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CALL 12,

UPON

THE UNEMPLOYED TALENT OF THE  
CHURCH:

A SERMON IN BEHALF

OF

The American Sunday-School Union,

DELIVERED AT PHILADELPHIA, MAY 15, 1853,

BY

REV. GEORGE POTTS, D.D.

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AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,  
NO. 316 CHESTNUT STREET.

# A Sermon.

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“And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, I will give you.”—  
*Matt. xx. 3, 4.*

It was said of the Athenians of the apostles' day, and said to their reproach, that they spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. The excitements of novelty, not those of truth, were their object. No such spirit is to be found, I hope, among those who are assembled here to-night, as the subjects appropriate to this anniversary have been too thoroughly canvassed to afford any opening for novel thought. The gleanings of a well-reaped field are all that remain for us. But two considerations will console the preacher when handling a subject so familiar to those who are likely to assemble on this occasion. The one is, that the most valuable things are not new. The very familiarity of this subject is a demonstration of its great importance. It proves how fully it has been investigated, and how long a time its principles have been tested by trial; so that many things which once required argument, have now become fixed truths, which no longer call for any thing more than expansion and application. It is a further relief to one who at this late day is called to speak on the subject of the Sabbath-school system, on this anniversary occasion,

to reflect that his thoughts, though familiar to you at head-quarters, are by the usage of the society circulated far and wide by the press, and may thus reach many distant hearers not so familiar with the subjects treated. Those who are here present will pardon me if I say, that in the selection of a topic, and the plainness with which I shall present it, I have kept in mind the invisible audience to whose ears my words may thus be borne. The point I have selected is—

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENLISTING MORE OF THE UNEMPLOYED TALENT OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORK OF SABBATH-SCHOOL INSTRUCTION.

I pass by untouched the agency necessary to circulate information, to solicit funds, to provide books, and to remove the difficulties in the way of establishing schools and collecting our youth upon the Sabbath. All these are preparatory and most important parts of the work which must be done by this Society. But they are only preparatory. Without disparagement, we may say they are not the most important. The actual work of *Teaching* is the most important. It were in vain to prepare a machine if there were no hands to work it, or if its working were left in incompetent hands. However valuable are the plans of this society, the co-operation and influence of the ministry in encouraging the establishment of Sabbath-schools, the labours of the Sabbath-school missionary who carries your machinery into destitute neighbourhoods in city or country, and the books you have prepared and circulated for the young—most valuable of all are the last links in the chain of agencies, viz. an intelligent, whole-hearted, competent band of Teachers, to *bring the influences of truth to bear upon the young*. This is the consummate object of this whole system of means. Hence the reason why the final result should be in the most ef-

ficient hands that can be procured. All else depends on it.

In affirming, as we do, that there is no point in Sabbath-school operations in which there is more room for extension and improvement than this, we must not be misunderstood as undervaluing the labours of those volunteer agents, who are now, or have been, employed as teachers in the Sabbath-schools of the land. I need not say that they have deserved well of the church and of the country. We should be doing great injustice if we did not bear a decided testimony to the untold value of the labour which has been devoted to this work by a large number of persons, who were no more bound to give that labour than thousands of others who have done nothing. Without regarding the Sabbath-school system, even when most efficiently carried out in all its departments, as, in itself, omnipotent to the cure of a single social evil, or even to the spiritual rescue of a single child among the many who are brought under its appliances, surely it can be no longer doubted that with the blessing of God, it has quietly accomplished a great and good work. As a system, it came in to supply a want, and up to the point to which it has been carried, it has done well. The unmeasured language of eulogium cannot be applied to any human agency, but we know of none to which it might more justly be appropriated. God has blessed it in many ways. He has especially rewarded the teaching labourers according to the promise. In the attempt to teach others, thousands have been taught themselves. Multitudes have been added to the church from the corps of teachers, who, by the nature of their employment, have greatly improved in their knowledge of the Scriptures, and developed themselves into useful Christians and philanthropists. Look to our courts of justice, our

professors' chairs, our pulpits, our Christian physicians, and—not the least important department of life—look to our quiet home circles, and you will find large numbers who are exercising a valuable influence in society, who now, or formerly, occupied places in the corps of Sabbath-school teachers, who will remember the salutary mental and moral stimulus created by their employment. Perhaps they began the work young, as pupils, and continued in it as instructors—and some continue in it still—and on them and their work, I repeat, God has sent down a blessing of inappreciable value. Quiet and silent, indeed, like the falling dew, but, like that, fructifying. The Church of Christ, the institutions of the country, the great social interests generally, owe a debt to these volunteer labourers of the Sabbath-school, which can never be repaid.

And yet who are these labourers? On whom has the actual business of instruction been devolved, as if by general consent? Is it not the fact—with a few exceptions—that they are the younger members of the churches and congregations? Has not *Sabbath-school teaching* come to be regarded as the prescriptive right and duty of those who are comparatively new in the Christian life? Is not the marriage of a teacher, and much more the approach of gray hairs, generally considered as a discharge from this work, and a signal of retirement?

Believing that this is not an exaggerated statement of the facts, (a comparatively few cases excepted,) we deem it a grave subject of inquiry whether there be any sufficient reason for this state of things? Has this practice of almost exclusively detailing the youth of the church for the work, been adopted from principle? If so, it must be for one of the following reasons: that they are the

most competent, or the most pious and zealous, or that they alone have the time to devote to it. But none of these reasons will bear examination. *Superior competency* will not justify the devolving of the work upon them, for older Christians may be presumed to have an average of greater knowledge, and greater experience in the best ways of operating on the human character. Surely, an intelligent father or mother is more likely to know how to approach and influence the young, than those who have no parental experience. Nor can it be supposed that the *superior piety and zeal* of younger Christians will justify the practice of the church in this matter, unless we assume that love to God and man, burns with a feebler light as we grow older and draw nearer to our account. And finally as to the last supposition, that the youth of the church *have more time for it, and can better bear its fatigues*, because they have fewer fatigues during the week than their elders, I submit that this is by no means universally, perhaps not generally, true, however confidently it may have been assumed. Examine the cases:— Has a youthful student or clerk or mechanic more time than his teacher or employer on the Sabbath-day, or less exhausting occupation during the week? I put out of view cases where health or other insuperable barriers lie in the way of Sabbath-school engagements. For example I freely concede that a mother's place and duties are often such as to exempt her from the obligation of bestowing care upon the children of others, when she has the charge of her own thrown upon her; but is that the case with fathers? Have they such peculiar domestic calls on the Sabbath as to relieve them from all claims upon their superior intelligence and skill? What is fatiguing and self-denied in this work, what interferes with their personal enjoyment of the opportunities of the

Sabbath—and I admit there is much—is as hard upon the sons and daughters of the church as upon their elders; so that on this score no universal rule of exemption can be set up in their behalf.

If, therefore, none of these reasons can justify the actual practice of the church of putting the work almost exclusively into the hands of the young, we are forced to believe that that practice is the mere effect of a precedent established at the early stages of the Sabbath-school effort, when the importance of the work—its grand importance—was not so thoroughly developed as it has since been. Because it was so in the beginning, it continues to be so. The church falls into habits—and sometimes into bad habits—as well as the individual. It is apt to run in ruts. But this early precedent, while it accounts for the fact that so large an amount of matured talent and experience is, at this day, unemployed in this great work of religious teaching, cannot justify our overlooking any longer the claims which belong to it, and which daily grow stronger. That so many well-gifted and experienced persons should be doing nothing in this work, cannot be accounted for, except upon one of two suppositions: a deficiency of zeal, which I am unwilling to believe, or a prevalent but most erroneous idea that the work *does not require* the best gifts which can be brought to it. This, I fear, is the common impression, and I dedicate the remainder of my remarks to an attempt to show how much it is mistaken. My conviction is, that our Sabbath-school plans need now to be pushed a step in advance, and in this direction; and my aim, in the following remarks, will be to aid this forward movement by convincing and persuading those who have heretofore given only a portion of their youth to it, and have withdrawn when they entered upon domestic engagements as the heads of



families, that they have deprived a noble system of benevolence of their services, at the very time when their increased experience may be supposed to have given them increased fitness to do the work well.

There are three aspects of this subject, which, if considered by a sound conscience, cannot fail to reform the practice of the church in this respect. They all resolve themselves into the general consideration of the *vast importance of the end aimed at, viz: The Christian education of the young.* This is generally admitted, but not practically felt. Theory is right, practice defective, and in a multitude of cases wrong; and to show how defective and wrong, let us consider the following weighty benefits which the unemployed talent of the church might confer if devoted to this means of usefulness. Let us look at the Sabbath-school, I. As an auxiliary; II. As a counteractive; III. As supplementary.

As an AUXILIARY—it promotes (1.) Christian family training, and (2.) The healthful organic action of the church upon the young.

As a COUNTERACTIVE—it corrects the effects of unchristian family training.

As SUPPLEMENTARY—it is a necessary, and at present the only available means to supply the great defect of our public school system.

These considerations are seen at a glance to involve the interests of the Family, the Church, and the State, and by demonstrating the important influence which the Sabbath-school system may exert if in the most efficient hands, they will, if duly weighed, help to enlist many experienced persons whose aid is now withheld. This is the distinct object of these remarks.

FIRST, AS AN AUXILIARY, let us study its bearings,  
(1.) *On Christian family training.*

In this character, not only has the influence of the systematic instructions of the Sabbath-school not been adequately appreciated, it has even been seriously called in question. It was formerly alleged by many—and the opinion is still adhered to by some—that this system has relaxed if not destroyed the sense of parental obligation, by offering a substitute for domestic training. A very serious charge, but one which will prove upon examination to rest more upon an early assumption of supposed tendencies than upon a clear deduction from facts. If facts have established the truth of the theoretical assumption, that because most persons are likely to neglect a duty when assistance is offered to them in the discharge of it, therefore Christian parents will neglect the religious training of their children—then the matter is settled, at least so far as Christian parents are concerned. We say, let nothing be permitted to come in between Christian parents and their offspring, to weaken in the smallest degree, the sense of obligation on either side. The Family is God's positive institution, and it ought to be the aim of all religious instrumentalities to make it what it was meant to be, the safe and fertile nursery of the Church and the State. Under God, the parent ought to be prophet, priest, and king, to the young subjects of the household. We yield to none in our views of the supreme importance of family religious training, and would reject, as radically wrong, any system which necessarily fostered the notion that Christian parents may delegate to proxies, however intelligent and capable, the whole or even the main responsibility of their children's instruction in Christian truth and duty.

But let us not be misled by an argument drawn from

probabilities and tendencies. Have facts, has the experience of the last five-and-twenty years, justified the presumption, that because human nature is prone to shift responsibility whenever there is a plausible reason for it, therefore the organization of Sunday-school instruction diminishes the interest of Christian parents for their children's religious nurture, and releases their consciences from the obligation to train them in the ways of God? I do not ask whether the early religious character of the young of our Christian families is as much cared for by parents as it ought to be; but is it less cared for now than it was forty or fifty years ago? In reply to these questions, we can of course give no more than an opinion, but it is the result of our own observation, confirmed by that of other observers. "Fifty years ago," I heard a minister of extensive experience remark lately,—“fifty years ago, it was a comparatively rare thing for a young person to make a profession of religion. It was a thing reserved for the maturity and decline of life; and if a young person came forward, it was noted as something to be remarked.” Is this true now? And if not, does it not refute the assertion that the Sabbath-school system has impaired Christian family teaching and influence? Looking at the number of youth who have united with the church, the apprehension once entertained that Christian families would be rendered less vigilant, less faithful, less anxious, for the spiritual well-being of their children, by the assistance proffered in the Sabbath-school, ought to be dispelled from the minds of attentive observers. Nay more, it ought to give place to an opposite conviction, that, indirectly, but most efficiently, it has tended to increase the interest of parents in their children; to enlarge their views, to deepen their sense of obligation, as well as to multiply their facilities for parental training. It has

been found to work—not as was feared by many wise men—as a *substitute*, but as an *auxiliary*; not as an offensive intruder and usurper, but as a friendly ally. The teacher, if at all competent to the duty of enlisting the interest of children in sound Christian knowledge, has inculcated, among his foremost lessons, parental rights and filial obligations; has commented on Scripture facts and characters, and observed and checked personal faults in such a way as not only to enforce, but to facilitate and encourage the teachings of home. What is more common now than for the youth of our Christian families to make some point of the Sabbath-school lesson of the day, the subject of Sabbath-day remark and conference with their parents, or to speak of the contents of the little volume they have brought home from the library, and in these ways to furnish happy opportunities and facilities for the inweaving of the golden threads of religious truth into the web of the family history? As to the fact of an increased amount of *knowledge* imparted by the means of Sabbath-school instruction, it is too obvious to be questioned. It has followed by a natural law, from the increase of that valuable Christian literature for the young, which we owe almost entirely to this system. But it is not of mere knowledge that I speak. What I now refer to, is not merely the increase of intelligence, but of spiritual impression generally: of a higher standard of Christian activity and breadth of view. A vast multitude who are now occupying fields of usefulness as ministers in the church at home, or missionaries in the church abroad, or those in the State who are blessing the world as benefactors and consistent Christian moralists, will, I doubt not, assent to the assertion, that among the agencies to which they are indebted for a portion of the influences which have made them what they are, they can look back

with thankfulness to some kind, intelligent, faithful teacher, who corroborated instead of weakening the force of parental influence and contributed largely to the awakening of their souls from the sleep of spiritual death.

In another direction we meet, occasionally with an objection, which also has tended to hinder many from coming forward who are eminently qualified to aid in carrying out the Sabbath-school plans. We have heard it asked—Is it not useless for us to undertake to do the work of those Christian parents who are amply qualified to do their own work? I reply, that the considerations already suggested show how important, as an aid, not as a substitute, Sabbath-school influences may be made even to the best-appointed families. But besides what has been said, we may add that the peculiar advantage of Sabbath-school teaching lies partly in the fact, that there is something influential in the associations of a place which brings together, for the one great definite object of religious impression, the children from many families; something which quickens the pulse of thought and gives freshness and variety to the workings of the mind. This kind of meeting operates by the same principles which give power and efficiency to every other kind of assembling for religious purposes. If, as some think, home-teaching renders other means of impression needless for the young, why not for their elders?—in which case, close your churches, as well as your schools. It is surely important, to say the least, not to lose this class of advantages in the matter of religious training, any more than in the matter of week-day school education, in which last department the benefits of association are admitted. If it cannot be called indispensable, it is surely useful.

These considerations may serve to show that no one who is offered so favourable an opportunity of helping

in the great work of deepening principles of truth, and giving a direction to the characters of those who are soon to come forward as actors in the great drama of life, should consider effort thrown away, and much less intrusive, even in cases where it may be supposed the home-training is upon the whole excellent. But as the remarks we have made cover only one portion of the ground on which we base our appeal to the now dormant intelligence of the church, let us proceed to a kindred class of thoughts, and consider the importance of the Sabbath-school plans—

As auxiliary (2.) *To the healthful action of the Church upon the young.* Like the family, the church is also one of God's positive institutions, expressly meant for the propagation, preservation, and enforcement of saving truth. "Go"—thus reads its commission—"go teach all nations." Its appliances to this end are not all specifically numbered and prescribed by rule: nor is the precise share of each of them measured or weighed in scales, either as to the amount of each man's labour, or as to the responsibility, efficiency, and honour due to each. But what of that? Enough to know that when men and women are brought into this church of Christ, they are brought into it to *do* good, as well as to *obtain* good—as givers, no less than as receivers. It is a believing, hoping, enjoying corporation, each of its members being surrounded by divine personal advantages; but it is also a working corporation, one of whose comprehensive constitutional laws is this: "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not." This law embraces all its various ministries—its preaching ministry, its ruling ministry, its ministry of charity to human bodies and souls, and its teaching ministry; and believers who have gifts qualifying them for one or more of these various ministries cannot let their gifts—though they consist of but a single talent—lie idle,

without risk to themselves, injustice to others, and dishonour to the Master. Each one, I repeat, has a ministry; and though it be as humble a service as that of washing the disciples' feet, let every one remember that the lowest service loses its character of an obscure and useless humiliation, and becomes glorious by having been performed by the glorious Lord himself. "I am among you," said he,—and what a lesson is here, my brethren!—"I am among you as one that serveth." "He that is greatest among you, let him be your minister." This is the spirit of Christ, and the same mind ought to be in us. And when these principles come to be as generally practised as they are generally admitted, we shall assuredly have no idlers in the church. There will be no consumers who are not also producers; every heir of the kingdom will be a benefactor—every plant of the Father's planting will give out a portion of the fragrance and fruitfulness which it has drawn from the soil of the covenant. We shall then see the true power of the church, as a reformer of evil, develop itself, when not a segment, but the whole orb shall display its illumined face to the world.

