cannot but be remarked here, that, from the nature of the case, there is danger that the true design of the Sunday-school will be misunderstood, abused, and perverted; that it will send back an influence into the family which will wholly defeat one of the great ends of the domestic organization. This danger arises from the impression which is likely to be left on the minds of parents, that they can thus transfer their obligations to train their children in the doctrines and duties of religion to others.

Much of the same feeling is likely to spring up on this subject which exists in reference to other departments of education. A parent places his child in a

common school. If there *were* no common schools, he would feel himself bound, to the best of his ability, to teach his own child to read and write, and to communicate to him the elements of knowledge in geography and in geometry. But the public has provided a teacher better qualified than himself, and he feels that the work can be better done than he could perform it. He dismisses his child, therefore, from his door, with the not unnatural feeling that his wishes in this respect are gratified, and that his responsibility is discharged. He may be gratified with the progress which his child may make; he may cheer him with a word of encouragement when he is desponding; he may receive with conscious pride the evidences of his scholarship; and he may rejoice in the honors that he may win in his course, but he feels no responsibility for giving him instruction, nor will he interfere in directing the studies of his course.

Now, it is greatly to be apprehended that one of the effects growing out of the system of Sunday-school instruction is just this to which I have adverted, that the parent will feel that he is released from the obligation of religious teaching in his family in the same sense in which he is from the obligation of teaching when he has placed his child in the common school, or when he has employed a music teacher for his daughter, or when he has sent his son to college. When he has dismissed his child to the Sunday-school, there is a strong liability that he will at the same time dismiss all sense of responsibility; perhaps that he will feel that he has done a meritorious act in being willing to give up his child to be brought under the influence of religious opinions which he does not him-

self hold, or to be led in the ways of a religion which he does not profess.

It is proper then to remark, as a sentiment sustained by all just views of parental responsibility, and as a sentiment which the Sunday-school system is not intended to diminish in strength, that there *can be* no divesting one's self of parental obligation in the manner here supposed. The obligation of the religious training of children is everywhere in the Bible laid on the parent, and is an obligation which is not transferable. 'Ye *fathers*, provoke not your children to wrath, but train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Eph. vi. 4. 'And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart; and *thou* shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' Deut. vi. 6, 7. 'He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that *they* should make them known to their children, that the generations to come might know them, even the children that should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.' Ps. lxxviii. 5—7.

Whatever means, therefore, a parent may employ to impress the truths of religion on the minds of his children, it is clear that the responsibility of giving right instruction rests on him, and cannot be transferred to another. 'What God has joined together, man cannot put asunder;' what he has connected with the very nature of the parental relation, cannot be divided from it. The parent may employ the aid of

others; he may avail himself of the advantages of books, or sermons, or lectures; he may summon to his side those more learned, more pious, or more experienced than he is himself; but the direct responsibility for religious instruction has been placed with him, nor can any thing be made a substitute for his own example, his own counsels, his own prayers. He is the natural instructor, guide, and example of his children in matters pertaining to God, and he can never throw off this responsibility in training them up for heaven.

The true relation then of the Sunday-school to the religious training of the children of our country is twofold. In regard to a large portion of the children of the land—amounting, as before remarked, probably to two millions at the present time—it furnishes the only hope that they will receive *any* proper religious instruction whatever. In regard to religious families, it is a helper to domestic instruction, a supplementary and adventitious aid, of which the Christian parent may avail himself in the discharge of his own duty. It is an arrangement for concentrating and combining good influences in a church, in making religious instruction more pleasant, and more efficient on the mind of a child, in bringing to bear upon him a stimulus in a school which could not be secured at home; and in adding to the natural force of appeals in favour of religion derived from a parent's love and authority, all that there is in the new interest in his welfare created in the mind of a teacher. But it is an abuse of the Sunday-school system, if it be supposed that it, in the slightest degree, releases a parent from the direct obligation to instruct his own children, or if it lead him to dismiss all concern in regard to them when he has

placed them under the care of a Sunday-school instructor.

(2.) The next point of remark, as illustrating the influence of the Sunday-school in bringing the Christian system to bear on the minds of children, relates to it as an arrangement for giving useful employment to the unoccupied talent in the church; or to the question whether the church has the *means* of furnishing that instruction without infringing on its other operations.

