

THOUGHTS ON SABBATH SCHOOLS

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Thoughts on Sabbath Schools by Hugh Barclay

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HUGH BARCLAY

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SABBATH SCHOOLS**

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ON

SABBATH SCHOOLS

(REVISED FROM THE "EDINBURGH CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE,"
AND PUBLISHED SEPARATELY BY REQUEST)

BY

HUGH BARCLAY

"Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your hearts. And ye shall teach
them your children."—*Deut.* xi. 18, 19.

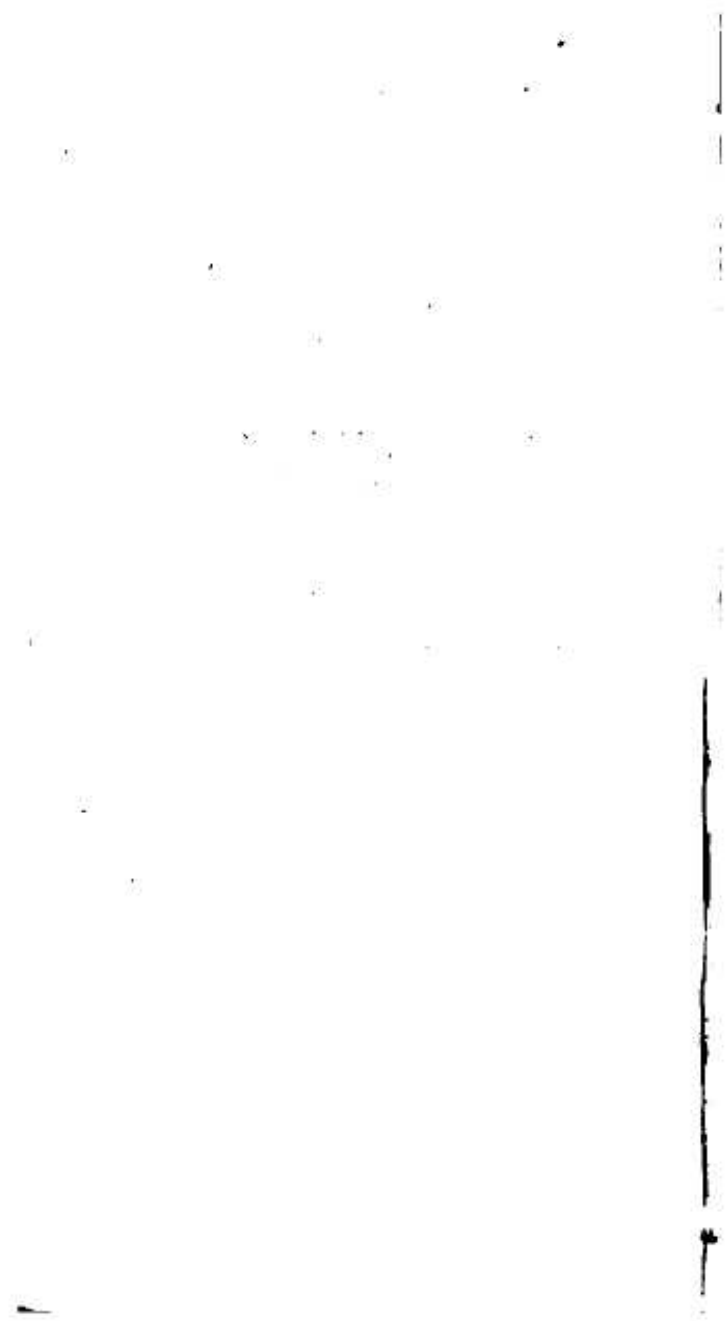
"Lift up thy hands toward Him for the life of thy vociferous enemies."—*Lam.* ii. 19.

"The children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David."—*Matt.* xxi. 15.

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THOUGHTS ON SABBATH SCHOOLS.

PART I.

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

"Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of the Lord; and they prepared them."—"To give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small; besides their genealogy of males, from three years old and upward, even unto every one that entereth into the house of the Lord, his daily portion for their service in their charges, according to their courses."—2 Chron. xxxi. 11, 15, 16.

THE time has now gone past when a portion of our Christian ministry looked coldly, if not with unfavourable and suspicious eye, on the Sabbath school. We must not, however, judge uncharitably of those who so thought and acted, or impute to them motives which they did not themselves avow, if they did not actually disclaim. It may have been with many of them that there was no latent hostility to Gospel teaching, or the godly upbringing of the young, but a well-grounded conviction that this duty, in the *first* place, devolved on Christian parents; and that the best and most appropriate Sabbath school was, as it still is, the family hearth; and the best of human instrumentality, the Holy

Scriptures and the Assembly Catechisms, taught from a father's mouth. This is, doubtless, a duty which no parent can perform by *proxy*; but it is, nevertheless, one in the performance of which the best of parents may have his hands strengthened, and his work made easier and more successful by well-adapted auxiliaries.

Perhaps some of the objectors might have entertained an undefined jealousy of lay teaching in the province of religion. Others might fear that the *secular* might, in time, predominate over the *religious* element in the instructions given; and that the children might carry more of the week-day school into that of the Sabbath, than of the latter into the former. But we have reason for gratitude to the Great Teacher that, in this respect, the *Sabbath* school of Scotland has ever stood out in bold and holy contrast with the *Sunday* school of England; and that the sacred hours of the Scotch Sabbath school have been wholly devoted to the same object as those of the sanctuary,—the teaching of the Gospel of God's Son.

This class of objectors, at one time formidable, but losing strength every successive year, had tarried behind the age. They had not heeded the slow, silent, but sure advances of the tide of population, with its large masses drained from the rural districts, collected into the mighty reservoirs of great towns, and there mingled with the muddy and bitter waters of sin and vice. These worthy men, seated in their quiet studies in the country, and doing to

the best of their abilities their duty to their children and domestics, with a blind charity supposed that all others in this Christian country were alike alive to a sense of duty, and equally active in its discharge. They knew their little flocks of *hundreds*, and did their best to attend to their early culture and more advanced progress in divine life. They knew very little of the world beyond the sphere of their congregation. They knew nothing of the large manufacturing towns which had been rapidly superinduced upon rural villages, and of the large parishes containing many villages of industry recently sprung into existence.

The Christian Church and the Government, alike to blame, stood aside in apathy, and saw the population thus rapidly increasing in numbers, and progressive in everything but in that which alone constitutes a nation's true greatness—its *righteousness*. The sheep were scattered without a pastor, and oftentimes became a ready prey to the false teacher. Even in the people's proneness to embrace error, there was evidence of the void within, and the innate craving of the soul for sustenance. The generation of Sabbath-domestic-teaching parents passed away, and with them that hallowed hour of family worship, when Christ, invoked, himself stood within each humble circle, and spoke peace to every heart, realizing His gracious promise, that "Wherever two or three were met in His name there would He be in the midst of them."

The lack of godly teaching in the family produced