The Sunday School and the Conversion of Children.

[A paper read by Mrs. I. E. Bill, jr., at the Yarmouth Co. Baptist Sunday School Convention, held at Arcadia, April 24th, 1888, and published by request of that body.]

Our Lord, when on earth, said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." I have often wondered if we, as Sunday school workers, were doing all that we might do to bring the children to Jesus. Are we earnestly and hopefully seeking their salvation? Rather, are we not in many cases neglecting this important work? Is there not a good deal of scepticism on the part of many with reference to the *early* conversion of children? I think so; if we may judge by the treatment many of the Lord's little ones receive from older Christians.

But why should the conversion of children be thought an incredible thing? Is the plan of salvation so beyond their comprehension that they cannot grasp it? Rather, are they not likely to lay hold of it more readily than older persons, because it is their *nature to trust?*

On one occasion a servant of God who loved children was addressing a Sunday school, and during his remarks he repeated those sweet words of the Saviour, "Suffer the little children to *come* unto me," when a tiny girl left her seat and walked up to him, thinking he had asked the children to come to him. Just as readily will the children go to Jesus and trust him, when they are made to understand that he is inviting them to come to him; for beautiful and fresh in its simplicity is the faith of little children. Then, too, their hearts are more soft and tender than those of more mature years, and they are more easily won by the sweet story of the Saviour's love.

The Rev. John Todd says: "When can the conscience be reached, if not in childhood? When has God promised that the soul *shall* find him, if not when he is sought early? When will the Holy Spirit impress the heart which you are laboring to subdue, if not when it is the heart of a child?"

The Rev. E. F. Hatfield, D. D., says: "On one occasion when I was talking to a member of my church about several cases of conversion that had recently taken place among the children of the congregation, he said, 'Is *there anything too hard* for the Lord?' 'Too hard!' I replied. 'Why, my dear brother, what a mistake! It is in the case only of a full-grown sinner, whose habits of disobedience and unbelief have been confirmed by constant and long-continued repetition, that such a question is appropriate. In the case of the simple-hearted child and ingenuous youth it is altogether out of place.'"

The question is often asked: "At what age may a child be brought to Christ?" I would say in answer, I think in some cases at a very much earlier age than in others. When a child is old enough to sin, it is old enough to be conscious of sin, and old enough to need a Saviour, and old enough to be led to the Saviour, *and old enough to be lost should it die without the Saviour.* And I believe, if the Saviour were then presented to the little one in all earnestness and faithfulness, in most cases the work would be successful.

The history of the church furnishes many instances of the conversion of young children. Is it not the church's sin that there are not many more? Matthew Henry, the commentator, was converted at eleven years of age; Isaac Watts, the singer in Israel, at nine; Bishop Ball at eleven; Robert Hall at twelve; Dr. Armitage at twelve, and President Edwards at seven. And we all remember the account given by President Elwards of the conversion of Phœbe Bartle when only *four years of age.*

Then there are the wonderful accounts of the conversion of thousands of the little ones in our own times, given by the "Children's Evangelist," the Rev. E. P. Hammond, and many others, which are too well assured to be doubted. But we all know prominent men and women, those who are faithful and efficient in the cause of God, as well as those who occupy more humble places in our churches, who were brought to Christ at a tender age.

Then when we have all these examples before us, how is it we do not, as a rule, expect the early conversion of the children? Why is there this great want of faith in this respect on the part of so many Sunday school workers? It is said, the Lord "did not many mighty works" among his own countrymen, "because of their unbelief." May not *our unbelief* be the reason no more of our scholars are brought to Jesus in childhood? We are too apt to think the little ones incapable of conversion. Dear friends, can it be possible it is the will of our Father in heaven that the little ones should live a single hour in conscious rebellion against him? Is he not rather saying to all the dear children, "They that seek me early shall find me"? Let us see to it that we be not like the disciples, who would keep the little ones from Jesus; but let us be among those who are endeavoring to bring them to him, ever remembering his words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

Then when we consider the *perils* that surround the young, how important it is that they should be gathered into the fold of Christ before the world gains too strong a hold on their affections and habits, before their consciences become seared, and their hearts hardened.

Then, too, the churches need the children. I believe their welfare depends largely on their conversion and ingathering of the young. Those who are now carrying on the work of the churches will, before many years, be passing away, and others will be needed to take up the work. As one has said, "The life of the church is to be perpetuated through the children, and not through the old or middle-aged." The old have only heaven before them. The children have no only heaven, but they have earth too. All life is before them. "*A whole life for Jesus,*" as one said in our conference recently, with reference to some children who were coming into our church. *A whole life to give to Jesus! How much they can do!* And will it not be blessed when at last these dear children can look back and feel that their *early* years, and *all* their years, were given to Jesus and his service.