A large part of the talent of the church is commonly unemployed. Some of its members, indeed, are little qualified for any very wide or active influence; perhaps little beyond that resulting from a consistent, pure and holy example, in some lowly walk of life. But there is a large portion of the talent of the church of a different order, that is commonly buried. It is sometimes controlled by incurable indolence—indolence from which not even the lofty motives of religion will arouse it; or it is enchained by some worldly habit or association; or it has no wisdom to originate plans to benefit others; or it pines away with the desponding conviction that there is nothing which it can do. In numerous cases this talent sustains no parental responsibility; it is possessed by those who are too young to be active leaders in a religious organization; and yet it is possessed by those whose own minds have been carefully trained in religion from childhood, and who have had the highest advantages of secular learning; and it is soon to be wielded in great questions pertaining to the interests of society, and needs itself to be placed under an influence which shall secure it for the consecrated uses of religion. In former times, (and the remark will apply to a lamentable extent to

the present,) nothing was more sad than to look on a Christian church, and to reflect how much more might have been done than was done; and how much of the actual efficiency of the church was wasted. At one period this unoccupied talent sought employment in the metaphysical discussions of the schoolmen; at another in pilgrimages. Here life wasted away in the indolence of a monastery or nunnery; there, in an equally useless manner, in composing or transcribing the legends of the saints. The weary hours of one part were filled up by the rites of a miserable superstition; and of another, in prosecuting *any* enterprise, however hazardous, rather than endure the dreadful monotony of a life of indolence. One class languished for nothing to do; and another wasted its energies in doing what had been better left undone. And even now, under the better system of the Protestant faith, the waste of religious talent is almost equally great and lamentable. In looking over almost any church, it would be painful to reflect how much youthful vigour there is that is unemployed for the purposes of religion; how much learning that is doing nothing for the defence or the elucidation of the Bible; and how much rich and ripe Christian experience there is now useless, except to its possessor, that might be made of practical avail in guiding those who are just embarking on life.

The Sunday-school furnishes an opportunity to bring out this learning, talent and experience, and to make it useful in the cause of religion. It offers at the same time a stimulus to arouse the indolent; opens a field for those who have no genius to originate a plan of benevolence; and furnishes congenial employment for youthful vigour, for ripe Christian experience, for

varied learning, and for clear and profound thinking. 'For youthful vigour:'—for the active duties in a Sunday-school are of such a nature as to make a peculiar appeal to the glowing ardour of early life.—'For ripe Christian experience:'—for in the instructions imparted in a Sunday-school there is often occasion to explain points pertaining to the highest departments of casuistry and duty.—'For varied learning:'—for there are acute and thoughtful minds in all Sunday-schools; there are questions that arise that go far into subjects of philology, geography, antiquities, history, laws and customs pertaining to former ages.—'For clear and profound thinking:'—for he who teaches a class of boys may have before him a bright genius, in whom the germs of great thoughts and plans are already discernible; and often the highest and the hardest points of the Christian theology come under examination in a Sunday-school class, and a child may ask a question, to be able to answer which, the profoundest theologian might regard himself as honoured. It is this fact which represses our surprise when we see, as we often do, not only the young engaged in teaching a Sunday-school, but experienced Christians, with their powers fully tasked; and men accustomed to profound investigations in the sciences, here grappling with a great question of morals or religion that some thoughtful boy has started, and that must be answered to save him from becoming sceptical; and judges, accustomed to direct counsellors and jurors in the abstruse points of law, here meeting the first development of the moral powers of the soul, and endeavouring to establish over all the future career of that soul the jurisdiction of the laws of God.

This employment is among the best devices to exert

also a healthful influence on the minds of those who teach. Religion prospers in a community in proportion as the Bible is studied, but the best way to study the Bible is to do it with a view to impart instruction to others. Then it is that a man will be compelled to grapple with the difficult questions which occur in the explanation of the Bible; for he will be in a position where those questions will be likely to come up. Then it is that he will be compelled to meet the question about the divine origin of the Bible; for there will be acute minds that will wish him to state *why* the book that he teaches is to be regarded as a revelation from God. And laying out of view all the direct effects of the Sunday-school on the rising generation, the benefit to the church from the single point before us would be worth all that the system costs. Were it a matter of a distinct arrangement *merely* to benefit the members of the church; to discipline and enlarge the piety of its members; to call forth powers that would otherwise be dormant; to promote in a community an intelligent acquaintance with the Bible, and to make the religion of the church more consolidated, stable and benevolent, there could have been no more economical, and no more effectual device, than the institution of Sunday-schools.

