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A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

Alabama Central Sunday School Union,

ON ITS

FIRST ANNIVERSARY,

AT MOUNT PLEASANT CHURCH, TUSCALOOSA, COUNTY.

JULY 27th, 1851.

BY REV. ROBERT B. WHITE.

PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD OF MANAGERS.

Tuscaloosa:

PRINTED BY J. W. & J. F. WARREN, "OBSERVER" OFFICE.

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SERMON.

Ephesians 6 : 4 : Bring them up (your children) in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The objects, which we are assembled to consider, have been, doubtless, so fully made known to all, whom it is my privilege at this time to address, as to render any explanation of them almost if not altogether unnecessary. I appear before you on behalf of the Alabama Central Sunday School Union—an institution of recent origin—it having been organized on the 11th of April, 1851, at Big Creek Church, in Tuscaloosa county, this its first meeting since its organization being designed as its first Anniversary. This association, though more limited in its sphere of operation than that, is kindred in its aims to the American Sunday School Union, which in 1824, was formed from the Philadelphia Sunday School Union, and which has already, as you know, conferred on our country and on our American Zion benefits vast and incalculable. We have the satisfaction to know that in our present discussion we occupy vantage-ground, in as much as we advocate no new and untried experiment, but aim only to extend and apply the blessings of an institution which has been long and favorably known, which has ever been pre-eminently successful in its operations, and is now sailing on the full tide of prosperity. The design of this discourse is to show the importance of the work in which our association is engaged, with a view to stimulating the zeal of those who have already taken part in it, and enlisting in it the affections and energies of others. In this great cause, so noble and benevolent in its aims, so beneficent in its past effects, involving so deeply the interests of our country and of the Churches of the land, we would enlist the sympathies and co-operation of all our fellow christians and all our fellow-citizens. In the conduct of this discourse, we shall arrive at the conclusions, to which we would bring you, perhaps circuitously but by regular steps.

1. We lay before you in the first place, the general proposition that a knowledge of divine truth is indispensable to the attainment of salvation and of high christian character. We address your understandings first, because we are aware that safe and permanent action must ever be built on the steady foundation of principle. Some may suppose that we are here only affirming a truism—a proposition so palpable and undeniable as not to demand and scarcely to admit of a discussion. But however obvious this principle may be to some minds it has been strangely and sadly overlooked by others; and many of the errors of our countrymen, and most of the indolence of our fellow christians have resulted from a secret denial of, or at least from a gross inattention to it. We affirm that there are many even in the christian Church, who act as though they did not believe that the attainment of religious knowledge is necessary to the attainment of salvation, and among these may be classed those men who oppose the various efforts of the day made for the evangelizing of the world—the opponents, for example, of missionary operations and Sabbath Schools; and not only those who oppose actively these benevolent institutions, but such as fail to co-operate with them are practically denying the great truth that we are just now affirming; many seem to expect the salvation of men to be effected without the dissemination of christian truth, and deride and denounce the efforts of those who would instruct their fellow creatures in religion as though they were attempting the Almighty's work.

We do not affirm that religious knowledge is of itself sufficient to secure the salvation of its possessor. We wish it distinctly understood that we do not hold that men can be saved by any amount of knowledge, apart from the influences of the divine spirit. We do not even believe that divine truth is always accompanied by the operations of the spirit of God, or that it always removes ungodliness and implants sacred and right feelings; although we do believe that generally when faithfully taught it is blessed by the Spirit and exhibits its effects in the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

We do affirm, however, that human beings are saved, (except in the case of infants dying in infancy) only through the instrumentality of received truth. We adopt the opinion of

a recent writer that "no man can have the spiritual discernment of a truth which he does not know. The intellectual cognition is just as necessary to spiritual knowledge as the visual perception of a beautiful object is to the apprehension of its beauty. Men cannot be made religious by mere instruction, but they cannot be made religious without it. Religion includes the knowledge, i. e. the intellectual apprehension of divine things, as one of its essential elements without which it cannot exist."

