

THE DESERT ROCK.

Rock of the desert, mourning still  
Thy streams the thirsting soul to fill  
Rock of the desert now as full  
Of living water, pure and cool  
We stand beside thy stream.

Bright water of eternity,  
We come, we come, to drink of thee,  
The voice of welcome that we hear,  
The voice dispelling every fear,  
Is, "Whosoever will."

River of life, upon thy bank  
We sit and of thy waters drink;  
The murmur of thy sparkling wave  
Speaks still of Him who came to save,  
Who bids us drink and live.

Donor.

THE RELIGIOUS TRAINING OF THE YOUNG.

READ BY REV. R. HAMILTON, AT A CONFERENCE ON SABBATH SCHOOL WORK HELD, BY THE PRESBYTERY OF STRATFORD, ON 17TH DEC. 1872, AND ORDERED TO BE PRINTED AND CIRCULATED.

There are three things about which there is no difference of opinion among professing Christians, namely: The young should be taught religious truth. The parents are naturally the best fitted to instruct the young in religious truth. And the Church should take a deep interest in the religious training of the young. Thoughts suggested by these propositions may for a little probably occupy our attention.

I. The young should be taught religious truth.

Sentimentality is not always the truth. Morbid hymns, with a religious tone running through them like a gilded cord, do not always teach the truth. Tales of innocent children with wonderful religious precocity and early happy deaths seldom teach the truth. The facts of history, of arithmetic, of algebra, of sciences may be useful in their place, but they are not the truth which is needful to every child.

The truth which all should know is contained only in the book of revelation which God has given us, and its contents should be made known to the young. There are many reasons why this thought should be pressed on men's attention, when books are plentiful as autumn leaves. The Bible is abundant, but in the midst of abundance multitudes are ignorant of its contents; to many it is an old book which has been lying a hand ever since they remember, of which they have read pieces now and again, and suppose they have read it with sufficient care: and few desire to read a book the second time when so many are at hand which have not been once read. Then there is the delusive hope, arising from the thought, because the Bible is always within our reach we can leave the reading of it to a more convenient season, but must at the first opportunity read the book from the library which is to be returned by an appointed day, so that in this way all the time at command for reading is occupied and the Bible is neglected. The human mind is apt to be frivolous and readily gratified, for a little, with phantoms of imagination which have no stability in them. The facts of the Bible are solid and present realities without fun. They have nothing which is much fitted to make hearts, who love not God, weep over, nor anything to make the frivolous laugh, but facts are recorded there which are much fitted to make reasonable men gravely ponder, to make thoughtful men mourn, and to make believing and grateful men rejoice: The record of man's creation, his subjection to a merciful law, his rebellion and consequent exclusion from his Maker to a condition of hopeless despair involving his race, are facts which should be known in order that the mind might be able to comprehend the realities of subsequent revelation concerning judgment and mercy, the significant condemnation of Cain and acceptance of the offering of Abel, the destruction of the world and the saving of Noah, the overwhelming of the Egyptians and the emancipation of Israel, the death of a rebellious generation in the wilderness, and the entrance of a more obedient one into the promised land; the captivity of a nation for their sins, yet a seed preserved, and according to promise brought back to the city of their fathers; the abandonment of that nation to the horrors of war, famine and slavery for their rejection of the Son of God and the proclamation of forgiveness to a perishing world. These are facts God desires men to know. They have a special relation to man's mental and spiritual health now, and his future and everlasting condition. They are the truths which make wise unto salvation. They should be taught to the young.

II. The parents are naturally the best fitted to teach the young religious truth. There may be exceptions, but they do not weaken the truth of the proposition. There are many parents not so qualified, mentally, to instruct their children, as some others may be; some parents have less glowing zeal for the salvation of their children than have some individuals, distinguished for their burning love and energetic devotedness to the everlasting welfare of the young; yet, notwithstanding this, the general rule is parents are better fitted to instruct their children religious truth than others, and because of this God has assigned them this work.

By what is already said we may see that the teaching of Scripture on this point is sufficiently plain. The teaching of nature is not less plain.