(3) The next point of remark in illustrating the influence of Sunday-schools as a system for applying Christianity to the mind of a child, relates to an almost wholly new department of influence which has been originated by these institutions. I mean the creation of a youthful Christian literature.

The Sunday-school system could not succeed without a literature of its own; and beyond most institutions that have appeared in the world it has a *creative*

power on this subject. It might have been argued at the outset that such a system could not exist without a literature; and it might have been demonstrated that, if successful, it would create a literature; and the general character of that literature might have been anticipated. There is so much in the whole system, and in the end contemplated, that is dependent on a peculiar kind of learning, that it was inevitable that such a literature must exist; and the fact that the American Sunday-school Union is not only a Society for establishing Sunday-schools, but is also a book-making establishment, engaged largely in the manufacture and sale of books, is not an *accidental* fact, or a thing which has grown out of the ambition or cupidity of its managers.

The system could not get along *without* books; and it would not get along *with* the books which were at command when the system commenced. For, beyond almost the least conceivable range, there was at that time no religious literature that was adapted to children. On this point it is most interesting and affecting for a man who has reached the fiftieth year of his life to look back and ask himself what was the amount of religious literature that could have been put into his hands when he was a boy, compared with that which is now found in the depositories of the Sunday-school Societies; and there is almost nothing which excites more painful regrets in his mind in view of the disadvantages of his own early years. Beyond the New England Primer—a book of standard excellence still, though imbued with some errors—a book that contains the 'seeds of things,' and that has done perhaps more to make our land what it is, than all that we have derived from the literature of Greece and

Rome—a book that is mentioned by many only to excite a smile, and remembered by many only as associated with the painful operation of 'catechizing' on a Sabbath afternoon when the boy was anxiously watching for the time when the upper limb of the sun should have disappeared behind the trees that skirted the western horizon as seen from his father's house—but which, by its great truths, bound him fast to faith and freedom—beyond that book, he can recall almost nothing that constituted the religious literature of his own early years. That little book, thumbed, and worn, and examined in every position in which it could be placed—read backward, forward and diagonally; its pictures examined and re-examined; the number of the Children of the Martyr counted over and over again to make the picture corrrespond with the account in the biography—that book left its sentiments indeed deep on the heart, but never satisfied the wants of our early years.

When I was a boy, the utmost amount of this kind of learning that I could have commanded* had I been

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* The exact list, so far as it can now be ascertained by those best qualified to give information, I insert as a matter, not of curiosity, but of useful information. "A child may write them."

The New England Primer—in numerous editions. The most approved edition was that published by Edward Draper, in Boston, 1777. A fac simile of this has been re-published at Hartford, 1848, and is adorned with a portrait of "the Hon. John Hancock, Esq., President of the American Congress."

Christian Pilgrim, pp. 72, 12mo.

Pilgrim's Progress—supposed to have existed only in folio.

Hieroglyphic Bible.

Scripture History, 2 vols., with a volume of prints, all imported, as it was never printed in this country. But few copies reached America.

possessed of wealth enough to have bought up all the religious literature designed for children—and it would have required little more than Franklin foolishly paid for his whistle—would have embraced not much besides that same New England Primer, and Janeway's Token for Children, and Dr. Watts's Divine Songs for Children, and, were it not that the book of the immortal tinker, like the Bible, is adapted to minds of the maturest age and of the highest order as well as to children, I should mention perhaps, also the Pilgrim's Progress.

It is the tendency of every thing now to create a literature of its own, and every department of human effort forms for itself a library. Thus we have the literature of Chemistry, of Agriculture, of Law, of Anatomy, of Government; we have a distinct department for missions, for mining and for coining; we have a literature of rail-roads, of architecture and of gardening. On any one of these departments we have the power of collecting around us a library greater in amount than all the books which princes could boast of in the days of the Henrys of England.

