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# SABBATH SCHOOLS

CONSIDERED,

IN

REGARD TO THEIR BENEFICIAL EFFECTS

UPON THE

TEMPORAL AS WELL AS SPIRITUAL INTERESTS

OF THE PEOPLE.

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BY THE

REV. GEORGE TOD,

ASSISTANT MINISTER AT INVERESK.

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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH.

M.DCCC.XXVII.

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*The following remarks were written to remove some of the objections which are generally urged against Sabbath Evening Schools ; they are founded on the experience which the author has of a parish to which such a mode of instruction is believed to be peculiarly useful ; and they are affectionately dedicated to the people of that parish, in the hope that they may tend, under the blessing of God, to increase and to perpetuate institutions so very important to the young.*

G. T.

INVERESK, 11th Nov. 1826.



## SABBATH SCHOOLS.

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IN times when the darkest ignorance was considered the firmest bond of human society, and the surest support of the throne, it was only to be expected that institutions of this kind should meet with opposition and reproach. To say that they formed an inlet for the light of knowledge to the poor, was then enough to brand them with every thing that was abhorrent to the wise and the good. But, at the present

hour, when old prejudices have vanished, and old principles have been changed; when the progress of intellectual improvement hath declared that the better informed the people are, the more peaceable and industrious and happy they are likely to be,—it may well appear strange that any should be found who systematically opposed the principle upon which Sabbath Schools are established; or that we should be called to give them an illustration or a defence.

That such, however, is the case, is too evident from the conduct of many professing Christians around us. In many quarters there exist, not only a coldness and indifference, but an actual hostility to this mode of religious instruction. There are some, even

Ministers of that truth, which in Sabbath Schools is communicated to the young, who consider such institutions as fraught with danger to the peace and order of families, and at best doubtful means of communicating the knowledge of pure religion. It is to these persons that we address the following remarks, in the hope that, by the blessing of God, they may prove useful:—and we assure them that every argument which we shall use has been brought to the test of experiment.

If there are any who hold that human knowledge, and especially a knowledge of the Scriptures, are either useless, or positively hurtful, then with such persons our controversy is ended. We proceed upon the assumption that the enlightening of the minds of the

young, and particularly the communicating to them a knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, are the greatest and the most important blessings which can be dispensed. And if there are any who dissent from these propositions, to them our remarks do not, and are not intended to apply.

Viewing Sabbath Schools then as merely tending to advance the cause of education in a country like this, where so many of the people may be called poor, we conceive that they have claims of a high order to public support. It is true that their avowed and peculiar object is not the communicating of the elements of ordinary instruction, but that such is their effect hath in many cases been proved. In some places, where a coldness and

apathy have existed to the interests of the young, and where many were wandering in a state of total ignorance, the opening of Sabbath Schools hath led parents to reflect upon the responsibility under which they were placed in regard to their children, and, encouraged by the example of those who wished to assist them, they have been animated with a kindred zeal. In consequence of this, and as the means of preparing the young for receiving the benefit of Sabbath Schools, parents have sent their children to places of daily instruction. And we are prepared to state it as a fact, that just as Sabbath Schools have multiplied, so also have Day Schools advanced in their numbers, and in their usefulness.

This argument might be enough in

itself—and it hath sometimes been urged and acted on—to lead the ordinary instructors of the young to open schools on the evening of the Sabbath, for the mere purpose of increasing the numbers of their daily scholars. And we know many instances, in which teachers, who were at one time earning a scanty subsistence through the carelessness of the parents who ought to have placed their children under their care, and who no sooner showed their desire to advance the spiritual welfare of the young by teaching them on the evening of the Lord's day, than the public, seldom blind to the merits of those who are truly zealous and useful, have given them a support and a countenance before unknown. In this way they have received their



reward even in this life, and have been the happy instruments of awakening in the breasts of those around them a new desire, and a new resolution, to attend to the ordinary instruction of their children.

