

THE SABBATH.

SKETCHES FROM A NOTE BOOK OF AN ELDERLY GENTLEMAN.

The Puritan Sabbath--is there such a thing existing now, or has it gone with the things that were, to be looked at as a curiosity in the museum of the past? Can any one, in memory, take himself back to the unbroken stillness of that day, and recall the sense of religious awe which seemed to brood in the very atmosphere, checking the merry laugh of childhood, and chaining in unwonted stillness the tongue of volatile youth, and imparting even to the sunshine of heaven, and the unconscious notes of animals, a tone of its own gravity and repose? If you cannot remember these things, go back with me to the verge of early boyhood, and live with me one of the Sabbaths that I have spent beneath the roof of my uncle, Phineas Fletcher.

Imagine the long sunny hours of a Saturday afternoon insensibly slipping away, as we youngsters are exploring the length and breadth of a trout stream, or chasing gray squirrels, or building mud milldams in the brook. The sun sinks lower and lower, but we still think it does not want half an hour to sundown. At last, he so evidently is really going down, that there is no room for scepticism or latitude of opinion on the subject; and with many a lingering regret, we began to put away our fish-hooks, and hang our hoops over our arm, preparatory to trudging homeward.

"O Henry, don't you wish that Saturday afternoons lasted longer?" said little John to me.

"I do," says Cousin Bill, who was never the boy to mince matters in giving his sentiments; "and I wouldn't care if Sunday didn't come but once a year."

"O Bill, that's wicked, I'm afraid," says little conscientious Susan, who, with her doll in hand, was coming home from a Saturday afternoon visit.

"Can't help it," says Bill, catching Susan's bag, and tossing it in the air; "I never did like to sit still, and that's why I hate Sundays."

"Hate Sundays! O Bill! Why, Aunt Kezzy says heaven is an eternal Sabbath--only think of that!"

"Well, I know I must be pretty different from what I am now before I could sit still forever," said Bill, in a lower and somewhat disconcerted tone, as if admitting the force of the consideration.

The rest of us began to look very grave, and to think that we must get to liking Sunday some time or other, or it would be a very bad thing for us. As we drew near the dwelling, the compact and business-like form of Aunt Kezzy was seen emerging from the house to hasten our approach.

"How often have I told you, young ones, not to stay out after sundown on Saturday night? Don't you know it's the same as Sunday, you wicked children, you? Come right into the house, every one of you, and never let me hear of such a thing again."

This was Aunt Kezzy's regular exordium every Saturday night; for we children, being blinded, as she supposed, by natural depravity, always made strange mistakes in reckoning time on Saturday afternoons. After being duly suppered and scrubbed, we were enjoined to go to bed, and remember that to-morrow was Sunday, and that we must not laugh and play in the morning. With many a sorrowful look did Susan deposit her doll in the chest, and give one lingering glance at the patchwork she was piecing for dolly's bed, while William, John, and myself emptied our pockets of all superfluous fish-hooks, bits of twine, popguns, slices of potato, marbles, and all the various items of boy property, which, to keep us from temptation, were taken into Aunt Kezzy's safe keeping over Sunday.

My Uncle Phineas was a man of great exactness, and Sunday was the centre of his whole worldly and religious system. Every thing with regard to his worldly business was so arranged that by Saturday noon it seemed to come to a close of itself. All his accounts were looked over, his work-men paid, all borrowed things returned, and lent things sent after, and every tool and article belonging to the farm was returned to its own place at exactly such an hour every Saturday afternoon, and an hour

before sundown every item of preparation, even to the blacking of his Sunday shoes and the brushing of his Sunday coat, was entirely concluded; and at the going down of the sun, the stillness of the Sabbath seemed to settle down over the whole dwelling.

And now it is Sunday morning; and though all without is fragrance, and motion, and beauty, the dewdrops are twinkling, butterflies fluttering, and merry birds carolling and racketing as if they never could sing loud or fast enough, yet within there is such a stillness that the tick of the tall mahogany clock is audible through the whole house, and the buzz of the blue flies, as they whiz along up and down the window panes, is a distinct item of hearing. Look into the best front room, and you may see the upright form of my Uncle Phineas, in his immaculate Sunday clothes, with his Bible spread open on the little stand before him, and even a deeper than usual gravity settling down over his toil-worn features. Alongside, in well-brushed Sunday clothes, with clean faces and smooth hair, sat the whole of us younger people, each drawn up in a chair, with hat and handkerchief, ready for the first stroke of the bell, while Aunt Kezzy, all trimmed, and primmed, and made ready for meeting, sat reading her psalm book, only looking up occasionally to give an additional jerk to some shirt collar, or the fifteenth pull to Susan's frock, or to repress any stragglng looks that might be wandering about, "beholding vanity."

