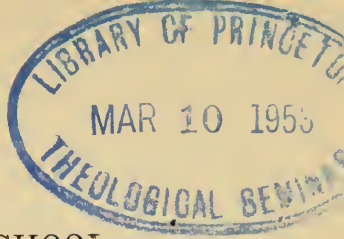


THE



SUNDAY-SCHOOL

ANNIVERSARY.

WRITTEN FOR THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
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IN the middle of October, I received a visit from a minister in the country. He came to invite me to attend the anniversary of the Sunday-schools belonging to his congregation. As I do not wish to let you know exactly where it was, I will call the place of his abode *Coventry*. I am

always glad of an opportunity to do any thing to help on Sunday-schools, and therefore I agreed to go to the anniversary, although I had made up my mind to spend that day in New York.

I have many reasons for loving Sunday-schools. About twenty years ago, when I was a little boy, we began to hear about the Sunday-schools in England, but there were none in our part of America. At last it was determined to set one up in the village where I lived. Accordingly, notice was given, and preparations were made. A room was en-

gaged; and what sort of a room do you think it was? You could scarcely guess. It was the loft above a carriage-house. This, however, made very little difference. Into the carriage-house loft we went, boys and girls together, full of expectation; for children are attracted by every thing new or strange. And we had heard of the red and blue tickets, with verses on them, which used to be given as rewards in those days; and also of beautiful little books which were to be presented to such as knew their lessons.

I well remember that first Sunday-school. I can almost see, at this moment, the crowded room, the long dipped-candles, flaring in the draft of wind which came through the chinks. I can almost hear the hum of boys and girls, like the noise of a swarming hive. It was an evening of excitement. We were all little enthusiasts. Our blue tickets were worth as much to us as so many silver dollars would be now-a-days; and as to the red ones! I am sure we looked forward to the prize as earnestly as we should at this time for a fifty dollar note.

Better things than these also came up in my memory. I recollect tender thoughts of my creator and Redeemer; resolutions to read, and pray, and seek God's favour. And though I am sorry to say, that we were more bent on getting many verses by rote, than on understanding what we got; and more anxious to have a box full of tickets, than to learn the lesson out of the Bible yet some good thoughts were dropped, like seeds, in our minds, which have never been destroyed. This is one of the reasons why I love Sunday-schools, and why

I am always glad to lend my aid in carrying them forward.

Before I tell about the Coventry anniversary, let me give another reason of my attachment to Sunday-schools. There are a great many passages of the holy Scriptures which I have by memory, so that I can repeat them to myself as I walk or ride, or as I lie awake, during nights of pain or sickness. This is a great treasure. I beg my young readers to take notice that every one of these texts is worth more to me than a piece of gold. Now, I can well remember that most of

these verses were committed to my memory, when I was a child at the Sunday-school in the village. And if I had not got them then, I could not, at a later period, have learned half so many; because it is observed, that the memory of youthful minds is like soft clay, in which you can leave any marks and impressions you choose; but the older one is, the harder it is to learn by memory, just as clay becomes solid and unyielding by age.

When I grew up to be a young man, and began to take more interest in religious things, it came

into my mind, that I ought to do something for the benefit of my fellow creatures; and after I had thought about it for some time, I concluded that there was no way in which a youth, such as I was, could be the instrument of doing so much good, as by teaching in a Sunday-school.

There was a neighbourhood of a few houses, about two miles from our village, where the people were very careless and ignorant. A pious young man from Geneva, was beginning a Sunday-school at this place, and I was asked to assist him. It was delightful to

me to hear the request, for I had long wished for just such an offer. Here we had a pleasant little school for about two years. Every Lord's-day morning we used to walk or ride to the hamlet, and return in time for church at home; and the remembrance of the happiness which I enjoyed in being a teacher, makes me love Sunday-schools. But I must return to my narrative.

As I said before, I agreed to go to Coventry, and assist Mr Hunt at the October anniversary. When the day arrived my health was not good. I had been at-

tacked two days before with a painful disease, and my strength was by no means recovered. Yet the morning was so lovely that I resolved to persevere, in reliance on our Heavenly Father, who gives grace as it is needed.

Mr. Jackson, a neighbour of mine, is a native of Coventry, and was kind enough to take me in his carriage. The clearness and freshness of an October morning is good for the health, and I felt stronger every mile we drove. The woods had that dappled appearance which the frosts of autumn produce on the foliage.

