

On Sunday-School Cramming.

BY GEORGE W. BUNGAY.

At a public exhibition of Sunday-school children, the *first* boy in one of the classes was taken suddenly ill, and the *second* boy was required to take his place. Without noticing the change, the teacher proceeded with the regular cut-and-dried questions and answers of the catechism, putting the first question to the second boy.

"Who made you?" asked the teacher, in the presence of a large number of spectators. "I don't know who made me, marm: but the boy God made has gone home with the stomach-ache," said the boy.

Boy No. 1 had probably been stuffing his body, as the teacher had been stuffing his mind, and he was not well enough to make a display of his attainments; hence the scene, which was more amusing than instructive. The practice of cramming the minds of children with answers to questions, with verses from the hymn-books, and with texts of Scripture, or any other texts, is as injurious to the mind as over-eating and stuffing is to the body. When a child eats too much, the organs of digestion, respiration, circulation, and secretion, all suffer. When the memory is overtasked, all the faculties of the mind feel the effects of the burden it is compelled to carry. When a fond parent feeds his darling with pork, pickles, and pancakes, and loads its little stomach with a "mixed mess" which would defy the digestive power of an ostrich, the child becomes dyspeptic, its growth is retarded, and the poor little stultified thing becomes a Tom Thumb when he might have been a Titan. When the mind of a child is "like wax to receive, and adamant to retain" impressions, it is a violation of the natural laws to overtask it by drawing upon the memory, and cramming it with lessons which would appal an adult. What shall we say of the practice of stimulating children to commit chapter after chapter to memory, by offering premiums to the little ones who can chatter off the greatest number of verses? The superintendents and teachers give their praise and their premiums to the children who have impaired their health and injured their minds by mastering

lessons which should never have been given to them. The starry-eyed and rosy-lipped children, who have during the "week-days" obeyed the physical laws by skating, leaping, ball-playing, and spinning tops, have in the "meantime" packed away on the shelves of memory a reasonable number of verses; but these children are ignored as stupid worldlings, whose names do not deserve conspicuous places on the roll of honor. They have good health, cheerful hearts, buoyant spirits, but they are not ecclesiastical encyclopedias, and they must take back seats. The "living memorandas" have hundreds, perhaps thousands, of texts at their "tongue's ends," but they have not blood-power sufficient to work the brain-mills they carry upon their stooping shoulders. What would those teachers say to the overtasked children if they should rise in their places in the Sunday-school, and give a report of the various kinds and quantities of food they had consumed during the week? Imagine a sweet little girl of seven summers saying in the presence of all the scholars and officers of the school, "Since last Sunday I have eaten ten times a day, and at each meal I ate six times as much as my father and mother ate. I have eaten twenty pancakes each morning for breakfast, five apple dumplings and three pounds of beef-steak each noon for lunch, and nine slices of bread and butter, two custard pies, seventeen ginger-snaps, five slices of cold ham, and eleven cupcakes, before going to bed at night, each night in the week." Would the teacher pat her on the shoulder and caress her with compliments, and make her presents of books on the art of cookery, and give her free tickets to sumptuous dinners at restaurants?

We make mere machines of children when we inspire them with the idea that there is "virtue," even piety, in the act of committing to memory a vast number of texts of Scripture. Children are not alarm-clocks, to be wound up six days in the week that they may strike loud and long on the Sabbath. The memory is not to be cultivated at the expense of the other attributes of the mind. The memory is not a mere "*index rerum*," to be written all over with quotations and references. There should be some clean pure pages in