And now, dear friends, what is our duty in reference to this matter? Is it not to see to it that we are consecrated? Should we not in all our work in this field have this one grand object in view? All our class-work should be in this direction. We should not only teach the lessons, but we should strive to bring them to the hearts and consciences of the children, the precious truths contained therein. It will not do the little ones much good to learn, for instance, about the parable of the "Marriage Feast" if they see no be' than ourselves to come and partake of the Gospel Supper. Sad will it be for the dear children if while learning about the parable of the "Ten Virgins," they are not led to see that their own lamps are trimmed and burning, ready for the Bridegroom when he shall come.

Then, I think we should work personally with the children. I think this kind of work always pays. We should visit them in their homes, when it is possible, and talk and pray with them there. We can then find out their needs. On this point, Mr. Moody says: "Now my experience in the Sunday school has been something like this: that whenever I could find a teacher who was willing to work personally with the children, and get them to learn one by one, and talk with them and pray with them, and pray for them, and then, after they had succeeded—because that kind of work always succeeds—in bringing them to Christ, if they just nursed them and fed them with the sincere milk of the word—instructed them and taught them how Christians ought to live—*that* teacher has always been successful. I never knew such a teacher to fail. But those teachers who never speak to their scholars except in class, and when they are all together, are about as successful as the ministers who never have any inquiry-meetings and who always meet their people in the pulpit and preach to them in a body." If we would be successful in leading the children to Christ we must do a great deal of personal work; there is a mighty power in the hand to hand, face to face effort. Then as we need the Spirit's power in this as in all other Christian work, we cannot be too much in prayer. We should go from our closet to our class. We should pray for our scholars individually; present them by name before the mercy seat.

A very dear friend of mine in London, England, had a large class of young girls, and she had been successful in leading all but one to the Saviour. One night she could not rest; the burden of that one soul was upon her, and she spent the whole night in prayer. In the morning the dear girl came in to tell her teacher that she had found Jesus. What a speedy answer to prayer! But notice it came after the teacher had done some Jacob like wrestling with God for one definite object. The Rev. W. Brock says, "When Dr. Jenner, of Edinburgh, died there was found among his papers, a long list, in his own delicate handwriting, of the children in his congregation, with private marks attached to each name, indicating, no doubt, the fulfilments or disappointments of his hopes concerning them. One can imagine the gentle old man on his knees, with that book before him, laying one name after another before the notice of the Father in heaven, and then going forth to 'feed his lambs.' Little wonder that the children clung to him wherever he came and loved to hear him speak; or that to this day his influence breathes over their hearts, and is fruitful and fragrant in their lives."

An earnest Sunday school teacher had such an abounding faith in the power of prayer that she was accustomed to say, "I have prayed too much for my class for one of them to be lost. I shall have them all. I shall say to Christ at the Judgment: Here am I, and the class thou hast given me." And, although she did not live to see it accomplished, the last one of the sixteen was gathered into the fold of Christ. Happy are those children who have such a teacher!

Fellow-worker, do you so pray for your scholars that you can have this strong faith? Remember those little ones whom you gather around you Sabbath after Sabbath may be lost unless you win them to Christ; for it may be many of those dear children have no one but *you* to talk with them about the Saviour. Many of the children in our Sunday schools have little or no instruction at home. In some cases, even when the children have professed Christian parents, they do not receive that instruction we would expect.

Not many years since, a Christian mother came and asked me to go and talk with her daughter who was dying. "For," said she, "I never could say anything about religion to my children." Let us trust such instances of neglect do not often occur.

Sunday school worker, how vast are your responsibilities! How large are your opportunities! And how great will be your reward if you are faithful to your trust.

"Feed my lambs," says Christ the Shepherd,
Place the food within their reach;
And it may be that the children
You have led with trembling hand,
Will be found among your jewels,
When you reach the better land."

In closing, I would say, there is much to encourage us in our work among the children, when we think of what has already been accomplished; when we think of the multitude of little ones now before the throne singing praises to him whom they learned to love while they were in Sunday school; when we think of the many useful men and women whom the Sunday schools have trained for the churches; when we think of the many dear boys and girls who are now being gathered into the churches through the instrumentality of the Sunday school, and who will be ready to help carry on the work of the churches when the older members are obliged to lay it down. Let us work on; pray on; trust on; remembering that he who gave the *command*, "Feed my lambs," has also given the *promise*, "Lo, I am with you alway."

Live Your Christianity.