Are we wrong in affirming that the whole inherent capabilities of the church and its various ministries have never been, as yet, fully tried? Is there not much moral power that now wastes itself or is hidden under a bushel? In affirming that there is, let it be understood that we are far from wishing to depreciate the extent and value of the work which has been done and is now a-doing by the church. We would not for one instant countenance the spirit which seems to regard a skilful uncovering of faults as the best proof of one's sagacity and fidelity. An indulged spirit of *fault-finding* is always unjust and uncharitable, even when its theme is charity. Far be it from us to hold the works accomplished by the household of

faith as of little value; and much more, to speak on this or any other subject involving Christian responsibilities, so as to leave the impression that all the evils of the world are to be laid at the door of the church, especially when by the church is meant, as is often the case, the preaching ministry of the church. Those who do this (and in all ages there have been some such—there are some in our's) in their theories of social reform and Christian duty, seem to us to have ignored the element of human depravity. They often speak as if they had forgotten that there is an iron wilfulness in the human heart which no mere means, not even the most wise and faithfully employed, can avail to overcome. It would be well for such to remember that the style of reproach they have adopted, when they charge the ignorance, vice, and misery of the world upon the unfaithfulness of the church, and the unfaithfulness of the church upon the ministry—may easily be made to recoil. But let us not ask whether the fault-finders are themselves faithful models of their own principles; let us only ask whether *they* have never made an effort to do good, which was disappointed through the incorrigible perverseness of its object? Has every faithful Sabbath-school teacher, or faithful friend, or faithful parent, or faithful benefactor, or faithful preacher of righteousness, an assurance that his zeal and fidelity will be omnipotent in producing the results he aims at? Is uniform and certain success necessary to prove that our work is wrought in God? Say, venerated apostle! Was it because thou didst not preach in the right way, was it from some defect in zeal or prudence, that thy labours often called forth persecutors to lay the lash on thy back, instead of converts, like the Philippian jailer, to wash thy stripes? Or thou, noble Stephen! Was it from thy lack of prudence or fidelity that thy hearers gnashed upon thee with their teeth and stoned



thee? Or thou, O Son of God! Was thy ministry unfaithful, because some refused thy hard sayings and others scoffed at thee, and even thy disciples shrank from thy side in the hour of danger? Nay, nay, the responsibility of the agents of truth is sufficiently weighty, without adding to it demands which nothing but a Divine power can meet.

These thoughts are applicable to our subject in two respects—first, in that they prove the unreasonableness of assuming that the church, with all its array of means, can do every thing that is necessary to convert the world in a year or a century, into a garden of holiness: and secondly, in that they show the equal unreasonableness of laying the whole responsibility of the work upon any one section of the church, and especially on its ministry of preaching, when all who can ought to take a share in it. Not a part, but the whole, should constitute the “teaching church.” Every one should, in some way, *teach*. In the predicted day of millennial perfection, we are told that it will be no longer needful that ‘every man should teach his brother, and every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord’—but until then, it is needful. Every parent must teach his children, every friend his friend, every minister his flock, and, by parity of reasoning, every one who has the favourable opportunity and requisite gifts, should lend them to the Lord in training the young. In that work we have seen that parents, even the best disposed, can be aided. If the pastor may lend his aid, why not the office-bearer and the church-member theirs? Too much is expected of pastoral influence over the young; impossibilities, indeed, if we may judge from the language of some. Let all just labours be required of them; let the pastoral office be what its name indicates; let it vindicate its title, by imitating him who ‘took the lambs in

his arms and carried them in his bosom.' Still, much of the ministrations of the pulpit will, from the necessity of the case, be lost to the young of the congregation, by being beyond their capacity; and even the special instructions of the Catechetical and Bible class are necessarily so infrequent as to make additional instruction very desirable. Hence, instead of looking upon the judicious and constant co-operation of the Sabbath-school teacher as intrusive and prejudicial to pastoral influence, a pastor who knows and feels the importance of maintaining an unintermittent impression on the minds of the young, and who takes pains to solicit such co-operation, will hail it as a personal favour, will be grateful to God for it, and will sustain it with all his might. In such a case there will never be cause to complain that it has come in to interfere with that influence of the church upon the young which every Christian should contribute to promote. To bring them early to Christ, and, as the grand means to that end, to bring them into felt contact with the church, which is his agent and minister of blessing, this is acknowledged as the primary point in Christian education; and that organism is best fulfilling its end in which all the instrumentalities, greater and less, are so employed as to endear Zion to her children.

We say then, to those whom we have in our eye, as you love the church which Christ loved, and desire to see it built up of living stones fashioned after the similitude of a palace, come bring your tools, ye wise and skilful workers who have laid them by to rust. Disdain not the call. There is noble work for you to do, in helping to shape and ornament the materials which are to constitute "the church of the future": not a church of shows, but of realities: not of confessionals, absolutions, and priestly mysticisms, such as some desire; but a church founded on