No parents having the love of God and the overlasting well-being of their children prevailing their hearts will delay religious instruction until they discover some written law imperatively commanding them. Although it had not been written "Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," love to Christ, love to the souls of their children would prompt them to tell how God has loved and dealt with men from the beginning, how Christ has suffered for their salvation, how spiritual health may be found for the soul, how an everlasting inheritance is to be secured. True love will constrain to these efforts. Men do not seek for a written commandment before they feed and clothe the bodies of their children; common natural affection is the law which leads to the performance of that duty; a law similar to this will rule in those who love the souls of their children and will move them to put forth efforts in order that the minds of the young may be supplied with suitable food. Parents who do not feel this law of love constraining them to strive for the spiritual good of those entrusted to their care, would not be much influenced by additional written commandments enjoining the duty. If the law written in natural affection be so effaced by callous indifference that it fails to enkindle an earnest desire, sufficiently powerful to lead to vigorous effort for the spiritual welfare of the child, it is not likely that any additional injunctions of revelation would be heard.

This work is not only assigned to, but parents can teach the facts of Scripture. That they cannot is an excuse often presented for neglecting the duty. In most cases the inability consists in the want of

willings, and has, in many cases, resulted in diminishing the capacity where a little more diligence in the use of opportunity would have made apt teachers of those who now stand before us on the ground of their defeat. The defeat is generally the result of past neglect. To resort to the non-observance of a sin as an excuse is not a good plea for the continued neglect of a duty. In many cases, however, the excuse is groundless. It is not true that parents possessing the Bible and able to read it cannot teach its contents. They may not be able to interpret many of its sayings, but they can tell what these sayings are. They can read the words with their children, call their special attention to portions, and endeavor to get them to know the leading facts of its history and doctrines. This a child can do for a child, and if parents would do a child's work the young in our land would make great advancement beyond their present attainment in Scriptural knowledge. By such means the simple facts of the Bible would find a place in the memory; and if to this were added, which, by a little diligence may easily be done, a knowledge of the Shorter Catechism, which children can commit to memory without much difficulty, then we would find the young furnished with truths much fitted to render them morally strong. Surely parents can get their children to read the Word; they can get them to commit the Catechism to memory, though they may not be able to explain as it is supposed a Professor of Theology can; yet doing what they can they will succeed in communicating a large amount of religious truth. To these efforts let there be added a consistent life and earnest prayer, and we have in activity the best means for teaching religion to the young.

Lively parent may not have the accomplishments of those who excel in making their instructions peculiarly interesting to the young, but this is no reason why the abilities possessed should not be employed to supply the necessities of the souls given us to feed. Though the mother may not excel in cooking, this is not a reason why she should allow her child to perish with hunger. Let her supply the nourishing food at hand though it may not be so delicately prepared. Should parents not have the skill of the professional tailor or milliner, this is not a reason why they should allow their children to remain naked; let them cover them with the warm clothing at hand, though it may not have the finish of the artist. If parents have not the knowledge of the learned nor the eloquence of the orator, with their Bible in their hand and a loving heart within their breast they have the mightiest instruments for teaching their children religious truth. They have opportunity and power to teach Bible facts which none else have. The opportunity is daily; it may be brief because of the pressure of other duties, but if the brief opportunity is well employed much knowledge may be communicated. If twenty minutes are spent in feeding the body with the bread that perisheth, may not four be spent in feeding the mind with the bread found in God's Word. Such daily instruction is better adapted to fix religious truth on the young mind than is any other, and none can give this daily instruction but the parents and guardians who are with them "in the house and by the way."

About the general tenor of these statements there may not be much difference of opinion; however the fact is too plain that these duties are imperfectly discharged by those whom we believe God has specially appointed to this work, and consequently many are growing up shamefully ignorant of our most holy faith. Many good men have felt this and have endeavored to supply the lack by instituting Bible classes and Sabbath Schools, and through these been instrumental in giving much Scriptural knowledge to many who have been neglected by their natural guardians. It may be said that Sabbath Schools are a necessity which has arisen from parental neglect, yet we feel it would be a sin in the Church not to help Sabbath School work, though convinced it is not the chief nor the best method for teaching the young religious truth, even though we may see there is danger of Sabbath Schools, in this matter, usurping the parents' place. The two facts must not be ignored by the church, viz:—the duty is much neglected by parents and there is a danger that Sabbath Schools stop beyond their sphere and increase parental neglect. They have now thrown around them much that is fascinating to both old and young, in numbers collected together, in libraries containing much that is questionable, in anniversaries and picnics where things are done we cannot commend; with such fascinations as these there is danger that parents overlook their personal duty to their children and hand over their religious instruction to the Sabbath School teacher.

We profess not to have the discernment of a "Seer," but we may be safe in asserting that should the general tendency of Sabbath Schools be to increase the neglect of parents, soon they shall become more a curse than a blessing to the community. However, they ought not to have this effect. In their design there is nothing which should lead to this result. They come to the rescue of neglected children and an aid to parents in the religious training of their families, but not to encourage any to diminish effort in discharging the duties God has enjoined. However, we know that man is prone to abuse every good purpose. When those naturally indolent are spontaneously aided by another they are tempted to slacken their efforts and trust to that aid and feel that they have been delivered from an irksome burden.

III. The church should take a deep interest in the religious training of the young. In the circumstances she has need to keep the two facts in memory: parental neglect and the danger of Sabbath Schools increasing that neglect. She has need to keep God's method of training the young definitely before the minds of her members, and before the world, so that the evil existing may not be increased. Office bearers in the church have an important duty to discharge in this matter. It is evident that she has to care for the young and not leave them to the varied methods which may be adopted by zealous men, but neither wise nor thoroughly loyal

to the Word of God. The instruction given to Peter, after his restoration, we regard binding on the church in all ages. "Feed my lambs." Not only are fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; the church also is to feed the lambs. In some way they are to be recognized and instructed, that is suitable to their circumstances and capacity, by the office-bearers of the church. The method in which this is to be done is not so clear as we would desire to see it. We have occasionally sermons to the young, but these are too seldom to meet the necessity. We have Bible classes which are means of much profit to those who embrace them. We have Sabbath-Schools where a considerable amount of scriptural knowledge is communicated. Through these means the church is endeavoring to fulfil Christ's command; but we have the thought forced upon us that these efforts are not the out-going of the will of the church as such; they are the efforts of individuals of whose work the church has formed too low an estimate, so that in many cases the Sabbath-School teacher is not recognized in his work by the church. By many sessions and congregations there has been no effort to establish and maintain Sabbath-Schools. It is rare to find in our session or congregational records any resolution bearing on Sabbath-School work. Many Sabbath-Schools have been established and maintained by a few combining together for the good of the young where the office-bearers, as such, have done nothing. Nothing has been done to provide a supply of teachers; nothing done to secure sound teaching; so that the Sabbath-School is regarded as something outside the range of church work, and members of the church feel under no obligation to recognize and value these means of instruction. This is not a satisfactory state of things, nor does it seem to be in accordance with the command, Feed my lambs.

We have not any system alongside church work which seems better adapted to fulfil the command than is the Sabbath-School, and on this account we feel the church should do more in the way of adopting and recognizing it as her own instrument in doing the Master's will. We are persuaded that it is by adopting it as a necessary instrument of the church for training the young in the knowledge of divine truth, we can lead them to have a higher regard to our peculiar principles as a section of Christ's Church, and arrest the evil of substituting Sabbath-School teaching in the room of parental training. With this view let the church openly claim control of the Sabbath-Schools, and if there cannot be found among her office-bearers persons capable and willing to instruct the young, let her seek such instructors as are judged worthy of confidence; and if such cannot be found to volunteer, let her select, train, set apart, and maintain one or more individuals in a congregation who may be appointed over this business, who may form a centre of united action, and devote their talents to devising methods and organizing means which may be put in practice along with others whom the church may trust as religious instructors. Let these aid parents co-operate and encourage each other to give a more extensive knowledge of Scripture truth.

Such a proposal may at present seem utopian, but we feel persuaded that something like this will be adopted by the church when more alive to her duty. Many more should be actively doing religious work in connection with the church so that she may make headway against the united streams of evil in which she is placed as a life-boat. At present Sabbath-Schools are in a transition state. There is something about their practical working which indicates want of stability. They have much of the world's ways of keeping up an interest in them, in exhibitions, in the ceaseless change of hymnology, in the perpetual craving for new amusement in music, and in the want of respect for the great design of the Sabbath by the extensive introduction of semi-religious books into the libraries. Such a state of things cannot last. There is too little knowledge of the Bible communicated in our Sabbath-Schools to form a bulwark against the sceptical romance reading which now envelopes society with a kind of hazy feeling that truth and fiction mean the same thing. The believers of truth may not despair in the midst of this transition. Truth is clear as well as great and shall prevail; only let those who have it fear from it the world's wrappings so that it may appear in its native brilliancy and cut away for itself through this fog raised by vain imaginations. It is still quick and powerful and able to divide between soul and spirit, and to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. Believers have need to be faithful in holding forth the truth: this they can do only when their own feet are firmly planted on the "Rock" which moves not amidst all the surging billows of depraved passions raised.