Joyously and with splendid abandon live your Christianity in your life, in the whole of it, in the free subjection of your thought to the discipline of Christ, in the surrender of will to his unquestioned sovereignty, in conforming behaviour to his example, in utter detachment from self and the world, and the exquisite play of your new life in his service, and you take the surest course to establish His religion at the springs and sources of the world's life. A bright, joyous religion, filled with the radiance of the love of God, kills despair, kindles hope, slays self, begets obedience to law, and creates a boundless love. "We love because he first loved us." "The love of Christ constrains us not to live to ourselves." The soldier who holds as "contend earnestly for the faith" has in one sentence, brief as a telegram, compact as a general's order, summed up his directions for warfare in the words, "Keep yourself in the love of God." That is the way to take care of the faith. Get out of that love, and shout as you may, fight as you will, you are lost, and the "Faith," so far as you are concerned, is lost too. Sunshine is light, nourishment, medicine. Love is the sunshine of God. Catch the sun. Never wander out of it. Move your positions till you get into it and so that you may keep in it. Do your man-building in its brightness. For your faith is to be used as the soldier uses bread and water, as the invalid the breezes of the sea and of the mountain side, as the sick man the healing medicine, and they are always to be used in the sun. Build yourselves on your faith but in the love of God. That is the builder's living and working "environment." Out of it he and his work perish, in it he builds for time and eternity; and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Here is the first great commandment: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." Better lose all than lose love. He who keeps that supreme. He loses who says one bitter word, writes one selfish line, or moves one inch out of the love of God and his brother. If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his. He may be the Church's, and belong to all the unions of Christendom, and have the applause of all men, but he is not Christ's in so far as he lacks his spirit. We hurt the faith more by hardness and self-will and unbrotherly behaviour than by confused opinions or false definitions. Rivkin says, "We have been taught a religion of pure mercy, and we must either now betray it or learn to defend it by fulfilling it." So did the first Christians defend the faith, filling out its sublime programme with the golden splendours of their devotion, the burning fires of their love to God and to souls, the passionate aggressive efforts to bring all men to the knowledge of him who, by the grace of God, tasted death for everyone.

O Lord Jesus, shed abroad that love in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and fuse our souls in the blessed unity of an unbroken devotion to Thee in the salvation and service of men!

Set Christianity to work in and on others is the second great commandment in the New Testament law. It is palpable beyond all dispute that the saints of the original forty years held that they had received a religion not for show, but for work—not as a creed for debate, but as the power of God unto salvation; a working force intended to renew and conquer. The disciples went everywhere preaching the Word; they had a message, and each was to deliver it. It was his main business in life to see that the good news was heard and understood, and the forms of the Spirit accepted and enjoyed. Christ was attacked, they defended him; misunderstood, they explained him; persecuted, they died for him; unknown, they set him forth.

Again I say if anyone ask me to describe the chief vice of present-day Christendom, I should affirm it to be that men do not believe in Christ Jesus enough to use him and his Gospel always, everywhere, and out and out. They dare not do as he would if he were visibly here, or say what he would say of wealth, and orthodoxy, and ecclesiasticism, and trade, and poverty, and of our inmost selves. We distrust him, not as the Saviour from guilt, but as the Saviour from sinning—from all kinds, and sorts, and degrees of sinning. We keep him out of our politics and go on in wrong; out of our trade, and make bad paper, bad clothes, bad buildings; out of our social life, and grind the poor, and stop our ears with cotton wool, so that the cries of agony and misery may not disturb us, and we let drink and harlotry flourish; out of our pleasures, and allow them to debase and sensualise our feelings; out of our churches, and so perish of our conventionalisms and respectabilities. He cannot do the mighty works wanted because of our unbelief. His religion fails to become the personal and social force it is meant to be because we do not use it. If a "declaration" about it would do it, we could make dozens; if creed passing would do it, we could get patent machines by the score. But it has to be worked day and night, among the thriftless and the cultured, in the slums and in the universities, at home and on the exchange; and for this simple and homely task we are poor, alas! unspeakably poor. We discuss where we should live, persecute where we should sympathize, put a system where we want a heart, appeal to men as critics where we ought to speak to their higher faculties, regal conscience, moral intuitions, craving for God, for the sight of his love, for his free pardon, and the assured sense of his sweet aid. We give a sermon and the world asks for soul; a tract, and it wants quickening life; a talk, and it sighs for work; a machine, and it still calls for a man. The incarnation of the Christ of the Cross is the one thing needful; the Gospel of the atonement translated into the vernacular of the world; the Christ of Galilee and Gethsemane, the street preacher, the comrade of the working man, the friend of fallen women, brought into actual touch of the real life of the dwellers in the cities and villages of the world. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, and on some have mercy that are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." O zeal of Christ, seize us, absorb us, consume us! Give us no rest night or day, except as we are saving our fellows and glorifying Thee!
—*Dr. Clifford.*

Give Your Hand.