the divine Word, whose bulwarks shall be manned by believers who know the Truth, whom the Truth has made free, and who will stand by the Truth; a church which shall dispense what she receives; a Bethesda for the poor, the halt, the maimed, the blind, the refugees of sin, of all casts and nations. Lend your aid to teach her sons and daughters to withstand the formidable assaults of superstition and infidelity which are gathering. That aid may be much in its results. Joining itself with kindred influences, your influence upon the mind of some youth may be precisely that which is to give momentum and guidance to its energies. You may fix a thought which will shape a character, and fix a destiny. Through this medium you may be more effectually working for the church and the world, than you could by any other, because you may be helping to prepare for society a benefactor, who, as a minister of Christ or a jurist, a statesman, a physician, a teacher, will show "how great a matter a little fire kindleth." Out of public sight, your work may be obscure and unblazoned: but like that of the bee, which in the dark builds its cell and stores it, it is none the less good, in that it proceeds upon the principle of that divine philosophy which is equally apparent in the kingdoms of nature and grace, and which teaches us not to "despise the day of small things," since it is God's pleasure that his kingdom should come "not with observation." Learners in this school, you will not refuse even the hewing of the wood and the drawing of the water, when you know that without these the temple cannot go up. Are you of those who glory only in what is grand and imposing? Who refuse to link their presumed dignity and respectability with the less obvious movements by which the church of Christ is carried forward? Who look for God only in the thunder, the earthquake, and the fire, and not

in the still small voice? Not such are the lessons which Heaven teaches us. It is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, to make the foolish, weak, base, and despised things to confound the mighty and wise, and with the little stone cut by unobserved hands out of the mountain, to smite the great image, and at last fill the earth. Look around you; it is 'a grain of mustard seed' which has grown into the glorious tree in whose sheltering branches we have built our nest. Whatever the world has of spiritual and social worth, whatever is vital and healthful in the moral atmosphere we have been breathing since childhood, whatever we hold precious in our personal condition, whatever knowledge we have of that blessed faith in Christ, which smooths the frown of the past and removes the flaming sword from the future; whatever shall gladden millennial days, whatever shall make heaven itself a joyful home to a multitude which no man can number; these are the fruits of the "handful of corn" which was sown so unobservedly on the tops of the mountain.

Yes, come forth and help to build the temple of God, though no noise of the hammer and axe be heard in the work. The great empire of thought is silent, but in it dwell God and all spiritual creatures. Aim thou to belong to it, for, though silent and unseen itself, it is destined to govern the world. In it, though out of sight, is to be found the secret spring which is steadily moving the hands forward upon the dial plate, until they reach the noon of time.

But let us advance a step. In thus claiming the unemployed talent of the church as auxiliary to the family and the church, in the vastly important work of training their own young, we have to admit that we have not assigned to the Sabbath-school its *most* important func-

tion. We admit that it is not in this part of the field that labour is most loudly called for. The now unexpended skill and zeal of cultivated Christians ought to be employed,

SECONDLY, IN COUNTERACTING *the effects of unchristian family training.*

The principle of caring "*for our own, and especially for those of our own household,*" is right, but with conditions. The family, the church, the neighbourhood, the nation, are bound to act on it, but not exclusively. That principle, so often the cover of a cold selfishness, has a counterpart: "*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*" Reason attests the excellence of this principle of action as well as of the other. The law of God, in concise but clear terms, defines its nature and breadth. Christ, by his precepts, and still more by his example, enforces it. Heaven blesses it to both him who gives and him who receives. Suffering relieved, prisons visited, hunger, nakedness, sickness alleviated, ignorance and crime arrested and converted—all join to testify that there is an unselfish interference in the concerns of others which is not a mischievous neglect of our own, or an uncalled for meddling with what does not concern us, but which partakes of the character of a duty and privilege.

Admitting this—and who dares to deny it?—some try to escape from duty, and to find an excuse for doing little or nothing, on the ground of the absence of definite instructions as to the form or the precise amount which each man is to give of his own surplus possessions of time, talent, and property, to supply the lack of others. Well—we admit that the gospel furnishes no foot-rule wherewith to measure the footsteps of charity. Her

work cannot be weighed out by ounces or pounds. But is not this true of all other moral obligations? Is the mother told by what measure she shall mete out her attentive love, or the child his, or the wife and husband theirs? Doubtless there is a precedence in duties, and sometimes a duty may have exclusive claims; but whether or not that be the case, can always be easily decided by studying the code of Christ in the school of Christ, under the influence of the love of Christ, and as we shall have to answer to Christ in that day when he shall say, "*Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.*"

Now there is a wide, ah! how wide a field for the application of these principles, lying upon the outskirts of the garden of the Lord. Close by the precincts of the church are destitutions which invite her to the work of evangelisation, which is the work given her to do. In the single department of Sabbath-school teaching, there is room for a thousand fold more work than she has ever performed. We have spoken of the Sabbath-school as an auxiliary to Christian families. But the statistics—nay, what need of statistics when every man can see the facts by simply opening his eyes?—show that numerous families in our land are *not* Christian, not able or not willing to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and what shall be done for *them*? Every country-side has them—every village and growing town. In our populous cities, they teem and multiply with fearful rapidity: Certain it is that there are hundreds of thousands of children in this land, who have not only no sound religious family training, but often a home education in ignorance and sin. Some of these belong to families, in which the best thing they are taught, is to make a living, to take advantage of the opportunities which our land affords for advancing in

material prosperity, and, if they can, to grow rich. But they are not taught to do so upon the high principles of integrity and purity which the gospel alone supplies. But this is the most favourable class of cases. There are multitudes whose family influences are, not simply negative and destitute of all cultivation of the religious principle, but positive, and on the side of infidelity and vice. How many youth are taught to neglect not only, but to hate religion as the craft of priests, and as an engine of the rich to crush the poor! Sabbaths—they have them indeed, but only to expend their opportunities in destructive amusements and dissipations: Books—but they are the corrupting stuff which teems from the press in issues which far, far outnumber the issues of Christian literature. Meeting places they have—but they are synagogues of Satan, and the service in them is truly a ‘passing through the fire to Molech.’ Their moral training depraves and ruins.