We state this argument for Sabbath Schools with the greatest confidence, for we have proved it by lengthened experience. We could point to places inhabited by the poorer and more ignorant classes of the people, where the day school at one time only consisted of forty or fifty scholars, and where, through the mere introduction of Sabbath evening instruction, and by leading the parents by this means to consider their children as formed for an everlasting existence, the numbers have increased within a few weeks to

ninety and a hundred. And instead of multitudes of idle children crowding the high ways, and loitering by the doors of the cottages, there are now to be seen happy and peaceable groups on their way to school. And the parents, imbibing the same spirit of improvement, have learned to avoid some of those habits of dissipation in which they formerly indulged, that they may save a portion of their weekly earnings to procure clothing and books and education for their families. In this way the morals of the old have been improved, while the minds of the young have been enlightened, and a new sobriety and industry and domestic affection have been produced and cherished among the poor. And in some places where, through the lapse

of years, the Sabbath was only distinguished from the other days of the week by bringing with it an opportunity for idleness and sinful indulgence, there are now many families who have learned to regard it as the season of holy rest, and of communion with God in the house which he hath appointed. The effect of this is twofold. The parents have been brought to devote to their families that money which was formerly spent in dissipation and sin; and have also been led to those habits of soberness and industry which are so important to society. In this way Sabbath Schools have tended most beneficially to human improvement, and, even in the eye of the mere friend to his country, they are entitled to the warmest approbation and support.

We have dwelt upon this argument, because we wish to appeal to those who are led by no higher motive than the temporal welfare of those around them, and who are ready to consider every innovation as fraught with some hidden danger to society. But this is the weak, and the comparatively unimportant view of the case. Human knowledge indeed is necessary, even for the communication of that which concerns a world to come; and in so far is, and must ever be, of paramount importance. But the subject assumes a very different, and a more important aspect, when we consider that every child who is brought forth from the ignorance, and it may be, the depravity of its home, and has the Book of eternal life put into its hands, and the

lessons of that Book engraven on its memory, and intertwined with the early feelings of its heart, does in truth contain within itself the germ of an existence which is to endure in happiness or in misery after all that pertains to human society, and human institutions, is gone. And if this child, formed for immortality, and destined, after a few years are past, to depart to a place where all is fixed and unchangeable, is nevertheless ignorant of the only way by which the inheritance of Heaven can be procured, and misery unspeakably awful avoided, can we possibly conceive any effect more important and interesting than that which would give to such a Being the knowledge of the way of salvation? And if it be true that Sabbath Schools are founded,

and established, and supported, on the very principle of laying hold of the affections of those whose infant years have been surrounded with darkness and sin, and leading them to that blood of sprinkling which can alone purify and save, can we conceive any act of human benevolence more strikingly important? The mere possibility of saving one soul that was hastening to destruction, and of plucking one brand from that fire which awaits the wicked, might be enough to prove the utility of any institution which had such an effect for its object. And when it is considered that the habits of childhood often colour the complexion of our riper years—that a pious youth will generally lead to a religious manhood and old age—and that they whose

opening years were tinged with the beams of their Maker's favour and love, often go down to the grave with the same effulgence of his mercy around them, then must every attempt to produce a religious impression upon the minds of the young, carry with it the greatest of all encouragements. For if it were true that only one individual were rescued from ignorance and sin, and received the saving light of the gospel of peace, through the instrumentality of Sabbath Schools, a greater sum of happiness would be gained, and a deeper amount of misery averted than any language can state, or any imagination conceive. And how immeasurably great must this appear, when we know that these institutions have been the means of leading, not

one but thousands to the knowledge and the acceptance of the gospel of peace.

We have proceeded thus far on the assumption that Sabbath Schools are the means of conducting to knowledge, both human and religious, which would not otherwise be obtained, in the same degree at least, by the young. And this brings us to the objections of those who, overlooking the other advantages of institutions of this kind, are ready to ask if parents themselves are not the best, and ought not to be the only teachers of religion to their children?