The following is told of two staunch Scotch Presbyterians, Johnny Mortor, a keen Burgher, and Andrew Gibbie, a decided anti-Burgher. Both lived in the same house, but at opposite ends; and it was the bargain that each should keep his own side of the house well thatched. When the dispute about the principle of their kirks, and especially the offensive clause in the oath, grew hot, the two neighbors ceased to speak to each other. But one day they happened to be on the roof at the same time, each repairing the thatch in the slope of the roof on his own side; and, when they had worked up to the top, they were face to face. They couldn't flee; so at last Andrew took off his cap and scratching his head, said, "Johnny, you and me, I think, ha'e been very foolish to dispute as we ha'e done concerning Christ's will about our kirks, until we ha'e clean forgotten his will about ourselves; and so we ha'e fought so bitterly for what we ca' the truth, and it has ended in spite. Whatever's wrang, it's perfectly certain that it never can be right to be unjivil, unneighborly, unkind, in fact, tae hate ane anither. Na, na! that's the deevil's work, and no God's. Noo, it strikes me, that maybe it's wi' the kirk as wi' this house—ye're working on a'e side, and me on the ither; but if we only do our work weel, we will meet at the top at last. Give's your han', auld neighbor." And so they shook hands, and were the best of friends ever after.—*Good Company.*

The Road to Honor.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

Our chickens generally come home to roost. Our thoughts of other men generally become other men's thoughts of us. According as we measure out to our fellows, so do they measure back into our bosome, for good or for evil. So especially, in reference to the Lord himself, the God of justice sooner or later causes a man to reap his own sowing, and gather his own scattering. See how the Lord keeps touch with his friends and foes, and pays them in their own coin—"Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." A man's life is often its own echo. He sinned, and he suffered after the likeness of his sin: you may see the sin in the punishment, as you see today the footmark of the Egyptian dog in the brick which he trod upon when it was yet in the soft clay. The man sinned again, for it is the nature of sin to repeat itself and grow into habit; and, behold, another sorrow was born in the likeness of that other sin. Thus the man lived in the present, and formed his future life by one and the same act. He spoke, and the echoes spoke to him in the years following. So does life repeat itself; so does the seed deep up the flower, and the flower again produce the seed. It is an endless chain; for the thing that has been done is the thing which shall be. A man may live to see a grim procession of all his old sins marching past him, robed in the sackcloth and ashes wherein justice dooms them to be arrayed. So it is also with our joys. God gives us joy after the similitude of our service. Godly fear fills her garden with many flowers, and her house with music of divers kinds, and the Lord appoints to her that she shall live of her ministry, and that her oxen shall eat of the good corn which they tread out for others. When we have been faithful to God, he is ever faithful to us, and sends us a full reward. If we walk contrary to him, he will walk contrary to us; but if we delight ourselves in him, he will delight himself in us to do us good. There is good will to men of good will, and evil shall slay those whose lives are evil.

If you wish to see this exemplified in Scripture, how many instances rise before you! Enoch walks with God because God pleases him, and then we find that he pleases God. Noah obediently rests the issues of his life upon the truth of God, and God gives him rest. Abraham was famous for trusting God, and it is wonderful how God trusted him. The Lord seemed to put his honor as well as his oracle into the guardianship and custody of Abraham. "Shall I," saith God, "hide this thing that I will do from Abraham, my friend?" Oh, no, God unhoseomed his heart to God. See, on the other hand Jacob. He is a good man and true, and I like not to speak of the failings of the faithful. There is a Hamlike propensity in some to point out the nakedness of God's saints; but it is much better to go backward and cover them with the garment of love. Yet we cannot help seeing that Jacob was not so in harmony with God as he should have been, and therefore his life lacked the serenity which attended Abraham's. He begins life by bargaining and cheating his brother; and all his life long he was bargained with and cheated beyond his heart's content. His cunning came home to him; what he was to Esau, Leban was to him. Yet, as he wrestled with the angel in mighty prayer the Lord gave him the wrestler's name of honor, and as he trusted in the Lord even in his saddest estate the Lord preserved him even to the end. As an instance on the other side, take Moses. He would not be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; but he gave up all prospect of a kingdom in Egypt. But what did he get? He became a greater king than Pharoah. He led through the wilderness a nation compared with which the Egyptians are mere barbarians. He had all the rank and dignity that could fall to the greatest ruler of his age or any other age; and his honor after death is to this day infinitely beyond that of all the Pharaohs rolled into one. Moses is an imperial name; among them that are born of women, whose fame is greater? He is no loser now. He honored God and he was honored. Take David, on the other side, and see how his transgressions came home to him. I will not speak of the better character of David just now, though that would abundantly illustrate how God repays his faithful ones; but, when he sinned, the sorrows that embittered the latter end of his life were the reflections of his own offences. One is struck with the likeness between David's sins and sorrows. Remember the names of Absalom and Adonijah, and you cannot forget the lust and the falsehood of him, to whom these young men were both sons and punishments.

