

OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL

One Sunday morning of this autumn I thought I would go to Sabbath school, as I seldom go. The bright faces of the children brought recollections of the long ago, when my limbs were lithe and light and my gray hairs were of a different color; of the home among the hills of the Empire state, of sparkling waters dashing in the sunlight down their rocky sides; of the brown autumn forest leaves stretching away in the distance of an Indian summer's hazy atmosphere; of my childhood's home where my mother dwelt. Ah me! Can we ever forget? What is there in the joyous face of a child that affects us so?

The children were taking their places as I entered the room; the school was called to order, and, after a song and prayer, each class recited a written lesson from Mark xi, 23: "For verily I say unto you that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe, that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith." Great stress was laid upon the efficacy of prayer, and the teachers, especially the young ladies, were very earnest in trying to impress upon the minds of the children that prayer could accomplish everything.

The exercises were concluded, the collection for foreign missions was taken, calling out some dissatisfied remarks from the superintendent, when a commotion was raised by a bad boy (what school has not got it's "bad boy?") who said, in a voice that could be heard all over the room, "Let us give the blame heathen our prayers, and keep our money to buy marbles with." There was a wild look of dismay on the faces of that school. Then the children tittered and thrust their handkerchiefs in their mouths. Some of the teachers indulged in a suppressed laugh behind their books, while others with a desperate twitching of their mouths, strove to be earnestly interested in their classes. The superintendent cast a withering frown at the guilty culprit, who hid himself behind the seat in front of him. The exercises were brought to an abrupt close by the superintendent briefly exhorting to increase the collection for the next Sunday, and be dismissed, after singing, "What a friend we have in Jesus."

At this stage I withdrew, and, slowly passing down the street, the notes of the organ fell gently on the air, the voices of the children blending sweetly with the sound, and these words shaped themselves in my mind:

What a friend we have in Jesus,

All the ills of life to bear:

What a folly in enduring

When relief is found in prayer.

Why beg coin to save the heathen,  
Of the widow's mite her share,  
And of childhood's tiny treasure—  
Why not trust it all to prayer?

From the earthquake he'll protect  
you,

Cyclone's wreck you need not fear.  
Tidal waves will never touch you  
If you'll cry aloud in prayer.

From the fever's breath he'll guard  
you,

Lightning's flash be lost in air,  
And dread hunger ne'er will drive  
you,  
If to God you'll shout in prayer.

To the starving babe and mother,  
Plenty-laden, he'll repair,  
And the knife of the assassin  
Shall be turned aside by prayer.

Not an ill will e'er betide you,  
Never want your frame impair;  
All earth shall be changed to please  
you,  
By your faith and power of  
prayer.

Horrid wars will ne'er oppress you,  
Sorrow, pain, nor wild despair;  
Death, so grim, will never seize you,  
If you spend your time in prayer.

Christ will come in all his glory,  
Quick descend from heaven  
through air,  
We will all be changed to angels,  
By our constant ceaseless prayer.

I reached my home, and, seating myself, fell to musing upon the ludicrous side of religion, as taught in Sunday-schools. Being a Sunday school scholar myself once, I remember how irksome it was to me and the whole class to be confined to lessons we could not understand, or our teachers either. Once outside the class room, relieved from the teacher's presence, our childish love of fun found full sway, and our lesson, teacher, school room, the Bible, and God himself were forgotten in our eagerness for boyish play.

The question has come to me through all these long years from my childhood: Which is the more instructive to the child, the revengeful God of the Sunday school room, with the agony of an endless hell, with its devils and its torments, or the lesson of nature, with its wonderful song of sighing breeze, its beautiful display of flowers and forest, the music of the plunging cataract, the twinkling of the starry space, the sublime roll of the restless sea, and the changing seasons' onward march, bringing health, and light, and love? Must we incline our eyes and ears to the beautiful truth, or accept what none can see or hear?—J. G. Slover in Truth-seeker.

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