Do not fear that I will seize this class of facts as the text for an argument on the social evils which they threaten to inflict upon the country. I assume all that as a postulate. I assume that all who hear these words, or read them, will agree, that society, in respect to the security of life, property, and well-balanced liberty, must depend upon the moral character of the classes which compose it, and that this is pre-eminently true of a society constituted upon our own peculiar political principles. I assume that the more men are free from outward restraints upon their actions, the more they need the inward restraints which enlightened conscience imposes. I assume that all experience has established the truth, that the best corrective of social evil, and the true preservative of mankind against the bloody convulsions and collapses which have so often disappointed the friends of religion.

and liberty in the old world, are to be found in the impressiveness with which men are made to feel that a righteous God is over all, and that rights and duties are twin products of his wise authority as a lawgiver. I assume, moreover, that all inculcations of moral and social duties, to be effectual, must have such an authority, such an interpreter, and such an impulse to give them activity, as are supplied only in the gospel of Christ. I assume that *there* is to be found the subduing power for fierce passions—the moderator for selfish passions—the arbitrator for contending passions. I assume that this method of assailing the evils of the world, by assailing them in their early stronghold—the depraved nature of every child—this method of striking at the vicious indolence, imposture, intemperance, dishonesty, licentiousness, violence, injustice, and oppression which have made so much poverty and misery, comes recommended by a double claim; that it is conservative as well as corrective. I assume, moreover, that these are evils which do not correct themselves, which are not to be placed in the category of fatalities which cannot be affected by any action of ours; are not inevitable growths which no wisdom nor zeal on our part can check, much less root up; but that, great as they are, they are not beyond reach.

Will not those to whom this discourse is addressed readily admit these principles? But of what avail the admission, unless made in good faith, and followed by a suitable activity, equally removed from the presumption that works without God, and the hopeless despondence that will not work with God? What we now want are the best available agents and instruments, by which this mass of ignorance and sin may be instructed by the gospel; and if they withhold their aid—and is not this the case with a vast body of intelligent, influential, matured minds in the



church?—we shall be in the condition of those who light the candle, but place it under a bushel. Plans, however wisely laid, cannot do this work—money, however abundant, cannot do it—books alone, however excellent, cannot do it; we must have the living, animated, Christ-like teacher, with an intelligent moral influence, to take up the work at the point where the preparatory arrangements of the Sabbath-school Union stop. There is need of the school-room and the Christian teacher, and the moral atmosphere they create. We must make use of the processes by which knowledge, sympathetically communicated by the living voice, will most easily reach the young heart. We must use the power of personal influence, which, if exerted in the spirit of our Lord, will make the faithful teacher more potent as a restraint upon the wilfulness and wickedness of our neglected population, than prison bolts ever are. This, almost beyond any thing else, is what we now need.

And is it not deplorable that so much of it lies idle in the church, while the evil of a neglected, unchristianized generation threatens danger to the country, and ruin eternal to themselves? Help, O fathers and mothers! a portion of whose Sabbath hours might tell so powerfully, first in collecting, and then in instructing these sheep without a shepherd. Let the zeal of the highway-and-hedge missionary descend into your hearts. Go forth into the lanes and streets, to seek and to save those who have no guiding fathers and mothers. They are the wards of the church of Christ—your wards; spiritual foundlings laid at your door; orphans with the worst sort of orphanage—that which is spiritual. Dare you refuse your aid? The successes which have rewarded every zealous effort heretofore made for this class, magnifies the importance of their

claims, encourages labour, and makes indifference inexcusable. Through this means of Sabbath-day schooling, thousands have been rescued from the perils of sin and converted into agents of blessing. Through this means—the proof of the fact abounds—religion has many a time taken her first steps upon the holy mission which was to carry blessing through many a godless neighbourhood in city and country. Through this means, parents who have lived ungodly lives, the victims of a vulgar infidelity, or of an equally vulgar superstition, have been reached through their children and brought to God. Through this means, many a church has been built, and many a minister called to labour in vicinities where no other instrumentality was at first available. In short, through this means, whenever it has been tried, a cheap solution has been found of the great social problem—how shall we save the republic and freedom from the immense strain put upon them by a growing population, and a terrific material prosperity? Republicanism! Freedom! what are these but mere names for beautiful but impossible abstractions, except—except in the case of a Christianly-educated people?

While these things are plain to the most superficial observers, I again ask, is it not mournful to look around our Christian congregations, and count, by hundreds and thousands, skilful hands which are unengaged in this vast work of teaching, by the only practicable system that exists at present, the tens of thousands who have none to counteract the palpable influences of a wicked domestic training, and bring them under the influence of the gospel?

We have said that this system of Sabbath-school teaching is the most promising, and, as things now stand,

the most available of all the means of reaching this very numerous class of neglected youth. If, in spite of what we have already advanced, any hesitate to admit so broad an assertion, let them proceed to consider the last topic of our plea for more labourers of the best kind.

**THIRDLY, AS SUPPLEMENTARY,** we affirm that *This system is the necessary, and at present the only available means of supplying the acknowledged deficiencies of our public-school system.*

A general education, by means of a public-school system, is largely relied on by many as a sufficient security against the evils with which we are threatened. Educate—educate—this is the panacea for social disorders. Time, and the limits set to the present discourse, forbid our attempting a discussion of the excellencies and faults of our common-school system. All we shall say will be brief, and directed to the point before us.

The question of education for the masses may with justice be said to be the question of the age, from whatever point it is viewed: whether that of political expediency, or of social philanthropy, or, above all, of religion. Everywhere, those who wish to impress certain qualities upon the society of the future are awaking to the importance of securing the control of a means so potent. On the one hand, the various schools of unbelief, lying between the extremes of materialism and superstition, are candidates for the office of controlling this vast machinery: while, on the other hand, true religion, equally remote from both, asserts her own indefeasible claims; affirming that neither paganized Christianity, nor the rotten ethics of political expediency, nor a mere training in the material sciences and arts of life, can prepare the young for a happy future either in this life or that to come.