The Sunday-school department of literature is the growth of the present age, and is worthy of the cause and of the age. There may be defects in it which will be corrected by deeper study, and a closer observa-

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Mrs. Barbauld's Hymns.
Cheap Repository Tracts, by Mrs. Hannah More, 3 vols.
My Friend's Family.
History of the Holy Bible.
History of Master Billy, and Miss Betsy Goodchild.
Janeway's Token for Children.
Watts's Divine Songs for Children.

tion of what is demanded. It might, perhaps, be more direct, pointed and distinctive; it might present the evangelical doctrines more plainly, and with a less careful anxiety to avoid giving offence; it might discuss questions of morals and religion which have not been introduced into it as prominently as they are in the Bible; it might take a higher range as evincing genius and displaying power; it might, perhaps, be condensed or curtailed to advantage—but, on the whole, where is there a literature, the creation of fifty years, that can, in its own department, in adaptedness, influence, and power, be compared with this? It has all the freshness of the dew of youth upon it, and has come forth to take its place as adapted to an age of high intellectual and moral culture, and to compete in its appeals to the youthful mind with the books that are made to captivate and mould that mind on other subjects. In the American Sunday-school Union we present to the world a catalogue of between seven and eight hundred bound books, "most of which have been prepared and published expressly to answer the uses of a Union Sunday-school." As an evidence of the *growth* of this department of learning, it may be added that, in the year 1826, there were but twenty-one of those books on the catalogue, and that the remainder have come into existence during the time that has intervened. And to these there should be added, in order to form a just estimate of the amount of youthful Christian literature now in circulation in our own country, and to determine the *progress* that has been made in this department of learning, the volumes circulated by the Sunday-school Societies of the different religious denominations, and much that is spread abroad by private enterprise. The whole

number of publications now accessible that may be classed under the general denomination of youthful Christian literature in our country, is probably not less than three thousand five hundred—a fact in regard to the *number* of the publications that is probably not equalled in any other department of learning. Nearly all of this is the creation of the present age, and a very large portion of it is to be ascribed to the necessity of supplying Sunday-schools with appropriate reading, and is just so much added, at the same time, to the religious influences, and to the business operations and capital of the country. These are the fruits of the Sunday-school system. There was nothing else that could have created this amount of religious literature; there would otherwise have been no demand for it, there would have been no private enterprise that would have furnished it.

From the nature of the case there is the best guarantee that these books will be adapted to the end in view. They are the result of a very careful study of the laws of the youthful mind; they have been prepared, in a great degree, by those who have had opportunity to know what is demanded, and what will interest the minds of the young; they are the effect of a great experiment to make religion, (naturally repellant to the human heart,) as attractive as possible to those in early life. They aim to present the common doctrines of our faith to the mind of a child—those doctrines as held by the great body of evangelical Christians, and as fitted to the state of the soul *before* the questions which divide us into sects and denominations come before it. That literature should not, and from the fact that there is a vigilant public eye which will guard that point, will not, conceal the great

doctrines of our common faith. The security that this literature will be evangelical is to be found in the piety of the churches, and the degree of the spirituality and purity of that literature will be measured by the amount of pure religion that shall prevail in the churches.

There is one feature in regard to this literature which is particularly to be noticed. It is, that it is held to be, and is, in fact, subordinate to the Bible in a sense in which no other is. From the nature of the case, it must be designed, to a great extent, to illustrate the Bible; and whatever may be the literature which the Sunday-school Societies may put in circulation, the Bible is the book that is pre-eminent. It is the book that is taught in the Sunday-school. It is the book which is explained. It is the book that is constantly referred to, and appealed to. The great object of the Sunday-school is to teach the Bible; and the literature which it scatters in the community is incidental to that, and will never usurp the place of the Bible. It is hardly a question whether a Sunday-school *could* be long kept up for any other purpose than to teach the Bible, or any longer than the Bible is made prominent and primary. For, however it may be accounted for, it is a fact, that, after all, the most attractive book that can be taught the young, is the Bible—a book so full of history, and parable, and biography, and poetry, and eloquence, that it would seem that it had been originally framed and penned with a very prominent adaptation to the young.

(4.) There remains but one point to be noticed, to complete the train of thought which I wished to submit to you. It relates to the bearing of this system of operations on the diffusion of the Christian religion

throughout our country. The remark which I have to make on this point is, that it is essential to our very existence as a nation, that vigorous efforts should be made to spread religion throughout our land, and that the Sunday-school system is an indispensable auxiliary in doing it.

I do not say that infidelity is increasing in the land, or that the nation is in danger of becoming infidel or heathen; for Christianity is constantly gaining on the public intellect, and the public morals; but then it is owing to the extraordinary efforts which Christians have made, attended by the blessing of Heaven, that it is so.