The proposition before us accords with the opinions of the wisest of men. Lord Bacon has said, in his treatise on the advancement of learning, that, "certain it is that veritas and bonitas (that is truth and goodness) differ but as the seal and the print: for truth prints goodness: and they be the clouds of error which descend in the storms of passion and perturbation." All statesmen, who would improve the morals of the people whom they govern, publish laws, which may be regarded as great truths. All philanthropists, who would elevate the moral and social condition of their fellow men, endeavor to impart to them sound knowledge as the necessary instrument of their advancement. It is a wise and happy aphorism of Victor Cousin, "Tell me the philosophy of a nation, and I will tell you its character."

The importance of the attainment of knowledge where men's temporal interests are involved shows its importance in religion. Who will deny the importance of knowledge in our worldly affairs? and why is it not equally necessary in religion? For who has not discovered that there is an uniformity in all the divine dispensations and an analogy between the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace?

The history of the world generally has shown how important an agency religious knowledge has in the elevation of the human race. False opinions in religion have conducted to the vilest immoralities and impieties, while true opinions in regard to this momentous subject have rarely failed to beautify the moral aspect of a family, a neighborhood, or a nation. Searching the records of peoples that have passed away you will discover that piety has prevailed among them just in proportion as the attributes of the Deity, and the scheme of saving grace have been, clearly apprehended among them, and now

looking over the world, although the impression of the picture is painful because ignorance and sin exist and abound everywhere, we find morality and piety flourishing most where christian truth has been most fully communicated, and where this is absent, we find superstition and fanaticism and penances and sacrifices indeed, but the lowest moral degradation with few evidences of regenerated desire and scarce a trace of piety : and we turn from the scene with the reflection that if truth could only shine on all the world, its inhabitants would find a pathway from their debasement up to virtue and holiness and God. The world's history has certainly illustrated the fact that absence of divine truth dooms the sons of humanity to the deepest moral disgrace, to the contempt of all that is spiritual and pure, to gross idolatry on the one hand, or dark and icy atheism on the other. Quench the light of sacred truth and what would become of all the amenities and moralities of civilized society : all the sweet charities of life—what would become of your asylums for the unfortunate—your hospitals for the poor, the sick and the wounded, the deaf and dumb, the blind and insane—what, (we may confidently ask) would become of all your humane laws, and those free institutions which christian principle has founded and protected ? all these would perish. And if a knowledge of religious truth is necessary to the preservation of a mere outward morality and philanthropy, much more is it necessary to sanctify the fountains of action in the human soul : this the past history—the present condition of the world fully evinces.

The history of the christian Church especially has shown the importance of religious knowledge as an instrument of holiness. Christianity has sanctified and saved multitudes of souls. But how has she achieved her conquests and maintained her authority ? Her weapon has been truth : her armor truth, her fortifications have been reared on the foundation and built up with the materials of truth. When the Church of Christ had sunk to the lowest point of depression, when its ministers had become unfaithful and corrupt, when the fires of holiness had expired upon her altars, then did the motto prevail that "ignorance is the mother of devotion," and what raised up its drooping head and rekindled its extinguished piety and infused into it the warmth of a new spirit-

ual life, and recovered it the godliness which had animated and adorned it in the day of its pristine purity and power? The communication of religious truth. Oh! why is Scotland the most religious of the nations, but because she is most enlightened in the knowledge of divine truth? Scotland, whose free church is so energetic, so liberal, so devoted to Christ, and whose late exode from spiritual despotism is one of the most heroic and morally sublime occurrences in all the annals of christianity.

That a knowledge of the truth is necessary to salvation is evident from the direct testimony of the holy scriptures—testimony that has more weight with us than all the voices from the past. The way of holiness is called in the sacred word the “way of truth.” The Savior prayed, “sanctify them through thy word, thy word is truth.” When he wished to recover mankind to holiness, he commanded his disciples to go and “teach all nations.” A failure to apprehend divine truth results in damnation as appears from the solemn passage, “God shall send them strong delusions that they might believe a lie, that they might be damned that believe not the truth.” The correct opinion on this subject is conveyed in the declaration of the Apostle that “we are saved through the sanctification of the spirit and the belief of the truth.”