But what is the prospect that a true religion will succeed immediately in making her vital forces penetrate our system of common-school instruction? In the contest just referred to, and which we believe to be only just in its infancy, shall she triumph, and when? Rely upon it, it is the grandest struggle in which she has ever been called to confront her enemies; and we would have her stand with keen eye and foot planted, in readiness to resist them with all allowable weapons, and, by affectionate concert among Protestant believers of every class, secure to the public-schools her indispensable benefits. Not for a moment should Christians abandon the attempt to introduce a proper proportion of religious instruction into their practical workings. But, ah! how can we disguise the fact that sectarian divisions among Protestant Christians have heretofore left the subject, to say the least, unsettled; and that, from our want of agreement upon some plan of coöperation, the enemies of Christianity and Protestantism are hereafter likely to embarrass the question with difficulties, which will result in casting off every vestige of religious teaching. The great body of the nation is undoubtedly Christian and Protestant; and if the Christian denominations were united upon some plan for introducing the evangelical truths and duties into the schools, the country would support them. Why not such a "Union," for this very purpose, as that which brings us together to-night?

But I have no intention of dwelling on this subject farther than as it presents the position which religious teaching holds now and is likely to hold for some time to come, in our public system of education. It is, and for a time is likely to continue, *in abeyance*. Infidelity will raise more loudly than ever the cry of Church and State; and Popery, under cover of the true principle, that educa-

tion should not be godless, will claim that the schools shall either be broken up, or that she shall be put into possession of the Romanist share of school taxes and funds, for the carrying out of her own plans. She complains that the schools are infidel, or that what religion there is in them is Protestant, or that the Bible is read at the opening. These are the grounds of claim for separate endowment. If the latter were the only difficulty, it might be easily removed, by putting the Douay version into the hands of those who preferred it. But in reality that is not desired. The real difficulty is of another sort. What is feared from the public-school system is the effect resulting from the mingling of their youth with others, namely, the generation of a spirit of independence which is not likely to suit the purposes of a hierarchy which requires an unquestioning submission to authority. No doubt, a segregation of their youth is a matter of life or death to the papal sect, and therefore the vigour and perseverance with which they have so *often pressed their claims upon the school fund* for this separate action. But these claims are to be resisted on many grounds—chiefly that of justice. Nominally they ask for *their* proportion of the school fund, but really for a part of *our* proportion. Owing to the fact that so large a part of their population have come to our shores in a state of poverty, their own proportion of the tax would be too small to meet the wishes of the priesthood. But with what justice can they ask, that Protestant aid, in the shape of a tax, should be placed in their hands for the purpose of teaching a system which the great body of the nation regard as inimical to the word of God, and equally inimical to civil and religious liberty? That it is so, is the settled conviction of the country generally, and no such appropriation of the school taxes ought to be allowed.

Meanwhile, however, (and this is the point at which the preceding remarks touch our subject,) while this debate is going on, is it not the fact that our public-school system will exert little or no religious influence, owing to the desire to avoid the allegations of partiality, sectarianism, and the justly dreaded union of Church and State? The mere reading of a Scripture passage at the opening of a school does by no means reach the real demands of religious instruction. It is valuable as a symbol of free inquiry, and as a token of reverence for the still open word of God. Let us cling to the Bible in the schools as a sign that, as yet, the word of God is not 'bound.' But Christians surely cannot be satisfied that religion is sufficiently incorporated into the training of our youth, if a service so brief and often imperfectly performed, as that of opening the schools with a chapter of the Bible, be all that the public-school system permits.

It is clear that something must be done to supplement the defect.

And how shall this be accomplished? Let parents, it is said, train their children at home. We reply, there are tens of thousands who cannot or will not do it. Let the churches do it? Yes. This is the true answer. But how? By parochial schools? Much as we would delight in the prospect of seeing a thorough and extensive parochial school system, with an adequate corps of teachers exclusively devoted to the work, is it not clear that it must be for a long time too limited in extent, to furnish the requisite amount of education? What remains then, at present, but the systematic teachings of the Sabbath-school, put into the most efficient hands that can be found for the work: hands strong enough to grapple with its difficulties, numerous enough to master its extent, self-

denied enough to bear its real burdens, and hopeful enough to wait for its rewards?

For this employment is as arduous as it is honourable. No common qualifications will meet the exigencies of certain departments of this work. We must subsidize the most capable, because even the most capable will find it is no child's play. Knowledge of the springs of human action, promptitude in confronting the prejudices of ignorance and depravity, firmness in wielding authority, all inspired by a persistent Christian wisdom and love, are absolutely necessary to cope with a large class of youth. Take, for instance, those who now swarm in some of our large cities, and who, but for this corrective agency, will grow up into brutal and ferocious enemies of society. Many of these outcasts, these city Arabs as they have been called, have refused the advantages of the public schools; and many have been ejected from them as incorrigible: and yet they may be, for they have been, reclaimed by judicious treatment. Ignorance and brutality, so precocious and scornful of restraint that they met the first advances of the teacher with mockery, obscenity, blasphemy, and even violence, have been tamed by the perseverance of Christian wisdom, wielded by Christian love. But it requires skill, as well as zeal, to do this. It is akin to the work of the physician who is called to cope with dangerous and disgusting maladies. No surface treatment will answer, no feeble and timid practice. It needs the best hands, and in the name of Christ, we call for them.

This is the supplementary work, which the defects of our public-school system—call them unavoidable defects if you will—force upon the teaching church.