A stranger, in glancing at Uncle Phineas as he sat intent on his Sunday reading, might have seen that the Sabbath was in his heart--there was

no mistake about it. It was plain that he had put by all worldly thoughts when he shut up his account book, and that his mind was as free from every earthly association as his Sunday coat was from dust. The slave of worldliness, who is driven, by perplexing business or adventurous speculation, through the hours of a half-kept Sabbath to the fatigues of another week, might envy the unbroken quiet, the sunny tranquillity, which hallowed the weekly rest of my uncle.

The Sabbath of the Puritan Christian was the golden day, and all its associations, and all its thoughts, words, and deeds, were so entirely distinct from the ordinary material of life, that it was to him a sort of weekly translation--a quitting of this world to sojourn a day in a better; and year after year, as each Sabbath set its seal on the completed labors of a week, the pilgrim felt that one more stage of his earthly journey was completed, and that he was one week nearer to his eternal rest. And as years, with their changes, came on, and the strong man grew old, and missed, one after another, familiar forms that had risen around his earlier years, the face of the Sabbath became like that of an old and tried friend, carrying him back to the scenes of his youth, and connecting him with scenes long gone by, restoring to him the dew and freshness of brighter and more buoyant days.

Viewed simply as an institution for a Christian and mature mind, nothing could be more perfect than the Puritan Sabbath: if it had any failing, it was in the want of adaptation to children, and to those not interested in its peculiar duties. If you had been in the dwelling of my

uncle of a Sabbath morning, you must have found the unbroken stillness delightful; the calm and quiet must have soothed and disposed you for contemplation, and the evident appearance of single-hearted devotion to the duties of the day in the elder part of the family must have been a striking addition to the picture. But, then, if your eye had watched attentively the motions of us juveniles, you might have seen that what was so very invigorating to the disciplined Christian was a weariness to young flesh and bones. Then there was not, as now, the intellectual relaxation afforded by the Sunday school, with its various forms of religious exercise, its thousand modes of interesting and useful information. Our whole stock in this line was the Bible and Primer, and these were our main dependence for whiling away the tedious hours between our early breakfast and the signal for meeting. How often was our invention stretched to find wherewithal to keep up our stock of excitement in a line with the duties of the day! For the first half hour, perhaps, a story in the Bible answered our purpose very well; but, having despatched the history of Joseph, or the story of the ten plagues, we then took to the Primer: and then there was, first, the looking over the system of theological and ethical teaching, commencing, "In Adam's fall we sinned all," and extending through three or four pages of pictorial and poetic embellishment. Next was the death of John Rogers, who was burned at Smithfield; and for a while we could entertain ourselves with counting all his "nine children and one at the breast," as in the picture they stand in a regular row, like a pair of stairs. These being done, came miscellaneous exercises of our own invention, such as counting all the psalms in the psalm book, backward and forward,

to and from the Doxology, or numbering the books in the Bible, or some other such device as we deemed within the pale of religious employments. When all these failed, and it still wanted an hour of meeting time, we looked up at the ceiling, and down at the floor, and all around into every corner, to see what we could do next; and happy was he who could spy a pin gleaming in some distant crack, and forthwith muster an occasion for getting down to pick it up. Then there was the infallible recollection that we wanted a drink of water, as an excuse to get out to the well; or else we heard some strange noise among the chickens, and insisted that it was essential that we should see what was the matter; or else pussy would jump on to the table, when all of us would spring to drive her down; while there was a most assiduous watching of the clock to see when the first bell would ring. Happy was it for us, in the interim, if we did not begin to look at each other and make up faces, or slyly slip off and on our shoes, or some other incipient attempts at roguery, which would gradually so undermine our gravity that there would be some sudden explosion of merriment, whereat Uncle Phineas would look up and say, "Tut, tut," and Aunt Kezzy would make a speech about wicked children breaking the Sabbath day. I remember once how my cousin Bill got into deep disgrace one Sunday by a roguish trick. He was just about to close his Bible with all sobriety, when snap came a grasshopper through an open window, and alighted in the middle of the page. Bill instantly kidnapped the intruder, for so important an auxiliary in the way of employment was not to be despised. Presently we children looked towards Bill, and there he sat, very demurely reading his Bible, with the grasshopper hanging by one leg from the corner of his mouth, kicking

and sprawling, without in the least disturbing Master William's gravity. We all burst into an uproarious laugh. But it came to be rather a serious affair for Bill, as his good father was in the practice of enforcing truth and duty by certain modes of moral suasion much recommended by Solomon, though fallen into disrepute at the present day.

This morning picture may give a good specimen of the whole livelong Sunday, which presented only an alternation of similar scenes until sunset, when a universal unchaining of tongues and a general scamper proclaimed that the "sun was down."