Every shade and tint seemed to be sprinkled over the forest. The blood-red of some trees, the orange of others, the varied yellow of still more, and the general softness of the whole, was indeed very beautiful. Some persons are saddened by the fall of the leaf. It has never had this effect on my feelings, for I remember that the change is useful to the vegetable world; and that after the repose of winter, these same branches will be still more freshly and beautifully clad. It also reminds one of the death and re-

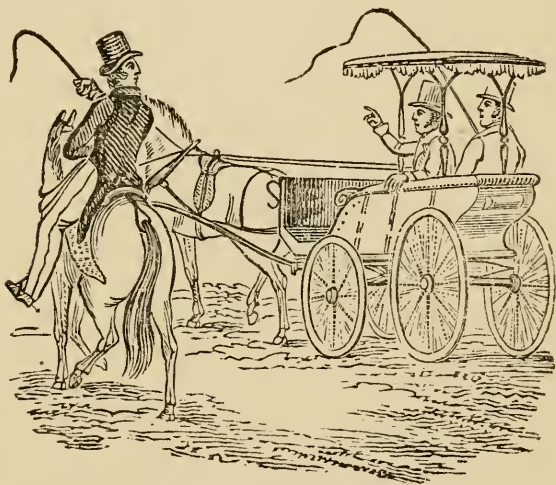
surrection of the believer, which is a pleasing, joyful subject.

As we passed on, through a fertile region, it was gratifying to behold the fruits of the earth rewarding the farmer's labour. We saw, on every hand, orchards laden with golden or blushing fruit; barn-yards crowded with stacks of grain, neatly thatched over to protect them from the storms; and meadows over which sheep and cattle were grazing with delight. Any man who has a heart for Christian cheerfulness must rejoice at such sights, and will think of the boundless goodness

of our heavenly Father. My mind turned naturally to such passages as these: "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth." "O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all!" "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

Mr. Duval, a good friend of youth, accompanied us in this little expedition; but for the sake of his health, and in order to en-

joy the prospect, he rode on horseback. Occasionally, as he galloped along by us, he would stop and point out remarkable scenes on the way, and join in conversation. Thus we proceeded with much cheerfulness and comfort. The farmers on our road were busily employed in gathering the Indian corn into little stacks which covered the whole face of the country at certain spots. This useful production gives food to many thousands of men and beasts, and is one of the richest gifts of Providence to America. The young reader



may be pleased to know that it is in Europe called *maize*. In the United States it commonly goes by the name of *corn*. In Great Britain, the word *corn* means all kinds of grain which grow in ears, and not in pods. When we read in English books of corn, we must not think of maize or Indian corn, but of wheat, rye, barley, and the like. Thus, in the gospel of John, our Saviour says, "Except a *corn of wheat* fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." And in Deuteronomy, of the ox that "treadeth out the corn;" and in

the Psalms, of the valleys “covered over with corn;” and in Amos, of “corn sifted in a sieve,” and in Joel, of “the withered corn.” There are some regions of the earth, however, where maize and rice are more used than wheat. In China and Japan rice is more common than any other grain. In the warmer parts of our own continent Indian corn abounds more than either. Asia is the native country of rice, and America of maize. Indian corn, though so tall and stout, nevertheless, belongs to the tribe of *grasses*.

But I must not forget my anniversary. As we proceeded in our ride, we came to a vale through which a gently flowing brook passes, in which I had often bathed when I was a boy, and over whose frozen surface I had often skated. A large grist-mill and a saw-mill are situated just where our road crosses the bridge. On the rise of the hill beyond, many feet above the water, stands the village church of Bellevue, in which for two successive years I have attended the yearly examination of several flourishing Sunday-schools. But between

the mill and the church, I was surprised to behold the wonderful change produced by a large canal, lately completed. Here, where, in former days, we could see no craft bigger than a canoe, or a ferry-boat, we now see passing every day large sloops and schooners. As I looked at the effects wrought by perseverance, enterprise, resolution, industry, and skill, I asked myself, Why should not Christians accomplish like wonders in behalf of Sunday-schools, by like zeal and diligence? And I took occasion to express this thought

to my good friends in the Co-entry church.