But I will detain you no longer. I have essayed to

point out some of the various bearings of the great scheme of Sabbath-school teaching, and on these have founded its claims upon the very best agents which the church contains; and yet I shall sit down with the impression that the half has not been said. Out of each of the elementary principles and facts which abound in the general subject, eloquence might weave an argument and point an appeal, which no Christian conscience, no Christian patriotism could evade. Voices from above and beneath call us to arise and be doing. The living and the dead call us. The past and the future, our country and our God call us. As it respects the grand Truth of truths which underlies all these appeals, the Truth that Salvation, in its most comprehensive meaning, is the heritage of those only "who know the joyful sound," who receive the faithful saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"—I should be indeed insulting your knowledge and zeal were I to attempt to argue that this Truth is to be recognised from first to last. Neither will any whom I address, question that this Truth, with its blessed fruits, is for the people; for the many not the few. I do not address the scoffing infidel, who despises this truth,—nor the luxurious selfish religionist, who despises the masses,—nor the self-confident politician, who considers our institutions, those free institutions and those free schools so much lauded yet so little understood—as sufficient to make a good and enduring nation. I have spoken to those who know that it is not the power to read, but the quality of what is read, that will make men wise; who know that the arts may flourish, while those who produce the works of art may live in ignorance and vice; who know that literature may shed a brilliant light, which may nevertheless be no better than the phosphorescence



which streams from corruption, and proves the progress of social decomposition. And what can hinder this? The inculcations of the Gospel alone. This is our confession of faith as Christians, and as republicans. And who shall inculcate the Gospel? Who but those that value it? And who are these? You, Christian parent—you, Christian pastor—you, Christian teacher. The field of labour is so large as to require all possible working agents; the evils to be assailed are of various growths, in various stages, and require all possible instrumentalities, employed at the best times and in the best modes. The teeming land, like a flooded river bank, must have drainage and cultivation, or it will breed pestilence. Ignorance of God, and of the terms of salvation, and of the common principle of morals, is the mountain under which human beings are crushed, and this is the mountain for our faith to remove. Christian knowledge is the lever, the grace of God our strength. We must do more than study the philosophy of our system: we must apply it with a will.

I have but two thoughts to add.

*Hopefully*—hopefully go forth into the vineyard, even though it be to some of you the eleventh hour. Hopefully, I say—for great things have already been accomplished through this instrumentality. This great land has been a-peopling with peculiar rapidity, and under peculiar, and in some respects unfavourable, conditions. What hordes of the ignorant and destitute have been brought to our shores for fifty years! Where now are they and their children? Why have they not swamped the ship? The true answer is full of hope. It is because they were met by circumstances, moral and social, which were favourable to the removal of their mental and bodily destitutions. They met schools, books, churches, freedom,

industry—all teaching self-respect and self-reliance. The tide swelled out westward: the forest gave way to the farm: the village, the town, the city, have grown upon the haunts of the wild beast. The progress has been the marvel of the world, for its rapidity and yet orderliness. Carried along from point to point, such a population might have been expected to ignore entirely the necessity of religion and learning, and they would have done so, had not the previous impulse of the land toward learning and religion, been too strong to be ignored. So the church, the school-house, the Bible, the teacher, the missionary have gone with or followed in the wake of the caravans; and where they rested, the banner of truth has been set up. And what has been the result? Not perfect indeed, but undeniably great. It was something to overtake the growing population with the most scanty means of moral influence; but the statistics of the last census reveal the almost incredible fact, that accommodation for public worship has been provided by the people at the rate of millions of dollars, and that the principle of voluntary contribution has erected one church edifice for about every six hundred and fifty persons of our whole population of nearly twenty-three millions. The bearings of these facts, I cannot stay to point out.

Again—I have a word of *warning* as well as of hope. The work is not done. Far from it: we have made only a promising beginning. We must not rest contented with past efforts, for that would be akin to the folly of living upon a past reputation. We must remember that there are many streams to bridge, many hills to lay low, before the highway of truth can be completed. Instructed by the voice of God's providence, echoing the teachings of his word, we must remember that we are in

danger from our very prosperity. It is true that commerce and art and agriculture hurry us on rapidly. The nation is already heated, but it is with the heat of a fever. The rush is already strong, in some quarters, toward fearful dangers. The train, filled with eager and joyous travellers, has to pass sharp curves and deep streams. What if the draw be open? What if the signal of danger be disregarded?

A materializing luxury, a depraved literature, a false philosophy, a corrupting prosperity, an ill-used liberty, a wily superstition—these are some of the chasms into which young America may plunge, against which young America must be guarded.

Lend a hand—lend a hand—to kindle the signal fires!

**THE END.**

23 APR 68

## **Two Hundred Sunday-school Missionaries.**

**MORE** than two hundred Sunday-school Missionaries should be employed this year, in the

**Western States, California, Oregon, and  
other Territories,**

BY

**The American Sunday-school Union,**  
to establish new Sunday-schools in destitute places, re-visit those before formed, re-supply them with books, &c. But without a large increase of contributions

**Not one half the number can be sent out.**

The Board are ready to commission, instruct, and send the men forth, but this cannot be done until the funds are supplied to sustain them in their self-denying labour. The Board therefore appeal

**To the Friends of Sunday-schools,**

AND TO

**All who desire the prosperity of our Country,**

To exercise an enlarged liberality towards carrying forward this most necessary and important work.

For a full statement of the reasons for, and the manner in which this branch of their operations is conducted, reference is made to the 26th Annual Report of the Board.

Churches, Sabbath-schools, Bible Classes, Benevolent Sewing Circles, &c., as well as individuals of all denominations of Christians, may help in this work. Some Sunday-schools, and some individuals, undertake to sustain a Missionary for the best working season of a year by the contribution of \$150, and others for a whole year with \$300.

Donations may be sent to

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