

POETRY.

From "The Gift for 1839."

FLOWER UPON THE GREEN HILL SIDE.

"Flower upon the green hill side,
Thou, to shun the threatening blast,
In the grass thy head dost hide,
By the tempest overpast.
Then to greet the azure skies,
And to feel the soothing sun,
Brighter, sweeter thou dost rise,
Tell me, flower, how this is done!"

"I will tell thee as thy friend,
Artless, timid, whispering low;
To the blast 'tis good to bend:
He who made me, taught me so!
While his teaching I obey,
I but fall to rise and stand
Brighter for the stormy day,
Leaning on his viewless hand."

"When to Him I've lowly bowed,
He with freshness fills my cup
From the angry, scowling cloud;
Then he gently lifts me up,
So I fall, and so I rise;
In the dark and sunny hour,
Minding him who rules the skies!
He's my God, and I'm his flower!"

H. F. GOULD.

EDUCATION.

THOUGHTS ON INFANT SCHOOLS.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM MUIR, D. D.

Minister of St. Stephen's Parish, Edinburgh.

Some of the mere accompaniments of the plan of Infant Schools have exposed the system to misrepresentation, and raised the feeling of contempt against it. For example, to gain the attention of children, from the age of three years to five, their instructor is obliged to have recourse to methods that are seemingly useless and frivolous. Certain things are said and done, and certain evolutions are gone through by the little scholars, which viewed in themselves, are doubt-exceedingly trifling. Separated from their design, it cannot be wondered at that the spectator of them utters the contemptuous opinion of the system which gives a place to them; and it is expected that when he speaks of the infant pupils rising and sitting down at some fanciful signal, moving from their place in one order of marching, and returning to it in another; alternately lifting and lowering their hands, and saying this merry rhyme and chanting that—it is expected that he will represent the whole as being very foolish, and infer that the system is unworthy of the time and expense employed on it. But what is thus censured is not the substance and end of the scheme. It is only an accompaniment—yet a most necessary one. It quickens and keeps up the attention of the scholars; it supplies, too, a certain degree of muscular exercise that is beneficial to health; and since it is done, also, in consequence of an order given by the teacher, and done according to method, it carries on, beneath what wears the aspect merely of childish recreation, the system of salutary discipline.

The most formidable objection urged against the whole design of infant school tuition is this, that it interferes with the duties of parents, and serves to weaken, if it does not destroy, the affection which should be fostered between them and their children. Now, in answering this objection, let it be considered that I refer at present to Infant Schools for the children of persons in the laborious or the destitute situations of life. It is for these, I am inclined to think, that the plan of early tuition, conducted out of the parent's house, is required; or, perhaps, I ought to say, it is for these only that such a plan should be provided. There may be many examples of gross ignorance, as to the useful and Christian mode of training children, displayed in those classes of society, in which both time and every advantage are given to parents for educating their infant offspring. Want of subordination in these, and utter perverseness, as the consequence of misrule, and the result of folly, or incapacity, may not be rare. But, are we bound to make a provision for remedying an evil, which springs from neglect or absence of

right principle among those who ought to know better things, and to practise them? Or are we called on to introduce any plan for meeting certain wants in the families, in which these wants ought never to have arisen? Surely the strongest law binds on parents the duty of watching, to the extent of their power and means, over their own children in infancy, and of not resigning too soon the care of them to strangers; but of employing, as long as they can, every day in discharging their sacred trust for all the purposes which parental wisdom and affection ought to be exercised in accomplishing it.

Now, when the system of Infant Schools is objected to, as if it interfered with that sacred trust, the reasoning must be held upon instances where the bountiful arrangements of Providence supply the parents, especially mothers, with opportunity and ample time for training the minds of their offspring, previous to their entering such a School as has hitherto been regarded as the earliest School. The objection cannot fasten on the system, when the peculiar case, for which I apprehend it is provided, is duly considered. The objector has not duly considered the situation of families that are supported by daily labour; and especially that, with all their labour, still experience the pressure of want. He can never have visited them, nor minutely observed them, nor sympathised with their poverty and cares; otherwise he would perceive how groundless the argument is which he brings against Infant Schools; as if, in such an instance, the establishing of them committed a trespass on parental duty, and weakened the bond of affection, which ought to be strengthened, between parent and child.

How does the case really stand?—or, rather, what is it we do by which we may incur the censure of injuring a bond that is so sacred? We are the means, we confess, of removing the children from home during five, or, at most, six hours in the day; but then, these hours are (first of all), from the very time in which the parents are thoroughly occupied—the father at his toils out of doors, and the mother at her portion of toils within. If so, the objector must allow that we have not separated the children from their father during these hours; that separation was to be effected though no school of ours had been opened for receiving the children. And though it is still said that the mother should be allowed to take the charge of her own infants, yet, with regard to the mother of a family in the necessitous situation which has been described, it is not possible that the toiling and anxious being can find the opportunity, during the hours of the day to which I refer, for giving her children the full measure of superintendence that is needed for their welfare. Whether she be fit to give the needed superintendence is questionable; or, rather, it would be extraordinary, considering all things, if she could give it.