As office bearers in the church we have an important duty to discharge in connection with Sabbath-Schools. To place ourselves in opposition to them because they may not be as we desire would not only be folly, but sin; amidst much carelessness in family training they are the best thing we have at present to supply the lack. They are doing much good and form an obstacle in the stream of Bible ignorance which the church was slow in arresting. In some measure she has risen to see the neglect, but more is yet to be done—by aspirations, nobler efforts, greater facilities, better accommodation, increased funds are needed for lifting up the young to a higher sphere in Bible knowledge.

All these things to which we have made reference may be said to consist only of bare instrumentality not more powerful in themselves than so many dry bones. We forget not that these are given no life, but pray that the efforts might result in a shaking so bone would come to his bone; that sinew and flesh would come upon them and skin cover them, then so far would our work be successful though lifeless. Let our desires go out for the breath of the Lord that he would make these bones a living power in his church for the quickening of the rising generation. We attach much importance to a wise instrumentality and believe that the nearer

it is to the instructions of God's Word the more successful it is likely to be, but we believe not that instrumentally can give what must be sought for in all religious instruction. It is the work of the Spirit of God. He only can lift up a standard which can effectually oppose the enemy coming in as a flood, but we have much to do in the matter, for we possess the Word which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

CHRIST'S TENDERNESS TO THE WEAK.

It is enjoined upon Christians that they strengthen themselves in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, but how many there are who neglect this duty, and all their lives travel on their journey like Bunyan's pilgrims feeble-minded and ready-to-halt. They are like the bruised reed and smoking flax—weak feeble, suffering Christians—babes and not strong men in Christ Jesus. But such is the wonderful condescension and sympathy of the Lord Jesus Christ that to even such Christians he gives precious promises. Here we have one, for it is the Saviour that speaks here, hence these words are attributed to him by the Evangelist Matthew, xii, 20. It is thus "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." That is where ever he finds a spark of grace he will watch over it with care.

Indeed he knows that it is the weak, feeble Christian that specially needs his help. The father cares more tenderly for the feeble infant than for the strong robust one. If it cannot walk alone, he extends his hand and gently leads it. So it is with the Saviour. "He carries the lamb in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with you." Paul was in great trouble; he had a thorn in the flesh, which made him feel very weak, and he prayed to God for help and the answer came, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And such was his experience of the strengthening grace of the Saviour that he said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak then I am strong." While feeble Christians should seek strength, and all should desire to become strong men and women in Christ Jesus, yet there is no room for despondency on the part of the weakest saint. There are many things a weak Christian cannot do. He may not be able, like Gideon, to kill the Giant Despair, but he can live in the fear of the Lord, and so claim the promise, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." The father pities and helps the weak, suffering child. So our heavenly Father will pity and help this weak, feeble child, even though it is fitly compared to the bruised reed and smoking flax. Listen to the cheering words: "Fear not thou worm of Jacob." You are weak and feeble, it is true, but "thou shalt thresh the mountain." My strength shall be perfected in your weakness.—Church at Home.

DOES GOD EVER SCOLD?

"Mother," said a little girl, "does God ever scold?" She had seen her mother, under circumstances of strong provocation, lose her temper, and give way to the impulse of passion; and pondering thoughtfully for a moment, she asked: "Mother, does God ever scold?" The question was so abrupt and startling, that it arrested the mother's attention almost with a shock: and she asked: "Why, my child, what makes you ask that question?"

"Because, mother, you have always told me that God is good, and that we should try to be like him and I should like to know if he ever scolds?"

"No, my child, of course not."

"Well, I'm glad he don't; for scolding always hurts me, even if I feel I have done wrong and it don't seem to me that I could love God very much if he scolded."

The mother felt rebuked before her simple child. Never before had she heard so forcible a lecture on the evils of scolding. The words of the child sank deep into her heart, and she turned away from the innocent face of the little one to hide the tears that gathered to her eyes. Children are quick observers; and the child, seeing the effect of her words, eagerly inquired: "Why do you cry, mother? Was it naughty for me to say what I said?"

"No, my love—it was all right: I was only thinking I might have spoken more kindly, and not have hurt your feelings by speaking so hastily and in anger as did."

"O mother, you are so good and kind, only I wish there were not so many bad things to make you feel and talk as you did just now. It makes me feel away from you so far—as if I could not come near you as I do when you speak kindly: and oh, sometimes I fear I shall be put off so far I can never get back again."