The time was when this objection might have been urged with something approaching to truth; and we might have hesitated before proceeding to answer it. There was a time when Sabbath Schools might have been un-



necessary, because every family was itself a gospel seminary. There was a time when, among the labouring classes of our people, the knowledge and the fear of God were preserved and transmitted as the birthright which their fathers had bequeathed them. At that time the stillness of the Sabbath was only broken by the notes of public devotion, or of domestic praise. The patriarch of the hamlet was accustomed to welcome this day of peace with the voice of thanksgiving and of prayer; he went stately to the House of God, often at a long distance from his dwelling; and the shades of night never consigned him to repose, till he had committed himself, and his household, to the care of that Being with whom he had walked during the years of his pilgrimage. And

other generations rose around him to sit in the same place where their fathers had worshipped, and to depart with the same hope of immortality. At that time the Bible was the Sabbath companion of the lowliest peasant in the land, and a neglect of the public ordinances of religion, or an act of impiety on this day, were almost equal to expulsion from the ordinary rights of the community. At that time all were acquainted with the Scriptures of Truth; and all were outwardly religious. But how has society changed! The useful knowledge, the simple piety, the humble hope of our fathers, have in many cases given place to the reckless ignorance, the practical unbelief, or the daring sneer of those who neglect what they do not understand; and the Sabbath

sun which formerly saw every dwelling send forth its inhabitants to the worship of God, now shines upon many a habitation from which no worshipper goes forth at the hour of prayer; and where the careless or wicked indulgences with which the day of the Lord is profaned are only equalled by the poverty and wretchedness with which they are attended.

Such being the case, especially in our larger villages and crowded cities, where the labours of the most efficient ministry on earth cannot descend to the cases of particular families, what possible way is there of reclaiming and instructing the young, but by some such institutions as Sabbath Schools? Will it be denied that there are many parents who are either totally ignorant them-



selves, or who never make the attempt to communicate the knowledge of the Gospel to their children? Will the most daring opposers of Sabbath Schools venture to affirm that there are not many rising up, ignorant of, and indifferent to, their present condition and future destiny? And how are these to be instructed? And even, with regard to those parents who do possess such a knowledge of their own, and such a sense of their duty, as might lead them to be the religious instructors of their children, we would not be inclined to draw the line of separation too broadly, which would exclude them from the benefit of Sabbath Schools. We are not sure but that a mixture of the better leaven may be necessary for restoring the mass that is

corrupted ; that the example of children more piously educated may form a living pattern to those who have been less favoured ; and that even by the contrast which they bear to each other, both may be benefited. We are not sure but the competition and ardour evinced by their fellow-scholars may not operate powerfully even upon those who have good instructors at home. But we are sure, that the mere exercises of prayer and of praise, which at these institutions are taught to ascend from the lips of the little worshippers of Jesus, do foster those feelings of devotion by which the best instructed may be improved, and the most serious may be edified. Besides this, the time occupied on the Sabbath evening by Schools of this kind, is not so great as

to prevent parents, who are really impressed with a sense of their duty, from sowing farther, the seeds of divine knowledge in those hearts which have already been prepared to receive it.

But, be this as it may, we have argument enough against those who hold that parents ought to be the only religious instructors of their children, in the fact that there are many by whom such instruction never is, and never can be given. If you make every family a religious one, then we admit that Sabbath Schools may be closed; but till that period arrives, we must use them for accomplishing such a reformation. And, unfortunately for the welfare of society, such an opportunity for discontinuing Sabbath evening instruction does not seem to be near. It is true, that

never was there a time when a greater number of children were to be found destitute of the knowledge of the principles of Christianity. Many there are, who, deprived by providence of their natural protectors, have been left without a friendly guide to lead them in the path of heavenly truth. Many there are who spring up in the bosom of families where religion, with its holy and exalted exercises, forms no part of the habits to which they have been trained. Many there are to whom no voice of parental affection ever taught those early lessons of piety, which, intertwined with the first feelings of youth, are destined to live for ever; and who have never been taught to raise the first and purest offering of their heart to the throne of their Saviour and their God. Many

there are to whom the return of the Sabbath brings the weekly interval for idleness and sin; and who, let loose from all the salutary restraints of their home, afford a fearful contrast in their idleness and misery, to the solemnities of the day which they profane.