But, it may be asked, what was the result of all this strictness? Did it not disgust you with the Sabbath and with religion? No, it did not. It did not, because it was the result of no unkindly feeling, but of consistent principle; and consistency of principle is what even children learn to appreciate and revere. The law of obedience and of reverence for the Sabbath was constraining so equally on the young and the old, that its claims came to be regarded like those immutable laws of nature, which no one thinks of being out of patience with, though they sometimes bear hard on personal convenience. The effect of the system was to ingrain into our character a veneration for the Sabbath which no friction of after life would ever efface. I have lived to wander in many climates and foreign lands, where the Sabbath is an unknown name, or where it is only recognized by noisy mirth; but never has the day returned without bringing with it a breathing of religious awe, and even a yearning for the unbroken stillness, the placid repose,

and the simple devotion of the Puritan Sabbath.

ANOTHER SCENE.

"How late we are this morning!" said Mrs. Roberts to her husband, glancing hurriedly at the clock, as they were sitting down to breakfast on a Sabbath morning. "Really, it is a shame to us to be so late Sundays. I wonder John and Henry are not up yet; Hannah, did you speak to them?"

"Yes, ma'am, but I could not make them mind; they said it was Sunday, and that we always have breakfast later Sundays."

"Well, it is a shame to us, I must say," said Mrs. Roberts, sitting down to the table. "I never lie late myself unless something in particular happens. Last night I was out very late, and Sabbath before last I had a bad headache."

"Well, well, my dear," said Mr. Roberts, "it is not worth while to worry yourself about it; Sunday is a day of rest; every body indulges a little of a Sunday morning, it is so very natural, you know; one's work done up, one feels like taking a little rest."

"Well, I must say it was not the way my mother brought me up," said Mrs. Roberts; "and I really can't feel it to be right."

This last part of the discourse had been listened to by two sleepy-looking boys, who had, meanwhile, taken their seats at table with

that listless air which is the result of late sleeping.

"O, by the by, my dear, what did you give for those hams Saturday?" said Mr. Roberts.

"Eleven cents a pound, I believe," replied Mrs. Roberts; "but Stephens and Philips have some much nicer, canvas and all, for ten cents. I think we had better get our things at Stephens and Philips's in future, my dear."

"Why? are they much cheaper?"

"O, a great deal; but I forget it is Sunday. We ought to be thinking of other things. Boys, have you looked over your Sunday school lesson?"

"No, ma'am."

"Now, how strange! and here it wants only half an hour of the time, and you are not dressed either. Now, see the bad effects of not being up in time."

The boys looked sullen, and said "they were up as soon as any one else in the house."

"Well, your father and I had some excuse, because we were out late last night; you ought to have been up full three hours ago, and to have been

all ready, with your lessons learned. Now, what do you suppose you shall do?"

"O mother, do let us stay at home this one morning; we don't know the lesson, and it won't do any good for us to go."

"No, indeed, I shall not. You must go and get along as well as you can. It is all your own fault. Now, go up stairs and hurry. We shall not find time for prayers this morning."

The boys took themselves up stairs to "hurry," as directed, and soon one of them called from the top of the stairs, "Mother! mother! the buttons are off this vest; so I can't wear it!" and "Mother! here is a long rip in my best coat!" said another.

"Why did you not tell me of it before?" said Mrs. Roberts, coming up stairs.

"I forgot it," said the boy.

"Well, well, stand still; I must catch it together somehow, if it is Sunday. There! there is the bell! Stand still a minute!" and Mrs. Roberts plied needle, and thread, and scissors; "there, that will do for to-day. Dear me, how confused every thing is to-day!"

"It is always just so Sundays," said John, flinging up his book and

catching it again as he ran down stairs.

"It is always just so Sundays." These words struck rather unpleasantly on Mrs. Roberts's conscience, for something told her that, whatever the reason might be, it was just so. On Sunday every thing was later and more irregular than any other day in the week.

"Hannah, you must boil that piece of beef for dinner to-day."

"I thought you told me you did not have cooking done on Sunday."

"No, I do not, generally. I am very sorry Mr. Roberts would get that piece of meat yesterday. We did not need it; but here it is on our hands; the weather is too hot to keep it. It won't do to let it spoil; so I must have it boiled, for aught I see."

Hannah had lived four Sabbaths with Mrs. Roberts, and on two of them she had been required to cook from similar reasoning. "For once" is apt, in such cases, to become a phrase of very extensive signification.

"It really worries me to have things go on so as they do on Sundays," said Mrs. Roberts to her husband. "I never do feel as if we kept Sunday as we ought."

"My dear, you have been saying so ever since we were married, and I do not see what you are going to do about it. For my part I do not see why

we do not do as well as people in general. We do not visit, nor receive company, nor read improper books. We go to church, and send the children to Sunday school, and so the greater part of the day is spent in a religious way. Then out of church we have the children's Sunday school books, and one or two religious newspapers. I think that is quite enough."

"But, somehow, when I was a child, my mother----" said Mrs. Roberts, hesitating.