The country became more and more pleasing to the eye as we advanced. On either side of the highway, there were wide-spreading farms, with comfortable dwellings. Sometimes we descended into hollows, through which small streams pursued their silent way; sometimes we were shaded by tall groves, in which the squirrel might be seen leaping down from lofty branches, or the wood-lark hopping in the thick underwood. Then we came out again into the high open country, and could see

at the north-west, on our left hand, the distant blue hills of Sidmouth. My heart rejoiced at the beauty of the scene, rejoiced in the goodness of the Lord. I was ready to say aloud—

“Not content

With every food of life to nourish man,
By kind illusions of the wondering sense,
Thou mak'st all nature beauty to his eye
And music to his ear.”

I felt disposed to say with the psalmist: “Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God. Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for

the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat:" but, what is better than all, "he sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation!"

Of all the people on the face of the earth, we, Americans, ought to be thankful. Blessed, blessed shall we and our children be, if we are rightly affected by the goodness of God unto us.

Towards the middle of the day we began to come into a more thickly settled district; the farms were smaller and nearer together and the houses more numerous. We approached a settlement resembling a village, and the steeple of Coventry church was seen rising above the yellow poplars. We alighted at the door of the pastor's dwelling-house, and he led us in. We could observe from the windows, that the people were already beginning to come in from the neighbouring country-places. And when, after a good plain dinner, and an hour of rest

we went to the church, we were surprised to see the numbers which poured in from the hills and valleys of Sidmouth, and the plain of Coventry. The people were arriving every moment; some in country wagons, some in chaises, but most on horseback or on foot. Clusters were gathering about the church-yard, and all seemed full of the anniversary. The pastor and his assistants were seen distributing the hymns that were to be sung; these having been printed for the occasion. But scarcely any thing gave me so much satisfaction as

to see a number of farm-wagons with light covers, closely seated and filled to overflowing with little, ruddy, smiling boys and girls from the various schools. As this was the first annual examination in Coventry, there was a very great interest felt by all the young people, especially as they were anxious to make proper answers when called upon to recite. Alighting from the wagons, the children walked in a sort of procession after their respective teachers, and then the other persons having entered the church.

we had quite a respectable congregation.

There is something in a rural assemblage of persons which always gives me pleasure. In the rich farming districts, like this of which I now speak, remote from great towns, there is often a remarkable appearance of equality. You do not see so many either of the flaunting rich or of the abject poor, as in cities; but the people are much alike in their manners, dress, and appearance. As I took my place near the pulpit, and cast my eyes around on the congregation, I was gratified

to see the health, the intelligence, the sobriety, and the cheerfulness, which shone in most of the faces before me.

The long rows of red-faced boys and girls were more lovely objects to my eye than so many bags of gold. I look upon them as the jewels of America. All looked full of health, robust, and vigorous. All seemed cheerful and respectful. All were full of the occasion. If one of our city lads had been present, I think it likely he might have laughed at these little country folks. He would be apt to see among them

many a coat or bonnet not in the fashion; he would see many a face burned with the harvest sun, and find almost every hand hardened with labour. He might imagine them to be poor or ignorant. But the city lad would mistake, and if he laughed at the farmers' sons, might be laughed at in his turn. These simple-hearted boys are in many instances the sons of wealthy farmers; but they have been bred to labour with their hands. Some of them may not know the rare sights of a city, or the tricks of a dancing school; but they can manage a fiery

horse, at which the scornful visitor would tremble ; or cut down a hickory in the woods, or swim with rugged strength over the torrent of a river, or drag the raccoon from his high resting place in the old oak.

My childhood was passed in a great city, but I respect the virtues of the country, and look upon the youth of our rural districts as the very hope of America. These boys and girls have many hours for reading in the long winter evenings. And I was delighted to listen to the quickness and accuracy with which they answered

the questions that were proposed to them. They had been well taught. Their teachers seemed to show a degree of pride in the good appearance which they made; and the children were in a state of very high excitement. Scarcely a single reply out of some hundreds was wrong. I rejoiced for my country when I looked at the schools here assembled, and saw the little folks so clean, so neat, so well instructed, and so happy. I rejoiced in the Sunday-school enterprise, which brings such youth together, fills them with divine truth, puts

books into their hands, and fits them for life. And I rejoice this moment in knowing that many thousands of such beloved children are training up in our Sunday-schools over all the face of the land.

After singing, prayer, and examination, it became my duty to make an address to the people; in order to awaken a more lively interest in the good work of Christian education.

When I had ended, Mr. Duval, our companion, made a short discourse to the children. They listened with the greatest atten-

tion, and even earnestness. He related several anecdotes of heathen children, to show how much cause the Sunday-scholars of America have to be thankful to God. And it seemed to me that the tears were swelling in the eyes of several little hearers.