And will it be said, by any one, that the opening of a place of Sabbath instruction to these is not conferring a most important boon on society? Are we to wait till some favourable and sudden change takes place on parents, who have, themselves, been nursed in ignorance, and hardened into indifference by long years of carelessness and sin? Are we to neglect the young, whose tender minds are ready to receive any impression, merely because that impression ought to be communi-



cated by parents who have never themselves been instructed? The supposition is too monstrously absurd to be for a moment endured. If a change takes place at all it must be with the young. And how is this to be accomplished, unless by the efforts of some active and zealous individuals who will come forward to be their teachers? Now they who would stand back from this task, and conceal from themselves a view of their duty, by saying that it ought to be performed by the parents themselves, may as well hope that the Ethiopian will change his skin, or the bitter fountain send forth sweet waters. And surely no means can be conceived as more likely to accomplish this moral reformation in regard to the young, than that which opens a door

of instruction where the most ignorant and destitute may find a teacher and a friend, who is ready without money and without price, to communicate to them the truths of the gospel as freely as these are offered from heaven.

It has been farther objected to Sabbath evening instruction that it is prejudicial to society, by tending to weaken or to destroy those bonds which ought to connect children to their parents and to their home. This objection hath often been gravely put, and is therefore worthy of an answer. Now, we might answer it by saying, that better, better far every earthly tie were broken and cast away than that in this land of gospel light so many of the young should perish for lack of knowledge. But we are not reduced to any

argument like this. We merely ask what these bonds are which institutions of this kind tend to destroy? Is it that which binds the young to ignorance and sin, in those dwellings where no voice of instruction was ever heard to lead them? Is it that which connects them with impiety and crime, in the profaning of that day which the Lord hath hallowed to himself? Is it the bond which, in this land of gospel light, hath bound so many of the young in a darkness as deep and fatal as though no Sun of Righteousness had arisen to cheer us? Bonds beside these we know of none which institutions of this kind can tend to dissolve; and if it is to these the opponents of Sabbath Schools allude, we allow them

all the force and all the credit of their argument.

To say that Sabbath Evening Schools can destroy any tie which ought to connect parents and children with their respective duties, is false in reason, and false in experience. It is false in reason; for one of the lessons of the gospel is to teach the young to be submissive to those who are placed over them; and the circumstance of others endeavouring to assist them, cannot surely make parents less careful of their duty. It is false in experience; for the whole history of Sabbath Schools hath gone to prove that the children who are distinguished as the most regular and zealous in their attendance upon these, are also the best members of the families to which they belong. In

proof of this we might appeal to many examples, to show that the practical effect of such institutions is no longer a matter of doubt or of controversy. We could tell of many, who having their minds enlightened by the truths of the gospel, have been induced to give a readier and a more hearty obedience to those under whose care they were placed. We could tell of many who, from these sources of light and knowledge, have introduced the word of life into dwellings never before gladdened by its influence, and have communicated it to those from whom they ought to have received it. We could tell of the approach of sickness, and its wearisome nights, being lightened by the remembrance of truths acquired in the evening of the Lord's

day. We could tell of the flame of piety shedding a halo around the head of the youthful sufferers, and their expiring moments being cheered by the repetition of hymns which breathe of the glory above, as if the first songs of the heavenly Zion were already breaking on their ear.

But it is vain to proceed farther, or to defend what the voice of the Christian world hath declared cannot be opposed. The tide of public opinion hath already swept away those tiny embankments which prejudice and time-fostered bigotry would rear to oppose it, and it is no longer a question whether knowledge, or ignorance, light or darkness, is the best guide for the human path. In many parts of the country Sabbath Schools have been

established ; and while not one evil in human society can be charged against them, they have been felt and admitted to be a blessed boon to the people. By their instrumentality many a person hath gone forth to the world better prepared to withstand its temptations, and to encounter its troubles ; and many a saint now in glory may date the commencement of his heavenward journey to the hour of his first admission under the banner of their hallowed instruction.