We may infer the indispensableness of religious knowledge to the salvation of the soul from other truths which are fully established. Religious knowledge is indispensable as a means of preservation from that enthusiasm and that fanaticism, which distract the soul and burn out its best affections, and wither in the bud its most sacred emotions. It has a tranquilizing—soothing effect on the mind, and produces a serenity of soul favorable to the nurture of piety: it is to the human soul like verdure to the eye of man. It is indispensable to piety because necessary to regulate the conscience, that great moral arbiter within us, on whose right action all morality and holiness depend. It is necessary to the exercise of faith: (faith indeed is the apprehension of divine truth—and men cannot believe unless they hear or are instructed, “how can they believe unless they hear?”) of faith which raises the soul above the world inspires a spirit of obedience to the Father of mercies, furnishes strength and weapons for the

conflict with the great spiritual adversary, produces a hope that is full of immortality, and being the evidence of things not seen, realizes even in the present life the things of eternity—which is at once the grand instrument of the justification of the soul, and of its sanctification. Religious knowledge shall be a great instrument of the souls perfection in the heavenly world. It is one of our best and brightest and most gratifying, one of our most enrapturing conceptions of heaven, that it is an estate of the most exalted knowledge, and of vast intellectual discovery, where the mists, that have enshrouded and obscured the most interesting subjects here, shall be removed and dissipated, where the ignorance shall be taken away, which by disturbing our understandings has checked the flow of our affections, where truths now imperfectly known, shall shine in perfect purity and undiminished effulgence, and truths now totally invisible from their distance, and peculiar to the sphere of heaven shall shine and blaze on our enlarged vision; where the light of truth coming from the face of Deity shall impress his image with more distinctness and certainly with more permanent effect, than the light of the natural sun, by the aid of human art, now impresses on the hard metal the image of the human face, or the edifice or the landscape. The more we learn of divine truth in this world, we affirm, the more godly are we likely to become, the more are we changed into the divine image from glory to glory, and if this truth had not been expressly revealed or discovered by human experience, we might have inferred it from the moral transformation effected by the beatific vision in heaven. A knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus is then a necessary, and an effective means of the salvation of men—as the history of the Church declares—as the experience of every believer attests—as revelation affirms—as reason assures us.

2. Having shown the importance of religious knowledge to the attainment of holiness and salvation we shall show you, in the second place, that this knowledge ought to be communicated at the earliest possible period of human life—in childhood and youth.

Children ought early to receive religious knowledge that they may be early brought into a condition of salvation.—

The conversion of children is a practicable and in every respect a desirable thing ; and we are persuaded that there are few things in regard to which the church of the present day is more culpable than its indifference to the immediate conversion of the youth of the church.

It is desirable that human beings become regenerated in early life because observation has taught us that they may early die. Although children are under a curse on account of their federal connexion with the first of the race we do not believe that they are actually sinners from the first moment of their lives ; in infancy and very early childhood, they are not morally accountable, because not capable of receiving the divine law. But although some become responsible agents at an earlier period than others, doubtless all children become so responsible much earlier than most persons are accustomed to imagine. And as soon as children become accountable to the divine government, they are liable to perish—to pass down to perdition—unless they have exercised faith in the great expiatory sacrifice and been regenerated through the instrumentality of heavenly truth. Nor is their danger removed by leaving them after this period in spiritual ignorance since in that event their condition resembles that of the heathen who have a law written on their hearts : indeed few of them can fail to learn despite parental neglect, something of the law of Sinai and the moral precepts of Christ.

Vast multitudes pass into eternity during the period embraced between the first dawning of moral agency and adult age—say between seven and eighteen years of age, (for who can say positively that with most children moral accountability does not commence as early as the eighth year of their lives ?) more perhaps than during any other period of life of equal duration. Oh it is a solemn thought that nearly all who die during this period, being accountable to God are lost unless grace has renewed them through the instrumentality of apprehended truth. Children are accountable and immortal beings—ever in danger of natural death, and as much as any other beings, are entitled to that religious knowledge which saves from death eternal. You know perhaps from the experience of your own households that your children may die ; you may have wept for your son or daughter cut down as a flow-

er in the bud, and covered up in the silent clods of the valley. It is delightful to think that many who have thus died, are singing now the songs of heaven, saved through a parent's faithfulness and prayers. It is sad to think that many who have thus died have gone to the world of the unhappy, because ignorant of Christ and his salvation. As multitudes of the heathen have, so multitudes of children have been lost, who might have been saved, if the plan of saving grace, if the Savior's love had been clearly disclosed to them. Oh let us seek to save our youth, because such multitudes of them before they cease to be young, pass away to the world of the dead—to the land where hope and mercy sigh farewell.