"No, my child, don't say that," said the mother, unable to keep back her tears, as she felt how her tones had repelled the little one from her heart; and the child, wondering what so affected her parent, but intuitively feeling it was a case requiring sympathy, reached up, and throwing her arms about her mother's neck, whispered:—

"Mother, dear mother, do I make you cry? Do you love me?"

"Oh yes I love you more than I can tell," said the parent, clasping the little one to her bosom, "and I will try never to scold you again, but if I have to reprove my child, I will try to do it, not in anger, but kindly, deeply as I may be grieved that she has done wrong."

It is to the instructions of God's Word the more successful it is likely to be, but we believe not that instrumentally can give what must be sought for in all religious instruction. It is the work of the Spirit of God. He only can lift up a standard which can effectually oppose the enemy coming in as a flood, but we have much to do in the matter, for we possess the Word which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

CHRIST'S TENDERNESS TO THE WEAK.

It is enjoined upon Christians that they strengthen themselves in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, but how many there are who neglect this duty, and all their lives travel on their journey like Bunyan's pilgrims feeble-minded and ready-to-halt. They are like the bruised reed and smoking flax—weak feeble, suffering Christians—babes and not strong men in Christ Jesus. But such is the wonderful condescension and sympathy of the Lord Jesus Christ that to even such Christians he gives precious promises. Here we have one, for it is the Saviour that speaks here, hence these words are attributed to him by the Evangelist Matthew, xii, 20. It is thus "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." That is where ever he finds a spark of grace he will watch over it with care.

Indeed he knows that it is the weak, feeble Christian that specially needs his help.

The father cares more tenderly for the feeble infant than for the strong robust one. If it cannot walk alone, he extends his hand and gently leads it. So it is with the Saviour. "He carries the lamb in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with you." Paul was in great trouble; he had a thorn in the flesh, which made him feel very weak, and he prayed to God for help and the answer came, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And such was his experience of the strengthening grace of the Saviour that he said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak then I am strong." While feeble Christians should seek strength, and all should desire to become strong men and women in Christ Jesus, yet there is no room for despondency on the part of the weakest saint. There are many things a weak Christian cannot do. He may not be able, like Gideon, to kill the Giant Despair, but he can live in the fear of the Lord, and so claim the promise, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." The father pities and helps the weak, suffering child. So our heavenly Father will pity and help this weak, feeble child, even though it is fitly compared to the bruised reed and smoking flax. Listen to the cheering words: "Fear not thou worm of Jacob." You are weak and feeble, it is true, but "thou shalt thresh the mountain." My strength shall be perfected in your weakness.—Church at Home.

DOES GOD EVER SCOLD?

"Mother," said a little girl, "does God ever scold?" She had seen her mother, under circumstances of strong provocation, lose her temper, and give way to the impulse of passion; and pondering thoughtfully for a moment, she asked: "Mother, does God ever scold?" The question was so abrupt and startling, that it arrested the mother's attention almost with a shock: and she asked: "Why, my child, what makes you ask that question?"

"Because, mother, you have always told me that God is good, and that we should try to be like him and I should like to know if he ever scolds?"

"No, my child, of course not."

"Well, I'm glad he don't; for scolding always hurts me, even if I feel I have done wrong and it don't seem to me that I could love God very much if he scolded."

The mother felt rebuked before her simple child. Never before had she heard so forcible a lecture on the evils of scolding. The words of the child sank deep into her heart, and she turned away from the innocent face of the little one to hide the tears that gathered to her eyes. Children are quick observers; and the child, seeing the effect of her words, eagerly inquired: "Why do you cry, mother? Was it naughty for me to say what I said?"

"No, my love—it was all right: I was only thinking I might have spoken more kindly, and not have hurt your feelings by speaking so hastily and in anger as did."

"O mother, you are so good and kind, only I wish there were not so many bad things to make you feel and talk as you did just now. It makes me feel away from you so far—as if I could not come near you as I do when you speak kindly: and oh, sometimes I fear I shall be put off so far I can never get back again."

"No, my child, don't say that," said the mother, unable to keep back her tears, as she felt how her tones had repelled the little one from her heart; and the child, wondering what so affected her parent, but intuitively feeling it was a case requiring sympathy, reached up, and throwing her arms about her mother's neck, whispered:—

"Mother, dear mother, do I make you cry? Do you love me?"

"Oh yes I love you more than I can tell," said the parent, clasping the little one to her bosom, "and I will try never to scold you again, but if I have to reprove my child, I will try to do it, not in anger, but kindly, deeply as I may be grieved that she has done wrong."