This assuredly is not the age when any plan ought rashly to be opposed which has a tendency, however remote, to give a deeper and more peculiar sanctity to the Sabbath. Without doubt, the besetting sin of the times is indifference ;—an indifference to the

unseen but awful concerns of the world to come. And it is from the influence of this apathy and unconcern which have hung and deepened for years, in undisturbed dominion over the faculties of the soul, that so many are to be found who seem to have forgotten that the Lord hath set the Sabbath apart for his own service, and for our preparation for an eternal existence. We speak not of those who, surrounded by the sinful pleasures of the world, consider themselves as raised above the restrictions of the divine law ; but we speak of that humble class in our large towns, so many of whom have separated themselves from gospel ordinances and gospel duty. They have learned to defraud the Sabbath of its honour, and the Lord of the Sabbath of his worship.



This day of holy rest comes not to them in that garb of devotion which raises the heart and affections to heaven. It is to them the season of idleness, not of peace; it sets them free from labour, only to give them the opportunity for sin. The effect of this upon human society is the most dangerous and fatal that can be conceived. It destroys those habits of regularity, soberness, and industry, which were so long the ornament of our poor; and it breaks the strongest tie which ought to connect the people with the duty which they owe to the laws and the authorities of the land. When they dishonour the majesty of heaven, the step is a short one, that they despise or defy the influence of their fellow-mortals. Besides all this, the neglect of the

Sabbath and of the ordinances of religion tend unquestionably to bring down the judgments of heaven upon any nation. It was the prediction of the Jewish prophet, conveyed in the language of lamentation, that the Lord was to cause the Sabbath to cease out of Zion; but when that event took place, the people were also driven from their own land, and the foot of the barbarian profaned the shrine where Jehovah himself had dwelt. The fate of the descendants of Jacob ought to be a warning to us, lest our neglect and our sin should call down a similar punishment. And surely if any plan can be adopted by which the Sabbath can be arrayed in a deeper and a more peculiar solemnity in the eyes of the people, if any means can be used to

call and constrain them to know and to feel it to be indeed the day of the Lord's own appointing; if the truths of the gospel can then be sent home, as it were, to the retirement of their dwelling places, where they would, if possible, shut themselves up from its knowledge and its power, surely any effort of this kind ought to be welcomed and supported by every friend to the prosperity and safety of our land. And we know of no better method for the accomplishment of this, than the planting of Sabbath Schools in the crowded lanes of our larger towns, and in the more populous villages of our country; that even they who had spent the day of the Lord in carelessness and sin might be arrested for a moment in their career, by the warning

rung in their ears from the still small voice of religion, which ascended to heaven from the youthful worshippers.

It were well if, in the midst of all the means that are used to assist them in their duty, parents could themselves be awakened to a desire for the spiritual welfare of their children. All that we can do is to point out the way, and urge and entreat them to walk in it. But surely if there be an obligation which above all others ought to lay hold of the affections and feelings of the heart, it is that which binds them to provide for the everlasting welfare of those whom the Lord hath given them. Those parents would justly be branded as unnatural and inhuman, who would leave their children without the necessaries of life, or

who would expose them to perish in the wilderness ; and of how much greater neglect and cruelty must they be thought guilty, who would allow the immortal soul to pine away into spiritual death ? To them there are opportunities of giving a bias to the youthful mind, which no other friend —no other teacher, can possess. And when the language of affection becomes the language of piety, it touches a chord which no other voice can teach to vibrate. The impression which is thus communicated, continues through life, because it is connected with feelings the purest and the warmest that ever pervade the heart. We know not at how early a period the mind is capable of receiving an impression of divine things,—much ear-

lier we are convinced than is generally believed,—but we do know that there is no period at which the Saviour of sinners is not ready to receive the weakest of his worshippers. The mothers of Israel who brought their children to our Lord, were welcomed with a kindness which showed how grateful the offering was to him; and their example ought to encourage parents in every age to lose no opportunity of devoting their little ones to his service.

