

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.]

## SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

## OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

## No. I.

The nineteenth century may, with propriety be designated an era of moral and religious institutions, which have for their object every needy and miserable child of man. Among these we should naturally expect to find those that have in view the welfare of the rising generation. There are many of this kind; and not the least useful or distinguished is that which embraces Sunday Schools. It stands in the foremost rank for utility; and the good effects are so visible, the first thought would lead us to conclude that all, especially professed Christians and philanthropists, would give it their best sympathy and most hearty support; yet there are those in every congregation, who manifest no sympathy, avoid all responsibility, utterly refuse all active service, and assume the position of neutrality, which is nothing less than opposition. But why should they be without a heart to feel and act, more than others placed in like circumstances? They have, doubtless, their reasons for occupying the position of unjustifiable indifference towards an enterprise founded in the fitness of things, and perfectly adapted to the welfare of the young.

Some assign as a reason, the comparatively recent origin of the Sunday School institution. With the same propriety they may object to Missionary, Bible, Tract, and other kindred societies. But who among these objectors would have these enterprises become extinct, and the world placed in the condition it was before their existence. Such persons in order to be self-satisfied, ought to have lived a hundred years ago; they appear to have been cast upon the earth at the wrong period of time, and in the wrong place; they find no food suited to their taste upon the sumptuous tables spread before them; they had rather go back and pick the bones of the past, than partake of the rich bounty which the present provides. Persons of this description are born after their time, and have no business here at this exact period.

Others assign as a reason, that the institution is designed and adapted to benefit children. Such persons do not possess a proper deference and respect for childhood. It is said of an eminent German Professor, that whenever he came into the presence of his pupils he always took off his hat; and when asked why he did it, he defended the practice by referring to the fact, that soon those lads would be their philosophers, statesmen, clergymen. It is impossible for us to conjecture, however disadvantageous the circumstances in which a child is placed,

what are the destinations of providence that await it. God works like himself. Sir Isaac Newton, to whom the scientific world is indebted for some of its noblest discoveries, was once a boy possessing an intellect, fettered by all the feebleness of childhood, giving no more promise of future greatness than any of his playmates; yet that feeble germ of intellect, sanctified by truth, expanded till it spread its benign influence over the whole earth. What a character was Moses. When a whole nation was to be released from the iron grasp of the most powerful tyrant of the day, Moses appeared before him, with the sublime demand, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." By the space he fills in the records of antiquity, as a historian and a prophet of the Lord, he has laid a tax of admiration and gratitude upon all ages. Yet all this importance was once hid for three months in successive concealments, launched in an ark of bulrushes on the Nile; and, by a concurrence of circumstances, apparently the most casual, discovered, saved, and advanced to the lofty position he afterwards occupied. The renowned missionary, George Morrison, when a boy, was led, by the hand of charity, into a Sunday School, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The far-famed William Cary, was once a poor shoemaker. The lion-hearted Knibb was once a member of Andrew Fuller's Sunday School. Instead of it being a reason why a person should neglect an enterprise because it is designed and adapted to prepare the young to act well their part in the great drama of human events, it is one of the strongest reasons we can present why we should do our duty.

Others excuse themselves on the ground that it seems to them like small business to instruct children. Such persons seem to have forgotten, or they never noticed the fact, that all great results in the natural and moral world, are characterised by almost imperceptible and small beginnings. What is there great, which was not once small? Our country, for example, sixty years ago, gave but little promise of its present flourishing condition. The mighty oak of the forest was once enclosed in an acorn. The noble river, which flows through half a continent, may be traced to insignificant rills; these little rills make the brook, and brooks the river, till the united waters of the whole pours on their way rejoicing to the glorious ocean, the emblem of eternity. So it is with the moral influence of Sunday School instruction. The instruction given to each child makes a rill; these rills of moral influence combined, eventually form a mighty river, bearing upon its bosom millions of children to glory and to God. Little did Robert Raikes, the founder of the Sunday School enterprise think that his humble efforts would result in such a blessing to the rising generation as has already attended

its operations. The earliest beams of celestial light which greeted the birth of the Saviour of the world, the pledge of a brighter glory, gave but little promise of the fulfilment of that pledge—He appearing not to the great men of the world, but to a few pious shepherds. "Despise not the day of small things."

Others say the Sunday School Institution does not have the appearance of doing much good. If it does not have as much appearance as some other institutions, it may be as useful. Many of the most powerful agents of nature are the most silent in their operations. The gentle breeze that fans the earth, and preserves the salubrity of the atmosphere, is more beneficent than the noisy tempest; the softly falling dews, which invigorates and supports vegetation, is more beneficent than the flooding rains or desolating hail; the steady influence of gravity is more beneficent than the earthquake or the thunder storm. So this institution, based upon a comprehensive philosophy in its quiet and constant efforts is doing more good than many societies which make louder pretensions. Although the immediate effects of Sunday School instruction may appear small, from it may follow great and important results. If with an invisible liquid we draw lines over a canvass, no result is apparent; but spread that canvass to the fire, or to the sun, and figures will flash out over its whole surface; so the souls and labours of those in the Sunday School, who are intently and prayerfully drawing the lines of religious instruction over the broad canvass of social character, may appear unmeaning; but let that character be exposed to the intense action of adversity, the quickening agency of the means of grace, and the fervent influence of the Holy Spirit, the emblems of Christian doctrine, and the figures of salvation, will be developed in a thousand individual families and social scenes. Hence let those engaged in the work of instructing children in the Sunday School take the Word of God as a pencil of heavenly light, and draw the invisible lines of scriptural instruction over the moral character of those committed to their care, and write the name of God, Jesus, Salvation, Immortality, Judgment-to-come, Heaven, Hell; and when in the fulness of time the Spirit, in its enlivening and enkindling influences, shall breathe over this work, minds instinct with heavenly grace, and luminous with Divine knowledge, will show the glorious achievement of the principles of the Bible, by teaching children the way of life.

S. T. G.

Hamilton, 1852.

"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."—*Luke ix. 26.*