"O my dear, your mother must not be considered an exact pattern for these days. People were too strict in your mother's time; they carried the thing too far, altogether; every body allows it now."

Mrs. Roberts was silenced, but not satisfied. A strict religious education had left just conscience enough on this subject to make her uneasy.

These worthy people had a sort of general idea that Sunday ought to be kept, and they intended to keep it; but they had never taken the trouble to investigate or inquire as to the most proper way, nor was it so much an object of interest that their weekly arrangements were planned with any reference to it. Mr. Roberts would often engage in business at the close of the week, which he knew would so fatigue him that he would be weary and listless on Sunday; and Mrs. Roberts would allow her family cares to accumulate in the same way, so that she was either wearied with

efforts to accomplish it before the Sabbath, or perplexed and worried by finding every thing at loose ends on that day. They had the idea that Sunday was to be kept when it was perfectly convenient, and did not demand any sacrifice of time or money. But if stopping to keep the Sabbath in a journey would risk passage money or a seat in the stage, or, in housekeeping, if it would involve any considerable inconvenience or expense, it was deemed a providential intimation that it was "a work of necessity and mercy" to attend to secular matters. To their minds the fourth command read thus: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy when it comes convenient, and costs neither time nor money."

As to the effects of this on the children, there was neither enough of strictness to make them respect the Sabbath, nor of religious interest to make them love it; of course, the little restraint there was proved just enough to lead them to dislike and despise it. Children soon perceive the course of their parents' feelings, and it was evident enough to the children of this family that their father and mother generally found themselves hurried into the Sabbath with hearts and minds full of this world, and their conversation and thoughts were so constantly turning to worldly things, and so awkwardly drawn back by a sense of religious obligation, that the Sabbath appeared more obviously a clog and a fetter than it did under the strictest régime of Puritan days.

SKETCH SECOND.

The little quiet village of Camden stands under the brow of a rugged hill in one of the most picturesque parts of New England; and its regular, honest, and industrious villagers were not a little surprised and pleased that Mr. James, a rich man, and pleasant-spoken withal, had concluded to take up his residence among them. He brought with him a pretty, genteel wife, and a group of rosy, romping, but amiable children; and there was so much of good nature and kindness about the manners of every member of the family, that the whole neighborhood were prepossessed in their favor. Mr. James was a man of somewhat visionary and theoretical turn of mind, and very much in the habit of following out his own ideas of right and wrong, without troubling himself particularly as to the appearance his course might make in the eyes of others. He was a supporter of the ordinances of religion, and always ready to give both time and money to promote any benevolent object; and though he had never made any public profession of religion, nor connected himself with any particular set of Christians, still he seemed to possess great reverence for God, and to worship him in spirit and in truth, and he professed to make the Bible the guide of his life. Mr. James had been brought up under a system of injudicious religious restraint. He had determined, in educating his children, to adopt an exactly opposite course, and to make religion and all its institutions sources of enjoyment. His aim, doubtless, was an appropriate one; but his method of carrying it out, to say the least, was one which was not a safe model for general imitation. In regard to the Sabbath, for example,

he considered that, although the plan of going to church twice a day, and keeping all the family quiet within doors the rest of the time, was good, other methods would be much better. Accordingly, after the morning service, which he and his whole family regularly attended, he would spend the rest of the day with his children. In bad weather he would instruct them in natural history, show them pictures, and read them various accounts of the works of God, combining all with such religious instruction and influence as a devotional mind might furnish. When the weather permitted, he would range with them through the fields, collecting minerals and plants, or sail with them on the lake, meanwhile directing the thoughts of his young listeners upward to God, by the many beautiful traces of his presence and agency, which superior knowledge and observation enabled him to discover and point out. These Sunday strolls were seasons of most delightful enjoyment to the children.

Though it was with some difficulty that their father could restrain them from loud and noisy demonstrations of delight, and he saw with some regret that the mere animal excitement of the stroll seemed to draw the attention too much from religious considerations, and, in particular, to make the exercises of the morning seem like a preparatory penance to the enjoyments of the afternoon, nevertheless, when Mr. James looked back to his own boyhood, and remembered the frigid restraint, the entire want of any kind of mental or bodily excitement, which had made the Sabbath so much a weariness to him, he could not but congratulate himself when he perceived his children looking forward to Sunday as a day of delight, and found himself on that day continually surrounded by a circle of smiling and cheerful faces. His talent of imparting religious

instruction in a simple and interesting form was remarkably happy, and it is probable that there was among his children an uncommon degree of real thought and feeling on religious subjects as the result.

The good people of Camden, however, knew not what to think of a course that appeared to them an entire violation of all the requirements of the Sabbath. The first impulse of human nature is to condemn at once all who vary from what has been commonly regarded as the right way; and, accordingly, Mr. James was unsparingly denounced, by many good people, as a Sabbath breaker, an infidel, and an opposer to religion.

