

you know that may be instructive to them; and endeavour to give them really to see the odiousness, the excessive odiousness of sin; and lead them to that power whereby alone grace may be implanted to counteract their natural corruption; for we cannot tell how soon grace may begin in a poor child. God be praised, in this sacred volume we are told that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God could obtain strength. And while the Pharisees in their spite and enmity could cry out against Christ, "Crucify Him, crucify Him," the little children could cry out in the temple, and say, "Hosanna to David's Son, and to David's Lord." I say you cannot tell how soon God begins with the human mind. I did think, till I considered it more deeply, that we were carrying things a little to the extreme by the education of children in infant schools. I now think quite otherwise; I am very well convinced we cannot begin with them too early; the earlier they are brought under the regulations of a religious education the better; aye, better indeed for us who are living in the present generation, and infinitely better for the children themselves, who are to form the next generation, when that Divine knowledge, through the blessing of God on your instructions, has been so communicated to the mind that that fine glorious passage is accomplished in their hearts, when they are made in their early days to "abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good."

From these considerations, my dear brethren, you will be taught, that with tenderness of heart, and affection for the good of the souls of the children, nothing is done well but as it is done in the spirit of love. Love is the fulfilling of the law; love melts, and nothing else but love can melt the hardest heart, the stony heart; and make the heart of stone become a heart of flesh. You will dwell on the lovely story how Christ Jesus came and offered Himself a sacrifice for sin. You will tell the child, in the language he can best understand, the need of being acquainted with the Saviour, how they should love Him, and what obligations they are under to obey Him. Then you will lead them to the perceptive part of the word of God; for that is the second part of the business. First, you teach the child what he is, and what he must be, before he can be a good child; and when he is made a good child, after grace has possessed the heart, then you may teach him the practice of goodness; tell him how he should behave himself. You cannot sow good seed in uncultivated ground: let the ground be first well fallowed and broken up. O God! send down the conviction of sin on the children of the rising generation; and then we will do all we can to show, among such little sinners as these are, what grace there is in Christ to change their poor little hearts, and to teach them in their early days to be devoted to the love and service of the living God. I don't think you do a quarter the good you otherwise would in merely teaching a child to read, unless you remember that yours is a Sabbath-day school, and teach them to read, and to understand what they read, that they may be the better for it.

Now, it is a matter of fact that the rising generation will be an extremely corrupted generation, unless the grace of God, that brings salvation, be early communicated to their hearts, "teaching them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts." Faith teaches this; but we don't understand anything about grace but as it is divinely communicated from above. See, therefore, that children are taught to look for this gift, that they may be instructed in those things that relate to their everlasting peace. And though we should not be proud of it, yet we should be thankful for it. Consider the blessings that are frequently the result of all this. I thank God that we have some (the Lord make us very humble) labouring in the ministry of the word who had their first instruction in our Sunday-schools; and there are a great number of good people who have got themselves well associated by being connected with good people, and connected constantly with each other, whereby we have those that watch over each other wisely and well. I look upon it they cannot do otherwise than live to God, since the Lord has honoured them by placing them among the honourable tribe of Sunday-school Teachers.

Yes, my dear brethren, you are doing an abundance of good; and you know not what good may yet be done. The more you are filled with the grace of the Gospel to teach, the better you will be enabled to do this in a good and spiritual manner. Oh, may the Lord send down upon your dear souls ten thousand thousand times more of that spirit of wisdom and understanding, that sweetness of Divine knowledge, that love to the precious souls of men, that love, one towards

another, and especially towards the children of the poor; and may He set your tongues at a gracious liberty, and make you find that though dear is a sacrifice made by attending these schools, yet the Lord is pleased to make the sacrifice a pleasant one, in giving you to see that your labour, as you have already been told, "shall not be in vain in the Lord." I remember that a poor man once met me at the corner of the street, and produced before me a little bit of paper, asking, "Will you be so good as read this for me?" I said to him, "Can't you read yourself?" He replied, "No, sir, I was not born in the days in which there were many Sunday-schools; but my children can read very prettily, and they read to us after I have done my labour; and we never were so happy as since we have taken to read religious books, to look into our Bibles, and to pray that we may be governed by their contents." The Lord grant that you may have many such instances as this, in making many a family that is a hell full of wickedness, to be a little heaven, by God Himself dwelling in the midst of it; for we live unto God when the Spirit lives in us. Hence it is that you will judge that it is in vain to instruct any of the rising generation but as they themselves receive early instruction from God, and are taught the necessity of being themselves regenerated and born from above. And indeed the doctrines of Divine grace, though mysterious ("How can these things be?") may be explained, and I doubt not will be, in language of that description as that children of an early growth may be led to understand it. Cannot you tell them of the pride and anger of their hearts, working in them the evils that are produced there? And cannot they be told that these evils come from the evil nature within them? Cannot they be told how grace can subdue these iniquities; how God can give them early repentance for early crimes; and how He can renew their hearts in a wonderful, wise, and gracious manner, even in their first setting forth in life? God be praised, we have instances set before us sometimes of this sort, in a remarkable, sweet, and happy manner.

Alas, my dear brethren, that I cannot now serve you as I would. My strength is gone, but my heart and affections are where they always have been; and I am particularly anxious to drop this, my last testimony, on behalf of your important office which you have undertaken, in instructing the poor man's child, and the present rising generation. Go on, my dear hearers! God bless you in every effort! Pray much for His Holy Spirit, that you may have the spirit of eminently wise holiness dwelling in your minds, and that you may be taught how to instruct children in the best of wisdom in their early days.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast,"—don't be wavering in any part of your duty—"unmoveable," that will prove that you are steadfast, indeed, if there is no moving you from it. We cannot imagine how much we increase in the work of the Lord, but as we abound in it. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." Oh, there was a time when preaching to me was but trifling work; I was very glad to go from town to town, and from village to village, and preach the Gospel to as many as I could. You are young; use your youth for God and His glory while you have time. Remember that it is in time alone that you are to do good. We can do more good on earth than we shall be able to do in heaven, it is done beforehand there; there will be no good to be done in heaven; there will be a good deal of good to receive there, but it is all done; so remember this is the time to do good. Here you are amidst the enemies of God, and here you may prove His glorious strength. May the blessings of the eternal God be abundantly poured down upon you, that you may always abound in the work of the Lord; and as you have already proved, you shall prove that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Many a good preacher has been already raised up from Sunday-schools. I will not mention some names that I could mention; and for this reason you will say, that they were poor Sunday-school boys before they became useful and efficacious ministers of Christ; but that should not deter us either. Some Sunday-school teachers have been called from that occupation to the work in which they are now stationed, and which they are filling with credit, and to the eternal salvation of the souls of many.

May the God of all grace give you all the blessings that you need in the work; and may the blessing of God be with you all the evermore. Amen.—Reprinted, with a few abbreviations, from Rev. V. J. Charlesworth's "Life of Rowland Hill," published by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton.