

And here let me say a word to those who may possibly think that the work of teaching the young can be with propriety deferred to a later period than youth; for I know there are some so warped in their judgments as to maintain that it is unfair to their children to teach them Christianity before they are able to form conclusions for themselves.

This idea I cannot better combat than by quoting what Coleridge says of himself. "Thelwell," he says, "thought it very unfair to influence his child's mind by inculcating any opinions before it had come to the years of discretion to choose for itself. I shewed him, he says, my garden, and told him it was my botanical garden. How so? said he; it is covered with weeds. O, I replied, that is only because it has not yet come to the years of discretion and choice. The weeds, you see, have taken the liberty to grow, and I thought it unfair to prejudice the soil in favor of roses and strawberries." This is the truth earnestly and forcibly taught, and I will only add that, in the garden of a child's heart, something must, by the inevitable law of nature, grow; and if you, its parent, sow not there the roses and strawberries, depend upon it the wild weeds of passion will grow, and at last utterly destroy the dearest treasure you possess.

I am quite aware that the Sunday School is regarded by many as a sort of pious and laudable effort on the part of a few well-disposed people to instruct the children of the *poor* and *unfortunate*. Fathers and mothers may even appreciate an effort which removes from their houses all the noisy and unruly members of the family, thereby giving them an afternoon of profound quiet and repose. For this and other reasons, they may consider Sunday Schools, if not highly important, at least benevolent and worthy of *some* encouragement; but that the mass of professing Christians understand, or even feebly grasp, the tremendous importance and absolute necessity of the Sunday School, I utterly deny. And this conclusion I arrive at, not from any direct assertion on the part of Christians generally, but from the coolness, the apathy and even contempt exhibited by some toward this all important movement.

No one, I trust, will imagine that I think little of