Such was the character heard of him by Mr. Richards, a young clergyman, who, shortly after Mr. James fixed his residence in Camden, accepted the pastoral charge of the village. It happened that Mr. Richards had known Mr. James in college, and, remembering him as a remarkably serious, amiable, and conscientious man, he resolved to ascertain from himself the views which had led him to the course of conduct so offensive to the good people of the neighborhood.

"This is all very well, my good friend," said he, after he had listened to Mr. James's eloquent account of his own system of religious instruction, and its effects upon his family; "I do not doubt that this system does very well for yourself and family; but there are other things to be taken into consideration besides personal and family improvement. Do you not know, Mr. James, that the most worthless and careless part of my congregation quote your example as a respectable

precedent for allowing their families to violate the order of the Sabbath? You and your children sail about on the lake, with minds and hearts, I doubt not, elevated and tranquillized by its quiet repose; but Ben Dakes, and his idle, profane army of children, consider themselves as doing very much the same thing when they lie lolling about, sunning themselves on its shore, or skipping stones over its surface the whole of a Sunday afternoon."

"Let every one answer to his own conscience," replied Mr. James. "If I keep the Sabbath conscientiously, I am approved of God; if another transgresses his conscience, 'to his own master he standeth or falleth.' I am not responsible for all the abuses that idle or evil-disposed persons may fall into, in consequence of my doing what is right."

"Let me quote an answer from the same chapter," said Mr. Richards. "'Let no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way; let not your good be evil spoken of. It is good neither to eat flesh nor drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak.' Now, my good friend, you happen to be endowed with a certain tone of mind which enables you to carry through your mode of keeping the Sabbath with little comparative evil, and much good, so far as your family is concerned; but how many persons in this neighborhood, do you suppose, would succeed equally well if they were to attempt it? If it were the common custom for families to absent themselves from public worship in the afternoon, and to stroll about the fields, or ride, or sail, how many parents, do you suppose, would have

the dexterity and talent to check all that was inconsistent with the duties of the day? Is it not your ready command of language, your uncommon tact in simplifying and illustrating, your knowledge of natural history and of biblical literature, that enable you to accomplish the results that you do? And is there one parent in a hundred that could do the same? Now, just imagine our neighbor, 'Squire Hart, with his ten boys and girls, turned out into the fields on a Sunday afternoon to profit withal: you know he can never finish a sentence without stopping to begin it again half a dozen times. What progress would he make in instructing them? And so of a dozen others I could name along this very street here. Now, you men of cultivated minds must give your countenance to courses which would be best for society at large, or, as the sentiment was expressed by St. Paul, 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves, for even Christ pleased not himself.' Think, my dear sir, if our Savior had gone only on the principle of avoiding what might be injurious to his own improvement, how unsafe his example might have proved to less elevated minds. Doubtless he might have made a Sabbath day fishing excursion an occasion of much elevated and impressive instruction; but, although he declared himself 'Lord of the Sabbath day,' and at liberty to suspend its obligation at his own discretion, yet he never violated the received method of observing it, except in cases where superstitious tradition trenched directly on those interests which the Sabbath was given to promote. He asserted the right to relieve pressing bodily wants, and to administer to the necessities of others on the Sabbath, but beyond that he allowed himself in no deviation from established

custom."

Mr. James looked thoughtful. "I have not reflected on the subject in this view," he replied. "But, my dear sir, considering how little of the public services of the Sabbath is on a level with the capacity of younger children, it seems to me almost a pity to take them to church the whole of the day."

"I have thought of that myself," replied Mr. Richards, "and have sometimes thought that, could persons be found to conduct such a thing, it would be desirable to institute a separate service for children, in which the exercises should be particularly adapted to them."

"I should like to be minister to a congregation of children," said Mr. James, warmly.

"Well," replied Mr. Richards, "give our good people time to get acquainted with you, and do away the prejudices which your extraordinary mode of proceeding has induced, and I think I could easily assemble such a company for you every Sabbath."

After this, much to the surprise of the village, Mr. James and his family were regular attendants at both the services of the Sabbath. Mr. Richards explained to the good people of his congregation the motives which had led their neighbor to the adoption of what, to them, seemed so unchristian a course; and, upon reflection, they came to the perception

of the truth, that a man may depart very widely from the received standard of right for other reasons than being an infidel or an opposer of religion. A ready return of cordial feeling was the result; and as Mr. James found himself treated with respect and confidence, he began to feel, notwithstanding his fastidiousness, that there were strong points of congeniality between all real and warm-hearted Christians, however different might be their intellectual culture, and in all simplicity united himself with the little church of Camden. A year from the time of his first residence there, every Sabbath afternoon saw him surrounded by a congregation of young children, for whose benefit he had, at his own expense, provided a room, fitted up with maps, scriptural pictures, and every convenience for the illustration of biblical knowledge; and the parents or guardians who from time to time attended their children during these exercises, often confessed themselves as much interested and benefited as any of their youthful companions.