I do not say that we are in danger from the Roman Catholic religion, or that the foundation of our Protestant institutions is in danger of being subverted by the multitude of strangers that is coming to our shores. I have never seen any such danger, nor have I believed that that foreign religion is destined to take possession of our land. But then it is owing to no change in that system, and to no want of zeal on the part of its friends, and to no evidence that they have never entertained the hope that it might be so: but it is owing to the fact, that there is a Protestant spirit that is easily aroused in this land when there is danger; that the foundation of all our institutions is essentially Protestant; that there are twenty millions of Protestants in the land to compete with a million and a half of Romanists; that we increase in our Protestant population in a ratio vastly greater than do the friends of that system of religion; that even now we make ten proselytes to Protestantism where they make one to the papal faith; that there are twenty-five thousand Protestant ministers in the land to compete with

less than a thousand Roman Catholic priests—Protestant ministers, too, trained among us, having access to the American ear, and acquainted with the American mind; and to the fact, that there are great national institutions for sending out the Bible, for diffusing tracts, for founding churches, and for establishing Sunday-schools all over the land. Let these institutions die, and I admit that our country *might* become a prey to the foreigner: but they will not die.

Nor do I say that our population outstrips all the means of grace, or that it increases in a much greater ratio than our churches increase; or than the educated ministers of religion increase: for the land is incomparably better supplied, proportionally, in these respects, than it was fifty years ago. But then it is because we have Education and Missionary Societies, and Sunday-schools, that it is so. Let these cease to be sustained, and soon our population would have gone beyond all hopes of ever overtaking it with the means of grace. I do say, therefore, that there is such a state of things, and such an increase of population, as to make all the appliances now in existence, necessary; and as make it necessary that they should be increased in their efficiency and power, just in proportion as the vast hosts multiply and move on toward the western borders of our land. "Well-established calculations in political arithmetic enable us to say, that the aggregate population of the nation now is 22,000,000

That ten years hence, it will be				30,000,000
" twenty	"	"	"	38,000,000
" thirty	"	"	"	50,000,000
" forty	"	"	"	64,000,000
" fifty	"	"	"	80,000,000
" a hundred, (that is, in 1950,)				200,000,000

equal to nearly one fourth of the present aggregate population of the globe, and double the population of Europe at the time of the discovery of America."*

Now we do not claim for the Sunday-school, in this great enterprise, that it is the main, or primary agency in securing this end. It cannot answer the purpose of the Bible Society; for just in proportion to its success will it make the Bible Society more indispensable. It is not a substitute for the Tract Society, and need not be brought into competition with that; for they have distinct fields of operation. It is not, and cannot be, a substitute for preaching, for that is 'God's great ordinance' for converting the world; and if our land is saved, and the world converted, preaching must have that primary place which God has given it. It cannot be a substitute for the Foreign Missionary Society; for you cannot penetrate the darkness of a heathen community, and establish Sunday-schools there, till you have sent them the preacher of the gospel, and till he has prepared the way for Christian institutions. Nor can it be a substitute for Home Missions in the great West; for there, as elsewhere, God does honour, and will honour, the primacy of preaching in the order of means for converting men.

The place which Sunday-schools are to occupy in the great schemes of Christian benevolence, can be expressed in a word. To a considerable extent they may be established where there is no Christian church; and when successful, they will always be the means of establishing a church.

On the first part of this statement it is, perhaps, only

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* Seward's Speech in the Senate of the United States March 11, 1850.

necessary to refer to the operations of the American Sunday-school Union. In the Report of the Union, for 1849, it is stated, that "probably one-half, if not three-fourths of the Sunday-schools in the West and South-west were formed, and are still held, where there are no houses for public worship." (p. 72.) In another part of the same Report, in detailing the result of the labours of three years in a single agency, embracing parts of Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Iowa, much of it on ground beyond any stated preaching of the gospel, it is said, that "the aggregate of schools organized, and supplied with books, for three years, was one thousand and twelve schools, embracing seven thousand four hundred and forty-four teachers, and fifty thousand six hundred and twenty-eight scholars." (p. 63.)

I add, in this connection, a statement furnished me by an authority already referred to, as the "result of more than twenty years' exploration of the destitution, and endeavours to extend the supply of Sunday-school instruction in our country." It is in these words:— "That it is entirely practicable to establish a Sunday-school in every locality where children are found, and so to furnish and conduct it as to render it a priceless blessing to those who are immediately or remotely connected with it; in truth, to the whole community. Children are more ready and willing to be taught than professed Christians are to teach them; more ready to attend the Sunday-school than parents are to aid them in it. The child's social nature powerfully prompts to this, where there are few other occasions of meeting those of their own age."

On the other part of the statement, it is to be said that the friends of Sunday-schools never design them

to remain independent and separate institutions. They do not go forth and plant them in the prairie or in the wilderness with the expectation that they will stand there alone. They do not regard them as having such inherent vitality that they would live long by themselves, nor do they anticipate that they will long continue to shed their influence on a surrounding population, sparse or dense, unless they are the means of awakening a people to the necessity of a preached gospel, and of inducing them to make efforts to procure it. They anticipate that the fact that there is a Sunday-school in any destitute place will suggest the proper idea of the observance of the Sabbath; that they who can be induced to engage in teaching will be led to see the propriety of worship on that day; that parents who can be prevailed on to send their children, will themselves be induced to take an interest in the appropriate service of that day of rest; and that children who are trained in a Sunday-school will themselves be brought to love the gospel, and to desire, as they advance in years, the public dispensation of divine truth. They would be greatly disappointed, therefore, if the result should not be in any given case that the permanent establishment of a Sunday-school would be followed by the establishment of a Christian church; and they look over the broad field where they have established those schools, and where they are now labouring to establish them, as just so many places where 'the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert bud and blossom as the rose.'

On this point, also, I add a statement from the source already referred to, as expressive of the results of more than twenty years' effort to establish Sunday-

schools among the destitute of our land. It is in these words:—

"Some doubts have been entertained, as to the permanency of these schools, where not connected with a church, or watched over and aided by a minister. The Union has taken special pains to investigate this matter, and as the result of their careful inquiries they cannot find that more than two and one-half per cent of these schools have *failed*, and if taught for six months only, it is not a *failure*, in a series of three years' trial. On the contrary, a majority of the schools first planted, where there was no other institution of social religious privilege, have, in a few years, resulted in the formation of a church, or at least the stated preaching of the gospel, by some evangelical minister."

And in the literature which we send out, we expect still more widely to promote and extend this power. No one, we think, can properly estimate the influence of what we are doing by this kind of literature. It is much to give a good book to a boy in the West, that he will sit down on a log to read on his way home from the school, or by a light made of pine knots at night; it is much to have such a book carried into a family where there are few or no other good books; it is much to place a library of such books in a neighbourhood where we are sure that every book in it, in its turn, will find its way to every log-hut in the vicinity. I speak now of this as adapted to affect the religion and the literature of our country.

The religion of this land is to be the Christian religion. I do not say the Christian religion or none—but I say the Christian religion. The world is too far advanced now to attempt to get along in States and Republics without *any* religion, and Christianity

has shed so many blessings on our land, and is so interwoven with all our habits of thinking and our laws and literature, and is moreover so certainly the religion which merciful heaven has appointed for a fallen world, as to make it certain that *that* is to be ever-onward the religion of our nation. But this religion, in order to produce its best effects, should reign in its great catholic and general principles, rather than in sectarian forms; or, in other words, Christianity in its essential nature, and its general influence, should be *primary*—the sect, the denomination, should be *secondary*. There will be sects; and there are many not undesirable effects which spring out of the division of the one great Christian family into different branches; but the love of sect should be restrained; the attachment for the denomination should always be subordinate to the love of the great brotherhood; and the readiness to propagate Christianity, as such, should always be superior to the desire to propagate the peculiarities of the denomination. Now this, we think, will be promoted in an eminent degree all over the land by that early study of the Bible by all our children and youth, which we seek to secure in such organizations as that of the American Sunday-school Union. It is difficult to make a mere sectarian—a bigoted lover of the denomination, out of the mere study of the Bible; and when trained in the knowledge of that book, children will learn Christianity *first*, and then, if ever, sectarianism and party will be to be learned as a *secondary* matter. For after all the efforts which you can make, it is exceedingly difficult to show *to a child* how the peculiarities which separate the different evangelical denominations of Christians from each other, grew out of the Bible, or are sustained by the