We ought to desire the early conversion of our children even if we knew that they were to live to old age, and if we were sure of their possessing piety in the maturity of life. For their own sake, for God's sake, and for the sake of their fellow man, we ought to desire it. All human beings even the youngest need the present consolations, support and direction of religion. We are apt to regard childhood as the happiest season of the life of man, but it is not a season of unmingled enjoyment. We may say that unconsolated by the Gospel of Christ, childhood and youth are vanity. Can you doubt that your children would profess a far higher happiness, if religion were the stay and comfort of their young hearts? Can you doubt that religion sheds an additional radiance even over the sunny pathway of childhood? Human beings must be truly regenerated, if at any period of their existence here, they would tread the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace. Grace may renew the heart at a very early age and there is a peculiar beauty and sweetness in youthful piety. God is certainly as really glorified by the piety of the young as of the old, and every argument which proves that a pious devotion is the duty of the latter proves equally that it is the duty of the first. If our youth would not spend a portion of their moral existence in a state of as deep degradation as that of irrational creatures—a state, however, which theirs is not, one of guilt—they must remember their Creator in the days of their early life. Those who like Obediah commence the service of the Lord early are apt to serve him greatly; they have fewer difficulties to encounter in the

christian path, become prepared for a higher usefulness in the church, are trained up for a nobler destiny. The highest piety attained on earth is the portion only of him who commencing early the service of religion pursues it steadily through the lapse of years, to the end of time. Yes, that mellenial piety which we so much love to anticipate, and which shall beautify the church of the Redeemer, shall spring forth in the vernal season of life, and grow in its summer, and mature in its autumn, and abide green and vigorous in the winter of age. We discover from our observation of men, that whatever is commenced by them in early life, is apt to be carried to the highest perfection. There have been good soldiers, who were not brought up in the camp, or accustomed in youth to the mimic war of hunting. There have been scholars, who have become such despite a defective education. But such cases are rare and constitute exceptions to a great general rule. They usually become the best scholars, who have been familiar with books from childhood : and they usually become the best soldiers, who from an early period of life have been familiar with fire arms ; his familiarity with the gun from his boyhood contributes perhaps more than any thing else to make the American militia man equal in the battle field to the disciplined soldiers of the old world. He, that would excel in any of the arts of practical life, must commence it young. So it is in religion If the path of the just shineth more and more, his path must be brightest in middle manhood, who has begun the pursuit of religion in his earliest boyhood. You increase the present power of the church by bringing into its bosom children truly regenerated : such may exhibit as others the beauty of holiness and the power of grace, and such may offer as well as others that fervent prayer which has power with the most High and secures blessings to the Savior's church. Many have blessed God that their children were converted, because they themselves have been led by those children to the feet of Jesus. A pious mother on her death-bed once thanked God that her boy had ever been sent to the Sabbath School—saying that the piety which he there acquired, had been the means of her soul's salvation. These cadets in the army of Jesus Christ may render effective service now and prepare for the noblest service in coming life, and cer-