SKETCH THIRD.

It was near the close of a pleasant Saturday afternoon that I drew up my weary horse in front of a neat little dwelling in the village of N.

This, as near as I could gather from description, was the house of my cousin, William Fletcher, the identical rogue of a Bill Fletcher of whom we have aforetime spoken. Bill had always been a thriving, push-ahead sort of a character, and during the course of my rambling life I had improved every occasional opportunity of keeping up our early acquaintance. The last time that I returned to my native country, after some years of absence, I heard of him as married and settled in the village of N., where he was conducting a very prosperous course of business, and shortly after received a pressing invitation to visit him at his own home. Now, as I had gathered from experience the fact that it is of very little use to rap one's knuckles off on the front door of a country house without any knocker, I therefore made the best of my way along a little path, bordered with marigolds and balsams, that led to the back part of the dwelling. The sound of a number of childish voices made me stop, and, looking through the bushes, I saw the very image of my cousin Bill Fletcher, as he used to be twenty years ago; the same bold forehead, the same dark eyes, the same smart, saucy mouth, and the same "who-cares-for-that" toss to his head. "There, now," exclaimed the boy, setting down a pair of shoes that he had been blacking, and arranging them at the head of a long row of all sizes and sorts, from those which might have fitted a two year old foot upward, "there, I've blacked every single one of them, and made them shine too, and done it

all in twenty minutes; if any body thinks they can do it quicker than that, I'd just like to have them try; that's all."

"I know they couldn't, though," said a fair-haired little girl, who stood admiring the sight, evidently impressed with the utmost reverence for her brother's ability; "and, Bill, I've been putting up all the playthings in the big chest, and I want you to come and turn the lock--the key hurts my fingers."

"Poh! I can turn it easier than that," said the boy, snapping his fingers; "have you got them all in?"

"Yes, all; only I left out the soft bales, and the string of red beads, and the great rag baby for Fanny to play with--you know mother says babies must have their playthings Sunday."

"O, to be sure," said the brother, very considerately; "babies can't read, you know, as we can, nor hear Bible stories, nor look at pictures." At this moment I stepped forward, for the spell of former times was so powerfully on me, that I was on the very point of springing forward with a "Halloo, there, Bill!" as I used to meet the father in old times; but the look of surprise that greeted my appearance brought me to myself.

"Is your father at home?" said I.

"Father and mother are both gone out; but I guess, sir, they will be home in a few moments: won't you walk in?"

I accepted the invitation, and the little girl showed me into a small and very prettily furnished parlor. There was a piano with music books on one side of the room, some fine pictures hung about the walls, and a little, neat centre table was plentifully strewn with books. Besides this, the two recesses on each side of the fireplace contained each a bookcase with a glass locked door.

The little girl offered me a chair, and then lingered a moment, as if she felt some disposition to entertain me if she could only think of something to say; and at last, looking up in my face, she said, in a confidential tone, "Mother says she left Willie and me to keep house this afternoon while she was gone, and we are putting up all the things for Sunday, so as to get every thing done before she comes home. Willie has gone to put away the playthings, and I'm going to put up the books." So saying, she opened the doors of one of the bookcases, and began busily carrying the books from the centre table to deposit them on the shelves, in which employment she was soon assisted by Willie, who took the matter in hand in a very masterly manner, showing his sister what were and what were not "Sunday books" with the air of a person entirely at home in the business. Robinson Crusoe and the many-volumed Peter Parley were put by without hesitation; there was, however, a short demurring over a North American Review, because Willie said he was sure his father read something one Sunday out of one of them, while Susan

averred that he did not commonly read in it, and only read in it then because the piece was something about the Bible; but as nothing could be settled definitively on the point, the review was "laid on the table," like knotty questions in Congress. Then followed a long discussion over an extract book, which, as usual, contained all sorts, both sacred, serious, comic, and profane; and at last Willie, with much gravity, decided to lock it up, on the principle that it was best to be on the safe side, in support of which he appealed to me. I was saved from deciding the question by the entrance of the father and mother. My old friend knew me at once, and presented his pretty wife to me with the same look of exultation with which he used to hold up a string of trout or an uncommonly fine perch of his own catching for my admiration, and then looking round on his fine family of children, two more of which he had brought home with him, seemed to say to me, "There! what do you think of that, now?"

And, in truth, a very pretty sight it was--enough to make any one's old bachelor coat sit very uneasily on him. Indeed, there is nothing that gives one such a startling idea of the tricks that old Father Time has been playing on us, as to meet some boyish or girlish companions with half a dozen or so of thriving children about them. My old friend, I found, was in essence just what the boy had been. There was the same upright bearing, the same confident, cheerful tone to his voice, and the same fire in his eye; only that the hand of manhood had slightly touched some of the lines of his face, giving them a staidness of expression becoming the man and the father.