—Suggestions of an overruling Mind in human history are found in the concealments of nature and of art. The hiding of the American continent from the elder nations till it is needed for the advanced development of the race; the concealment of certain metallic mines till the financial necessities of bommerce demand their disclosure; the burying of anthracite and petroleum till other means of artificial light and heat were approaching the point of exhaustion; the silence of the clouds respecting the identity of lightning and electricity till near the time when mechanical invention could make practical use of the discovery; the ignorance of Britons and statesmen of the extent of the coal deposits of England, till they were needed to advance the Empire to the front rank of nations, as the bulwark of Protestantism and liberty in European politics; the reserve of the manufacture of paper from the pulp of vegetable fiber, till the art of printing demand it, and would have been comparatively useless without it—these and other concealments are hints of a comprehensive and far-reaching plan of history which antedates and out-lives any human forecast of events. To conceive and to execute such a plan must have been the work of some other intelligence than that of man.

When William Pitt heard of the victory of General Wolf on the "Heights of Abraham," he exclaimed, "The more a man is versed in history of nations, the more he sees of the hand of an over-ruling Providence everywhere." A devout student must observe the same in the history of scientific discovery. Man has been the agent in the execution of discoveries, but some other Mind than his must have timed them.—*Prof. Phelps.*

—"Now, my dear," said the teacher, "what is memory?" The little girl answered after a moment's reflection, "It is the thing you forget with."

A True Story.

Charlie and George were two brothers, living in a village in England. One day they went into the village church and began to climb up the tower, to have a look at the chime of bells. When they got up high enough they had to cross some beams to get near the bells. Charlie happened to slip, and in falling, stumbled against George, who caught him by the collar with one hand and held the beam with the other. Though both boys struggled manfully to get on the beam again they were unable to do so. When the poor little fellows saw their danger, they began to shout for help, but in vain, and they only grew weaker. They soon realized that there were only two things possible, either that both should perish after hanging on as long as they could, or that Charlie should let go and thus permit George to get back on the beam.

When Charlie saw this he said: "George, I am going to let go of you, you will be able to get back on the beam. Give mother a kiss for me." Saying these words he let go his hold, and fell to the floor so far below. Poor George, climbing down the tower again, only to find his dear brother lying lifeless on the slabs, could hardly bring the news home to his mother. And though it pleased God to spare him to live a long life, yet he never forgot the brother lying in the churchyard, the brother whose death had given him life. Often he would be seen standing by Charlie's grave, and the boys used to wonder what the gray headed man thought of so earnestly at the gravemarked simply with the word "Charlie."

We that know the story, however, do not wonder. But is it not strange that boys and girls forget that we have a dear friend than Charlie, even the Lord Jesus, who took our place and died for us on the cruel cross.

—There are some little churches as parched and withered as gardens in dry weather, simply because their sympathies do not go forth in generous effort for the spread of the Gospel among the nations. If you would be miserable, live for yourself; do not take an interest in any religious enterprise, do not teach, do not give; let the world, with its load of superstition and sin, roll on unhelped; try to forget that there is anybody living except yourself and the few immediately near you, and your nature will be shrivelled, your heart will contract, it will become dry and small like a withered Kernel in a nut. But if you wish to be blessed, to be rich in character, to make life a large and noble thing Christ-like benediction and not a Cain-like curse, then you must be generous, you must have a sense of stewardship, which mean responsibility to God, and brotherly dealings with men. Our missionaries have begun to enter through the "open doors," and now, shall we falter on the threshold? Shall we fail to respond to the cries that come from sad hearts and darkened homes? Africa, torn, maimed, robbed, has found a voice; the moan has reached us. Shall we keep our oil and pence, and not act the part of a neighbourly Samaritan? Are we too niggardly, or too poor, to "buy up the opportunity"? Shall we regard the price as too great? Shall we set a higher value on our corruptible silver and gold than on "the precious blood of Christ"? Let us not incur the disgrace of retreat, but remember that "to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, it is sin."—*Dr. Owen at Bap. Union.*

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