tainly shall win for themselves the most blissful reward in the everlasting world. Who can estimate the usefulness of that holy youth John Urquhart? and yet he died before he had entered on a missionary field or had attained to the years of complete manhood. Eternity alone can disclose the usefulness of such men as Henry Maityn, Summerfield and McCheyne, who all died young men, amid the regrets indeed of the church at their loss, but amid its gratitude for their labors, their success and their example. Had they not been religiously educated, and renewed by divine grace, at a very early age, it is not reasonable to suppose that they would have been prepared for the high service which they have performed in the army of Jesus Christ. And, but for the conversion of these and such as these, in the firmament of holy witnesses whence the church receives so much of its light, there might have been vacancy and darkness where now shines a whole galaxy with unwonted splendor. But even if you are so unbelieving as not to expect the conversion of children, we beg you to consider that our youth must be instructed in religion with a view to thus attaining piety in maturer life, childhood is the most impressible season of life. The germs of character are then sown, whether or not they be developed at an early age. All admit that instruction communicated then is the longest retained, and the most powerfully influential, either for weal or woe. When persons in adult age are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, they are not converted simply through the particular sermon or exhortation or providential event which has been the proximate cause of their awakening, but through the instrumentality of all the truth that at various periods of life has been communicated to them. Experience has fully attested that comparatively few are converted in manhood, who were not religiously instructed in the days of childhood. Most of the eminently pious have been the children of mothers eminently pious, and have been taught the scriptures from the first dawns of the day of their reflection and moral accountability. We have not time to enlarge on this part of our subject and it is unnecessary to do so. We ask you to call to mind here those familiar thoughts which you have heard and read on the impressibility of youth, and on the difficulty of changing fixed

habits of thought and action, and of the illustrations of these things drawn from the facility with which the twig is bent, and the impossibility of bending the gnarled oak of the forest, of the facility with which the rivulet is turned, and the difficulty of changing the course or checking the current of the broad, mighty, impetuous river. You do not expect in many cases those who grow up in ignorance of the precepts of the Gospel, to attain a high morality, or those who grow up in ignorance of the plan of salvation to attain a high piety in subsequent life.

3. We affirm, in the third place, that Sabbath Schools constitute an important and necessary means of communicating to the youth of our country the religious knowledge which we have already proved to be of so inestimable value to them. The two great agencies for imparting religious knowledge to our youth, besides the Sabbath School, are the pulpit and parental instruction, but neither of these, in the present condition of the country and the church, is adequate to the effectuation of this vast and valuable design. Let it not be said that these are the only means of instructing the young that have been provided in the holy Scriptures. The church generally must take part in this work which it can do in no manner more proper or more effective than through the institution of the Sabbath School.

The pulpit is not adequate to the work of the religious education of the children of our country, for two reasons, the first, that in many portions of the land it does not exist at all, and the second, that where it does exist, its instructions are not adapted to the mind of children. You are all aware that there are thousands of neighborhoods in the land, where there is, we do not say, no intelligent preaching, but no preaching whatever. There are many such neighborhoods even in the favored county of Tuscaloosa. Sabbath Schools do supply not only for children, but for adults, to a considerable extent, this deficiency of public preaching. And let us ask is public preaching, of the character we hear anywhere, suited to the capacity of childhood? Are not the thoughts expressed in the pulpit and the mode of their expression altogether above the comprehension of the young? And this is necessarily so, since the plainness of style and frequent repetition of

familiar truths, which would be necessary for the benefit of children, would be irksome to adults generally—even to such as are pious. Children learn more religious truth in the Sabbath School in one month, than they can acquire in a whole year, under the most able and eloquent preaching.

Nor can we reasonably expect the children of the country to receive the religious instruction they need under the domestic roof. Multitudes of parents in this land, many in our own vicinity, are too ignorant to instruct their children in religion or to impart to them much valuable knowledge of any character. Many parents, who possess a share of religious knowledge themselves, being destitute of piety, are indifferent to the religious instruction of their children; and some, whom charity might induce us to regard as christians, are in this matter, most sadly neglectful. All parents, even the most intelligent and pious and attentive, find in the Sabbath School, especially in the books it furnishes, a most important auxiliary. Perhaps few would affirm that they would be able to instruct their children as well without as with this auxiliary instrumentality.

That men should object to the Sabbath School does not surprise us, since there is no institution however good, no institution human or divine, to which some men may not be found to object. Some persons of exclusive pretensions have objected that Sabbath Schools bring together the children of different grades of society and of different degrees of moral culture, to the detriment of the morals and manners of those whose domestic education has been the more fortunate. We know, however, that children of all sorts are accustomed to associate with each other in this land; and that they never associate in circumstances less unfavorable to their moral character than when they meet on the Sabbath for the purposes of religious instruction. We regard it indeed as one of the advantages of the Sabbath School, that it unites in one brotherhood the children of the rich and the poor, thus cherishing republican feelings, nurturing kindly affections, and forming friendship the more lasting because connected with the tender and delightful reminiscences of childhood.