"Very well, my children," said Mrs. Fletcher, as, after tea, William and Susan finished recounting to her the various matters that they had set in order that afternoon; "I believe now we can say that our week's work is finished, and that we have nothing to do but rest and enjoy ourselves."

"O, and papa will show us the pictures in those great books that he brought home for us last Monday, will he not?" said little Robert.

"And, mother, you will tell us some more about Solomon's temple and his palaces, won't you?" said Susan.

"And I should like to know if father has found out the answer to that hard question I gave him last Sunday?" said Willie.

"All will come in good time," said Mrs. Fletcher. "But tell me, my dear children, are you sure that you are quite ready for the Sabbath? You say you have put away the books and the playthings; have you put away, too, all wrong and unkind feelings? Do you feel kindly and pleasantly towards every body?"

"Yes, mother," said Willie, who appeared to have taken a great part of this speech to himself; "I went over to Tom Walter's this very morning to ask him about that chicken of mine, and he said that he did not mean to hit it, and did not know he had till I told him of it; and so we made

all up again, and I am glad I went."

"I am inclined to think, Willie," said his father, "that if every body would make it a rule to settle up all their differences before Sunday, there would be very few long quarrels and lawsuits. In about half the cases, a quarrel is founded on some misunderstanding that would be got over in five minutes if one would go directly to the person for explanation."

"I suppose I need not ask you," said Mrs. Fletcher, "whether you have fully learned your Sunday school lessons."

"O, to be sure," said William. "You know, mother, that Susan and I were busy about them through Monday and Tuesday, and then this afternoon we looked them over again, and wrote down some questions."

"And I heard Robert say his all through, and showed him all the places on the Bible Atlas," said Susan.

"Well, then," said my friend, "if every thing is done, let us begin Sunday with some music."

Thanks to the recent improvements in the musical instruction of the young, every family can now form a domestic concert, with words and tunes adapted to the capacity and the voices of children; and while these little ones, full of animation, pressed round their mother as she

sat at the piano, and accompanied her music with the words of some beautiful hymns, I thought that, though I might have heard finer music, I had never listened to any that answered the purpose of music so well.

It was a custom at my friend's to retire at an early hour on Saturday evening, in order that there might be abundant time for rest, and no excuse for late rising on the Sabbath; and, accordingly, when the children had done singing, after a short season of family devotion, we all betook ourselves to our chambers, and I, for one, fell asleep with the impression of having finished the week most agreeably, and with anticipations of very great pleasure on the morrow.

Early in the morning I was roused from my sleep by the sound of little voices singing with great animation in the room next to mine, and, listening, I caught the following words:--

"Awake! awake! your bed forsake,
To God your praises pay;
The morning sun is clear and bright;
With joy we hail his cheerful light.
In songs of love
Praise God above--
It is the Sabbath day!"

The last words were repeated and prolonged most vehemently by a voice that I knew for Master William's.

"Now, Willie, I like the other one best," said the soft voice of little Susan; and immediately she began,--

"How sweet is the day,
When, leaving our play,
The Saviour we seek!
The fair morning glows
When Jesus arose--
The best in the week."

Master William helped along with great spirit in the singing of this tune, though I heard him observing, at the end of the first verse, that he liked the other one better, because "it seemed to step off so kind o' lively;" and his accommodating sister followed him as he began singing it again with redoubled animation.

It was a beautiful summer morning, and the voices of the children within accorded well with the notes of birds and bleating flocks without--a cheerful, yet Sabbath-like and quieting sound.

"Blessed be children's music!" said I to myself; "how much better this is than the solitary tick, tick, of old Uncle Fletcher's tall mahogany clock!"

The family bell summoned us to the breakfast room just as the children

had finished their hymn. The little breakfast parlor had been swept and garnished expressly for the day, and a vase of beautiful flowers, which the children had the day before collected from their gardens, adorned the centre table. The door of one of the bookcases by the fireplace was thrown open, presenting to view a collection of prettily bound books, over the top of which appeared in gilt letters the inscription, "Sabbath Library." The windows were thrown open to let in the invigorating breath of the early morning, and the birds that flitted among the rosebushes without seemed scarcely lighter and more buoyant than did the children as they entered the room. It was legibly written on every face in the house, that the happiest day in the week had arrived, and each one seemed to enter into its duties with a whole soul. It was still early when the breakfast and the season of family devotion were over, and the children eagerly gathered round the table to get a sight of the pictures in the new books which their father had purchased in New York the week before, and which had been reserved as a Sunday's treat. They were a beautiful edition of Calmet's Dictionary, in several large volumes, with very superior engravings.

"It seems to me that this work must be very expensive," I remarked to my friend, as we were turning the leaves.