Bible. The creation of the denominational and sectarian feeling is usually the growth of more advanced years, and is commonly to be traced to other causes than the study of the word of God. Children, in reading the Bible, see little ground there for the distinctions which have sprung up in the Christian world, and none for the animosity of feeling, the bitterness of contention, the spirit of exclusiveness, and the fierceness of mutual denunciation which have too often characterized the different sects of Christians in their contentions with each other. And if the rising generation learn these things, and become imbued with this spirit, it must be from some other cause than the study of the New Testament. The tendency of the effort to teach the Bible to the young, and of the diffusion of those forms of Christian literature which grow out of that effort, is to soften the acerbities of party strife, to diffuse the spirit of Christian charity, to render less prominent the differences which divide one evangelical denomination from another, and to smooth down these mountains of difference to plains.

And we urge this as one of the strong claims which the American Sunday-school Union has to the patronage of the Christian world. Attached as we are, in our respective churches, to the peculiarities of our own denominations, and exercising in this respect, as we wish our children to do, the rights of Christian freemen; having no friendship for latitudinarian views, and no disposition to abandon what we deem to be truth on any subject, or in any form; and not aiming at the impracticable undertaking of breaking up all the religious denominations, or attempting to blend them into one; yet we do maintain, that the great doctrines of our common faith are *primary*, and that the peculiari-

ties of the denomination are *secondary;* that it is of the utmost importance that these principles should be spread all over our country, and over the world; and that any society has strong claims on the patronage of the church at large, that shall be successful in inculcating these principles on the minds of the coming generation. It is time that the different religious denominations should love each other more, and become more thoroughly attached to the great common brotherhood; and we claim for the Sunday-school operations, alike from the avowed purpose of the American Sunday-school Union, and from the very nature of the enterprise, that it tends to this result, and that, therefore, it has a claim to the support of all who 'love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity:'—that it tends to make the church more conformed to the standard of primitive Christianity, and to bring about the answer to the prayer of our Redeemer, 'that they all may be one.'

It is on this principle that the American Sunday-school Union was formed, and that it has, for so many years, now prosecuted its quiet labours. Without designing to interfere with the efforts of the various religious denominations to prosecute their own distinctive views in any way they choose, the 'Union principle is the only one on which this work can be most successfully prosecuted, especially among the sparsely settled, and greatly divided inhabitants of the new frontier States, where there are few of any one denomination, and yet some of nearly all of them.' And as my residence for more than twenty years in the city where the seat of this Union is located, has brought me into personal acquaintance with many of its most active supporters, several of the Board being members of my church, I think it not indelicate or improper on this

occasion to bear my testimony to the intelligence and fidelity which characterize its management, and to the value and high importance of its influence as a means of diffusing the great essential principles of the gospel throughout the land.

And does no one see already the effect of this whole effort on the religion and literature of our country? Is not the public mind becoming more imbued with the sentiments of religion? Is there no connection between these two facts:—the one, that the public press is decidedly more favourable to religion than it was thirty years ago—that the conductors of public journals are more willing to spread religious intelligence, and to defend the truths of Christianity, than they then were; and the other, the fact, that during that time a Christian literature adapted primarily to the young, has been making its way, silently, over the land? We believe that the true philosopher will yet see that the movements which we make in spreading a youthful Christian literature, and in so humble a work as appears to be that of establishing a Sunday-school, may be more closely connected than any thing else with a fact that is yet to stand forth before the world—that all our literature is to be imbued with sound Christian principles; that our statesmen are to be men who have early studied the Bible, and who shall carry its principles into the halls of legislation; that colleges, churches, and schools are to spread over all the prairies of the West, and that the children of that mighty population which is coming to our shores shall learn the nature of our institutions, and be trained up here in the fear of God. The Sunday-school seems to be a small thing. The Sunday-school book appears to be a small affair. The Sunday-school

library is a small collection of small books. But look on the children thus educated, and the books thus circulated. It is no small thing to spread, as the American Sunday-school Union has done, in a single year, (1849–50,) over the land, religious books that, in the aggregate, amount to more than one million of volumes. It is no small thing to send out more than a hundred Sunday-school missionaries, as was done by that Society in the same year, gathering and revisiting more than three thousand schools, embracing more than a hundred and fifty thousand scholars, most of whom had never before been in a Sunday-school, and placing them under the care of twenty thousand teachers.*