Nor is the objection worthy of respect that Sabbath Schools are based on the opinion that children are taught religion as

they are taught human science, and thus its character is degraded and the Holy Spirit insulted. The advocates of Sabbath Schools believe as firmly as other men the dependence of all men for salvation on the spirit of God. They hold, however, that the divine word is the sword of the spirit. This objection deserves no respect because it applies with equal force to the preaching of the Gospel, to parental instruction, and indeed to all the heaven-instituted means of grace.

The objection that Sabbath Schools transfer the religious instruction of children from parents to others is altogether unreasonable. Even if this were true, the question would be are children generally better instructed at home *or* at the Sabbath School. But it is not true that such an effect is necessary. A large part of each Lord's day is still left to parents for the religious instruction of their households. Such an effect is not produced except in rare instances. The Sabbath School has served to remind parents of their duties to their children—and has furnished them vast facilities for discharging them, and has rendered them more faithful in performing them than at any past period. We have been speaking of christian parents: and we ask you to consider here how few parents have the ability and the heart to instruct their children in the things of Christ's Kingdom.

A sufficient answer to all objections to the Sabbath School may be formed in the vast amount of good it has already accomplished in this land and elsewhere since its first establishment. It has already instructed millions of the children of our country in the way of salvation. There are doubtless at this time many hundreds of thousands of children attached to the Sabbath Schools of this land. The Sabbath Schools has supplied in numbers ministers for our pulpits, hearers for our churches, and inhabitants for heaven. We should detain you long, if we should detail all that our ears have heard or that our eyes have seen of its inestimable benefits. The name of Robert Raikes shall descend to coming generations with the name of Howard, to be honored as that of one of the best benefactors of the human race, it shall be recalled with a thrill of gratitude by myriads in heaven. Surely no christian that is acquainted with the history of Sabbath Schools, who knows how much they have already accomplished for human

souls, how much glory they have acquired for the Redeemer, how they have by their results caused men and angels to rejoice—no such christian can object to them, or fail to praise God for their establishment or to desire that they may be established over all the earth. At first this was designed exclusively for the benefit of the poor, but now they are found necessary for all classes alike and blessings to all.

We have said nothing of the influence of Sabbath Schools on the temporal welfare of individuals, families, and the nation. We have been arguing for immortal interests: for what would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul. And yet if we regard only the present life, the value of Sabbath Schools appears inestimable.

They have contributed vastly to the intellectual culture of our country's youth—of those of them especially whom fortune had deprived of all other means of mental improvement. They have taught thousands to read. They have brought thousands of minds which otherwise would have had access to no literature whatever, in contact with the purest and noblest and most elevating literature. The fact of a literature's being religious does not render it less effective as a means of intellectual improvement; and we contend that no literature is more improving to the intellect than that christian literature which the Sabbath School is the means of diffusing. The Sabbath recurring once in each period of seven days, regular attendance on the Sabbath School for seven years is equal in its intellectual influences and results to attendance for one year at a secular school. Indeed, when we consider that those who enjoy the benefits of these religious schools, usually devote a large portion of each week to preparation for their Sunday recitations, we affirm, that he, that attends the Sabbath Schools only for seven years, may expect to have his intellect at least as much instructed and expanded as he who for two or three years, attends the *week-day* school only.

Sunday Schools have restrained from crime and impelled to virtue—have preserved the quietude of the Sabbath—so great a temporal blessing to man, have secured personal respectability and domestic happiness, and the stability of our political institutions—have advanced the greatness and glory of our country. Mr. Wirt once said that the duration of our

free institutions depended on the Sabbath School. It has certainly saved millions to the treasuries of our States. It has done what is better—it has saved millions of tears—it has saved the blood of many a human heart. Who that has ever seen a well regulated Sabbath School—that has looked on the bright shining happy faces of the congregated children—but has felt that if this institution did nothing more than communicate a present happiness to those who come within its influence, it would be worth a thousand times all the cost of its establishment and preservation. In saying that the Sabbath School is a grand instrumentality of the conversion of men, we consider that the ascription to it of every other benefit has been included or implied. If it fits human beings for heaven, it surely prepares them for enjoying and diffusing happiness on earth.