"Indeed it is so," he replied; "but here is one place where I am less withheld by considerations of expense than in any other. In all that concerns making a show in the world, I am perfectly ready to economize. I can do very well without expensive clothing or fashionable furniture,

and am willing that we should be looked on as very plain sort of people in all such matters; but in all that relates to the cultivation of the mind, and the improvement of the hearts of my children, I am willing to go to the extent of my ability. Whatever will give my children a better knowledge of, or deeper interest in, the Bible, or enable them to spend a Sabbath profitably and without weariness, stands first on my list among things to be purchased. I have spent in this way one third as much as the furnishing of my house costs me." On looking over the shelves of the Sabbath library, I perceived that my friend had been at no small pains in the selection. It comprised all the popular standard works for the illustration of the Bible, together with the best of the modern religious publications adapted to the capacity of young children. Two large drawers below were filled with maps and scriptural engravings, some of them of a very superior character.

"We have been collecting these things gradually ever since we have been at housekeeping," said my friend; "the children take an interest in this library, as something more particularly belonging to them, and some of the books are donations from their little earnings."

"Yes," said Willie, "I bought Helen's Pilgrimage with my egg money, and Susan bought the Life of David, and little Robert is going to buy one, too, next new year."

"But," said I, "would not the Sunday school library answer all the purpose of this?"

"The Sabbath school library is an admirable thing," said my friend; "but this does more fully and perfectly what that was intended to do. It makes a sort of central attraction at home on the Sabbath, and makes the acquisition of religious knowledge and the proper observance of the Sabbath a sort of family enterprise. You know," he added, smiling, "that people always feel interested for an object in which they have invested money."

The sound of the first Sabbath school bell put an end to this conversation. The children promptly made themselves ready, and as their father was the superintendent of the school, and their mother one of the teachers, it was quite a family party.

One part of every Sabbath at my friend's was spent by one or both parents with the children, in a sort of review of the week. The attention of the little ones was directed to their own characters, the various defects or improvements of the past week were pointed out, and they were stimulated to be on their guard in the time to come, and the whole was closed by earnest prayer for such heavenly aid as the temptations and faults of each particular one might need. After church in the evening, while the children were thus withdrawn to their mother's apartment, I could not forbear reminding my friend of old times, and of the rather anti-sabbatical turn of his mind in our boyish days.

"Now, William," said I, "do you know that you were the last boy of whom

such an enterprise in Sabbath keeping as this was to have been expected?
I suppose you remember Sunday at 'the old place'?"

"Nay, now, I think I was the very one," said he, smiling, "for I had sense enough to see, as I grew up, that the day must be kept thoroughly or not at all, and I had enough blood and motion in my composition to see that something must be done to enliven and make it interesting; so I set myself about it. It was one of the first of our housekeeping resolutions, that the Sabbath should be made a pleasant day, and yet be as inviolably kept as in the strictest times of our good father; and we have brought things to run in that channel so long, that it seems to be the natural order."

"I have always supposed," said I, "that it required a peculiar talent, and more than common information in a parent, to accomplish this to any extent."

"It requires nothing," replied my friend, "but common sense, and a strong determination to do it. Parents who make a definite object of the religious instruction of their children, if they have common sense, can very soon see what is necessary in order to interest them; and, if they find themselves wanting in the requisite information, they can, in these days, very readily acquire it. The sources of religious knowledge are so numerous, and so popular in their form, that all can avail themselves of them. The only difficulty, after all, is, that the keeping of the Sabbath and the imparting of religious instruction are not made

enough of a home object. Parents pass off the responsibility on to the Sunday school teacher, and suppose, of course, if they send their children to Sunday school, they do the best they can for them. Now, I am satisfied, from my experience as a Sabbath school teacher, that the best religious instruction imparted abroad still stands in need of the coöperation of a systematic plan of religious discipline and instruction at home; for, after all, God gives a power to the efforts of a parent that can never be transferred to other hands."

"But do you suppose," said I, "that the common class of minds, with ordinary advantages, can do what you have done?"

"I think in most cases they could, if they begin right. But when both parents and children have formed habits, it is more difficult to change than to begin right at first. However, I think all might accomplish a great deal if they would give time, money, and effort towards it. It is because the object is regarded of so little value, compared with other things of a worldly nature, that so little is done."

My friend was here interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Fletcher with the children. Mrs. Fletcher sat down to the piano, and the Sabbath was closed with the happy songs of the little ones; nor could I notice a single anxious eye turning to the window to see if the sun was not almost down. The tender and softened expression of each countenance bore witness to the subduing power of those instructions which had hallowed the last hour, and their sweet, bird-like voices harmonized well with

the beautiful words,--

"How sweet the light of Sabbath eve!
How soft the sunbeam lingering there!
Those holy hours this, low earth leave,
And rise on wings of faith and prayer."