And well were it for the young if they were led to improve the precious opportunities which the season of instruction brings them. They are now sowing the seed which shall in time lead to a harvest of happiness or misery. In the calm retirement of their

homes, where the rude storms of this world's trouble cannot yet visit them, they are called to fortify their minds with those principles which will enable them to stand firm in the evil day. The many means which are now used to train up the young in the knowledge and the fear of God, must lay a deeper responsibility on those who fail to improve by them. The season of youth does not endure for ever, nor can Sabbath evening instruction accompany those who are called to mingle with the business and the cares of the world. And if any of those children who have been invited and received into the Schools, where the truths of the gospel have been made known to them; where they have been warned of the danger of sin, and of its hateful-

ness in the sight of God; and where they have been taught to join in those exercises of religion which carried their affections onward to the throne of their Father;—if any of these should go forth to the world, only to fall a speedy prey to its temptations, and an early victim to its sins; and if, after a life of carelessness and folly, they should be awakened to a sense of their danger, with the horrors of a death-bed remorse around them; and if the remembrance of their early instruction should then flash upon their view, oh with what bitterness will they then look back to those scenes of piety and peace where their heart was first taught to hold communion with its God! And as they reflect upon years mispent, and opportunities misapplied,



what would they not then give to be allowed to retrace those steps which have conducted them to the gates of everlasting death?



We have received the following hymn, which, while it bears witness to the utility of Schools such as we have described, may, we think, form a very pleasing task to those children who attend them.

#### THE SABBATH SCHOOLBOY'S HYMN.

O God, my deepest thanks accept  
 For all thy mercies shown to me,  
 Whose bark without a helm was swept  
 Across life's dark and stormy sea !  
 I heard the winds around me howl,  
 And o'er the whelming billows rode,  
 Yet never did it strike my soul  
 To call in prayer on thee, O God.

Alas ! how awful had it been,  
 If, when sin's darkness round me lay,  
 And I thy light had never seen,  
 My spirit had been called away !  
 But thou hast set the captive free,  
 And sunshine on my path hast pour'd ;  
 For what man is, and ought to be,  
 I learn from thy most holy Word.

Oh blest are they that fear the Lord !

This earth is not a home for them

Who walk, obedient to the Word,

On to their heavenly diadem !

Away the joys of earth may flee,

But still 'tis theirs elate to sing,—

“ O grave, where is thy victory ?

And where, O death, thy venom'd sting ? ”

Blessings be with them, they who stand

Amid a world of sin and strife,

Who call aloud to every land—

“ Ho ! turn ye to the path of life !

Ho ! turn ye to the sacred spring,

Where all without a price may go ;

Tidings of life to all we bring :

Why will ye perish ? turn ye, ho ! ”

Blessings be with them, who beguil'd

My erring feet to wisdom's path ;

For I, a careless, thoughtless child,

Knew nought of darkness and of death :

Blessings be with them, they who told

How Jesus died the bound to free,

And led me to life's pleasant fold,

One of the Saviour's flock to be !

I thank thee, Lord, that thou hast made

Mine eyes to see thy blessed light,

While thousands linger in the shade

Of Ignorance and Error's night ;

But thou hast shown how Christ for sin  
 His blood did as a ransom give ;  
 Yea, died, and lay the grave within,  
 That sinners such as I might live !

'Mid pleasures, may I ever feel,  
 That every joy to thee I owe ;  
 'Mid sorrows, teach me meekly still  
 Beneath thy chastening rod to bow :  
 Still be it mine thy name to praise,  
 And to thy holy will resign,  
 Whether thou wilt that length of days,  
 Or that an early death be mine.

A careless child in sin I trode,  
 And idly spent each Sabbath day ;  
 I never thought of Heaven or God ;  
 I knew not what it was to pray ;  
 But in my hands was placed the book,  
 Which now is all my hope and pride,  
 Which tells how Christ our burden took,  
 And for the sake of sinners died.

May still my life with thee be led,  
 O God, and keep me free from sin ;  
 Let what my Saviour taught and said,  
 Still glow my grateful heart within ;  
 May every day, and every year,  
 That finds me nearer to my grave,  
 Behold me resting, void of fear,  
 On him whose arm is strong to save !

Life is a span for trial lent—

O that my days so passed, that I  
Might less be griev'd for time mispent,  
When I must lay me down to die.

From sinner's paths, from scorner's ways,

From all temptations keep me free,  
And bid my spirit fix its gaze

On Heaven, and those who dwell with thee.

△

FINIS.

## ERRATA.

- Page 36, line 1, insert a comma after Sabbath  
— line 2, *for tend read tends*  
39, line 14, *for thus read then*