Lastly ; we affirm that there is no more effective mode of establishing Sabbath Schools throughout our State than that which this association proposes to adopt.

Great is the need of some agitation among us on the important subject of Sunday Schools, as we all admit. We need not repeat that there are many neighborhoods in our State in which no such Schools exist, and in which the truths of eternal life can scarcely be said to be proclaimed from one year's end unto another. We are persuaded that unless some vigorous measures be taken, multitudes of our youth must grow up in almost heathenish darkness, to endanger the morals and political freedom of the country, and to perish forever in their sins. Wishing to be greatly useful it is wise for us to commence our benevolent action with the Sunday School, because it is a means of good at once so necessary, so effective, so easy of application. Something ought to be done, something must be done speedily in behalf of this great cause.

Combination and concert of action are necessary to the accomplishment of any vast design. Our individual and isolated efforts might indeed effect something for this blessed cause, but thus associated, with our concentrated strength, we may hope to effect something far greater and more general. If too, it is wise to act in this matter on some definite plan, on what plan could we so properly act as one similar to that of the American Sunday School Union—an institution

that has sustained itself for more than a quarter of a century—that has ever operated most discreetly, and that has established thousands of Sabbath Schools in the land, and which promises, if sustained, to accomplish a still greater amount of good for our country. The American Sunday School Union furnishes our Sabbath Schools with books—the very best of books—the books our children need—books free from every thing of a sectarian character, and yet exhibiting prominently and forcibly the great truths of the Gospel. The security that we have that the Alabama Central Sunday School Union will not sink into sectarianism—that sectarianism which would be its bane and its death, is, that it designs to use in the Schools it establishes the books furnished by the American Sunday School Union. It is not to be understood, however, that the Schools connected with our institution are debarred from the use of other books—even those of a denominational character. It is for our particular section of the country that we propose to labor. We are associated for the purpose of establishing Schools here on the soil of Alabama. It is right for us first to build the portion of the de-lapidated wall that is over against ourselves. We labor for the children of our own State first and chiefly, because our first obligations are to them, and because we know their destitutions and necessities to be great. The establishment of a Depository of Sunday School books at Tuscaloosa shall prove a great blessing, and the agitation of the general subject, besides resulting in the establishment of new Sabbath Schools, must give a new impulse to the interests of those that are already in existence among us.

We regard the present as a great movement. We firmly believe that the result shall be a change in the moral and religious aspect of the entire State. And even if we should fail in our efforts, we shall enjoy the consciousness of having attempted our duty—we shall receive a reward for our efforts when all the events of time shall have terminated.

As there is an union of effort among us, there will, doubtless, be an union of hearts. Not the least advantage of this associated effort shall be, that it will draw together christians of different denominations, enabling them to feel that they have common interests, hopes and aims, it will cement our

hearts in love, and perhaps prepare us to go forth more vigorously and more unitedly to the great work of the world's conversion. It is delightful to meet on this broad platform of benevolence, and forgetting denominational distinctions, recognize each other only as christians and brethren.

To you, members of the Convention, who are engaged in the work of imparting instruction in our Sabbath Schools, we could speak many encouraging words. Persevere in your work amid all your discouragements and difficulties. Renew and redouble your efforts in this sacred cause. Yours is indeed a noble and blessed employment. The interests, which you uphold, are vital, your "Country's, God's and truths." Your work is "twice blessed." You are conferring the most important blessings on others. In watering others, you shall be watered yourselves. By your benevolent exertions, your own piety shall be invigorated and nourished. You now receive the approval of your consciences for your labors of love, and are treasuring up delightful reflections for the hour of your departure from the world: in the eternity into which you must soon enter, where the vanity of all merely earthly aims shall be discovered, if your motives are sanctified you shall see those who are the objects of your present solicitude, and rejoice in their happiness, and for your instrumental agency in their salvation, you may expect with confidence to receive then from the lips and hands of your Redeemer, a most blessed approval and reward.

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