But, even allowing that she were able; and, at the same time, desirous to give it, how obvious is it that the circumstances of a poor man's house preclude the very opportunity of her attempting to bestow it, during the hours of the day which may be called the busy and laborious hours. Though we had not drawn away her infants to our school, therefore, during these hours, they could have received no benefit from her affectionate watchfulness, however able and solicitous to exercise it. Her hands are too full. She is beset her part in providing for their daily bread; she is beset with many cares and annoyances; and she endeavours to gain her way through perplexities and toils, which by a want of method, seem often to grow more intricate and burdensome. Nay, in this scene of bustle and trouble, the very children whom she loves, are actually felt,—with their importunate clamours for what she may not have to give, or what ought not to be given to them, though she had it,—are actually felt as a grievance for the time; yea, as causes of irritation and fretting to her. And instead of that scene of domestic endearment and instruction, which the objector paints for the purpose of illustrating the impolicy of our scheme of infant tuition, there is literally nothing but what serves to nurse up the children in almost unceasing animosity and brawl.

The consequence of this will shew, that the separation between parent and children has actually, in the greater number of cases, ensued, because temporary relief is sought for, by removing the hands of the laborious inmate of the poor man's house.—The children are sent, if not driven to the street. Health is there endangered, and morals are there exposed to contamination, while the mother, whose thoughts wander after them still, is vexed between

the care of accomplishing her household toils and anxiety for their safety.

Now, that you may feel how unreasonable is the objection to our plan of infant tuition, that would resist it on account of its separating the children from their parents, consider the nature and the obvious effect of our arrangement. The children, instead of being sent to the street, are sent to school. Instead of being exposed to the hurtful changes of the weather, they are sheltered in comfort, and they promote their health by the exercise, both of body and mind, in which they are trained. Instead of the hazard of their being tainted by practices which they ought never to know, they receive the very means of moral purifying which God himself has appointed for sanctifying us. Instead of their being confirmed in the wildness of insubordination and disobedience, they are placed under discipline, and are taught submission. And, instead of listening to the language of profaneness, and joining in it, they are brought to hear the words of Scripture, and to unite with their fellows in hymns to the praise of the Saviour.

And what, moreover, follows their return to home after the periodic absence? Their appearing has something of the freshness of a new visit, and they are the more heartily welcomed. Their parents have now leisure to attend to them; they hear the lessons of religious and moral truth repeated, and may themselves receive that benefit, from listening to their children, which shall, in one sense, realize the declaration of the Bible, that "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God ordaineth praise." It is perceived, also, that the children are more easily managed at home; and surprise and delight have been expressed by the parents, that tempers which they had despaired (through their unskillfulness without doubt) of ever subduing, are at length made pliant and mild. Thus, the good principles and habits gained at school, may be transferred whither by no other means they could have found their way; and thus, too, instead of destroying, or even weakening the affection between parent and child, the very means are used of upholding and confirming it.

Infant Schools may well be pleaded for on account of their filling up, an important season in the life of those for whom they are designed, with the tuition and training suited to their capacities, and which, otherwise, would never be received by them. Sabbath Schools, it is true, do much for improving the rising generation, and are most useful auxiliaries to the cause of religion and morality. But Sabbath Schools are, in general, attended by those, at the earliest, who have entered on their eighth or ninth year. An important season, therefore, has been passed by the children in many cases without their having come under proper training at all. Previous to their ninth year, they may have unhappily acquired the most pernicious habits.

It is a fact, proved by the Reports of the Police Board, that mere infants are brought to show an expertness in crime that raises astonishment as well as pity. And though those who have been thus early acted on by evil communications may be drawn to Sabbath Schools, yet the miserable influence of the wrong beginning continues. It is felt in the extreme difficulty which opposes the teacher's attempts to reduce them to subjection. It renders the system of Sunday evening tuition unavailing in numberless instances, for any good, and often turns what should be a place of order and pious exercises into a scene of misrule, noise, and the desecrating of a holy season. And then, in consequence, our Jails and Bridewells may still have inmates, who have acquired some knowledge of the Scriptures and the Church Catechism.

How desirable that we make the attempt to reach the families of the labouring classes and poor with the means of instruction, at a period still earlier than that at which Sabbath Schools have usually received them! We do not say, indeed we can never say, that the having access to them even at the earliest period of life at which they can be instructed, is without failure to accomplish the design of instructing them. We are to feel while we own our dependence on the free and sovereign grace of God.—We are never to separate in our thoughts his blessing from our exertions, and we are to undertake our plans, imploring his aid, and confiding in it.

But, if the means hitherto employed for training to religion and righteousness, the children of the labouring classes and poor have, in so many instances, failed of answering their end, is it not worthy of consideration whether these means, (good in themselves,)