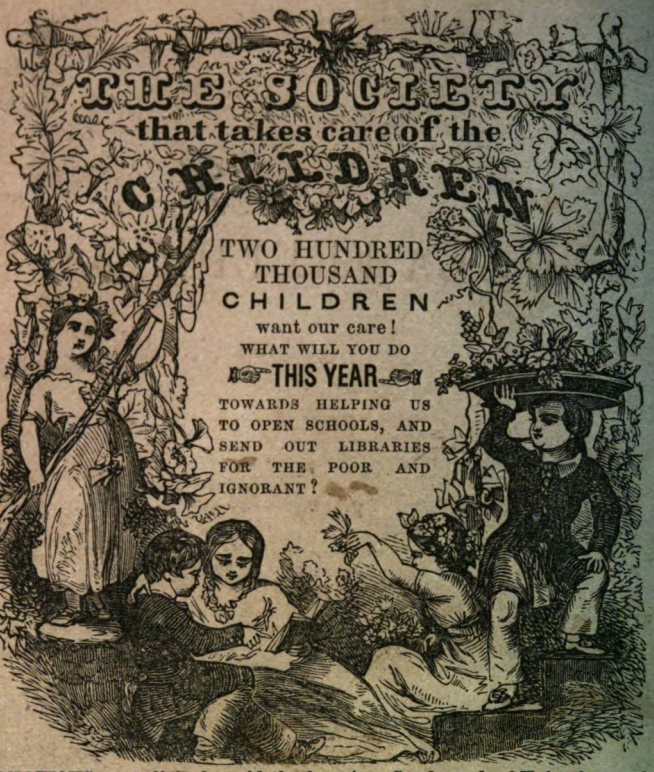
It is no small thing, that 'every ten years, five millions of persons who had been Sunday-school scholars, enter into active society.'† Think of these millions as fathers, mothers, citizens, voters—lawyers, physicians, judges, legislators, ministers of religion, teachers (in

* The exact result of these labours may be thus stated:—The amount of books sold in 1849–50, was $132,000, which, supposing the average price of a book to be 13 cents, would amount to 1,015,461 volumes. The results of Sunday-school Missionary work for the last year, as prosecuted by the American Sunday-school Union, may be thus summed up:—One hundred and three S. S. Missionaries were in service, on an average less than half a year each, and by their labour gathered and revisited three thousand five hundred and eighty-three schools, embracing one hundred and fifty-seven thousand scholars, mostly of the neglected class, placed under the care of twenty thousand teachers; these were scattered through a large majority of the States and Territories of the Union. These schools were supplied with the Society's publications to the amount of $28,000, nearly one half of which were donations. All this was done at an actual expense of less than $30,000, contributed for this purpose.

† Judge McLean's Letter, Ann. Rep. 1849.

their turn) of the young. Think of the influence of early training; of the effects of the books read in early life; of the prayers offered for those children; of the blessings which God has graciously promised to bestow on the efforts made to train up the young in the right way; of the favours which we all desire that He should bestow on this land, and which we believe He intends to bestow; of the purposes for which we believe He has raised us up as a nation in respect to the spread of religion and liberty among the other nations of the earth; and then, from this point of view, endeavour to estimate the value of the efforts made to establish Sunday-schools throughout our beloved land.

THE END.



DONATIONS are solicited to aid the American Sunday-school Union in supplying destitute Sunday-schools with Library Books, &c., and especially FOR SUNDAY-SCHOOLS IN THE WEST.

In many of our Sunday-schools, associations are formed among the teachers and scholars, who contribute weekly or monthly, and the money thus raised is remitted quarterly, by the superintendent or treasurer to the American Sunday-school Union, to give books to those schools that are almost entirely without them, and are not able to purchase them, and thus do not enjoy the privileges of other schools.

NOTE TO THE READER.

Can you not exert your influence in your Sunday-school or neighbourhood, and endeavour to have something done at once towards furthering this noble and most benevolent purpose?

Remittances of money may be safely addressed, by post, as follows:—

Treasurer of AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
146 *Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.*

Applications for donations, letters respecting the missionary and agency operations, and the general business of the Society, may be addressed

Corresponding Secretary of AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
146 *Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.*

Communications for the Society's periodicals, manuscripts submitted for examination, and whatever relates to the literary transactions of the Society, may be addressed

Editor of the publications of the AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
146 *Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.*