After another hymn, and another prayer, the anniversary meeting was concluded, and I believe all present were much gratified. A new interest appeared to be excited in behalf of the Sunday-school. I thought I could see the eyes of parents sparkling with new hope for their offspring; and

observe in teachers a fresh zeal for their good work. And, therefore, I flatter myself that our visit was not altogether unprofitable. I am sure it was most pleasant.

O with what spirit the wagon loads of children drove away homeward! The examination, for which they had both longed and trembled, was past! As the stouter boys on the front seats mounted, and took the reins, and smacked their long whips over the horses, their manner seemed to say, "Now we feel happy!" And how tenderly the thankful mothers led out the rosy girls,

who had scarcely done blushing from the unaccustomed trial of their modesty. And how pleasantly, the fathers, in groups among the speckled trees, talked about this new way of bringing up their sons and daughters in the knowledge of God.

I am sure these sensible, honest people went home with more love to their families, and greater determination to enlighten their minds. What a different state of things is this, from that which existed in Coventry forty years ago. *Then* there were no Sunday-schools; no questions on the

Bible; no cheap explanations of hard texts; no beautiful maps of Scripture places. Such books were only in the libraries of the learned. *Then* there was no such easy way for young Christians to be helping on the cause of God. The pastor had not then a little army of teachers to aid him in his work; nor a place at which he might meet all the lambs of his flock together.

While I gazed on the lines of carriages, and trains of horsemen, and companies of country people, departing on foot, and as I looked along the three great roads that

meet at Coventry church, I could not but exult and be thankful "What hath God wrought!"

Most of these youth will be *parents* a few years hence. And surely they will be better able to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," for having been at Sunday-school themselves. Some of them will be *teachers of schools* in different neighbourhoods; and surely they will be better teachers for having here learned the best method of instruction. Some of them will be *emigrants* to the far West; and surely they will

be more disposed, for this instruction, to carry far beyond the Mississippi the truth of Christ, and plant churches in the great States that are not yet named. Some of these teachers will be *ministers of the gospel*, and surely they will have that qualification which holy Timothy had; who, *from a child*, had known *the holy Scriptures*, which are able to make *wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. Some of them may be *missionaries* to the heathen; and while they found schools in Africa, or in the islands of the sea, surely they

will remember how they were taught in the schools of verdant Coventry. May *all* of them, through the grace of Christ, become true disciples of the Lord!

When we had spent a little time in the parsonage, with Mr Hunt's family, we found that the day was declining, and, therefore, prepared to return. As we drove off, the sun, near its setting, was immediately before us, and the crimson curtains of cloud seemed to hang in the west, just over our beloved home. There was not a mile of our way which

did not present something agreeable to the eye, or some matter for useful thought. As we passed the farm-houses, we saw the labourers coming in from their day's work, ready to enjoy their evening meal with zest, and still more ready to lie down in gentle, refreshing slumber, for *the sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much.* Eccl. v. 12. The cows from their pasture were slowly returning, and the tinkling of the bell was heard far off among the woods. The fowls of the air were silently ga-

thering to their resting places ;
and man and beast preparing for
repose.

These are common sights ;
and to many it may seem trifling
to mention them. But is not the
glory of God seen in these ordi-
nary occurrences ? Do we not
discern in them his wisdom and
goodness ? The psalmist thought
so. Many of his beautiful hymns
are framed in the view of just
such common scenes. Read the
104th psalm, and you will be
taught that the every-day sights
and events are proper to be min-
gled with our devout tribute of

praise. *The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted, where the birds make their nests as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the conies. He appointed the moon for seasons, the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.*

O LORD, *how manifest are thy*

works! in wisdom hast thou made them all!

It was dark when we arrived at home. God had prospered us through the day, and now we were bound to render him thanks, I trust it was not insincerely, that, in our several families, we knelt before the Lord our maker, to praise him for his goodness. A day spent in the service of Christ is always a day of enjoyment. O that the idle and the worldly knew this! Then, instead of running from one amusement to another, and tasting every pleasure without satisfaction, they

might find every day happier than that which preceded it, and all their enjoyments preparatory for heaven.

Reader ! The Lord Jesus Christ has work for *you* to do Believe in him, receive him as your Saviour, bow to him as your master, confide in him as your elder brother; and he will be your support, delight, and portion for ever and ever.

THE END.