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ART. I.—REVIEW OF SPRAGUE'S LECTURES TO
YOUNG PEOPLE.

*Lectures to Young People, by William B. Sprague, D. D.
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with an Introductory Address by Samuel Miller, D. D.,
Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton.*
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IT is the highest wisdom of man to endeavour to discover, and to follow the plan of God. This plan is manifested in the nature of his creatures, in the dispensations of his providence, and in his word. It is our business to fall in with this; never, from vain ideas of doing more good, venturing to counteract it. Thus, the different natures which God has given the sexes, renders it necessary, in order that the greatest perfection should be attained, and the greatest good effected, that the difference should be carefully preserved; that the man should not assume the position, or discharge the duties of the woman; and that the woman should not step out of her appropriate sphere into the province of the man. This is, however, a common evil. Unenlightened zeal in religion often leads to a greater or less infringement of the plan of God, in this respect. Women take a stand, and undertake to discharge duties, which

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force them out of their place in the great scheme of infinite wisdom, and the result is invariably injurious to themselves and to society. To be where and what God wills us to be, is our perfection and highest usefulness. It is of more practical importance than men are wont to imagine, thus to eye and follow the divine arrangements. As God has given a diversity of constitution to the sexes, suited to the different purposes they are to accomplish, so he has given to different periods of life different susceptibilities and powers, which are intimations of his will, and consequently of our duty, with regard to them. The dependence of the young on their parents; the feelings of parents towards their children; the susceptibility of the youthful mind; the quickness of perception; the tenacity of the memory and pliability of the feelings, all declare that this is the forming period of life; that God designs it to be employed and improved as such. This is, indeed, a universally admitted truth; and education has ever been one of the most absorbing subjects of interest. Though this be admitted, it is still true that the formation of character in the young has been, and is still lamentably neglected. The development of the intellect and communication of knowledge have ever been the grand, if not exclusive objects of education. How is it, at present, in our schools, academies and colleges? Is not the whole course of instruction directed almost exclusively to these objects? Is not the cultivation of the social virtues and the religious feelings, in a great measure, left to take care of itself? We cannot but think that there is here a lamentable deficiency in all our systems; that the intellectual, in opposition to the moral powers of the soul, are too exclusively the objects of assiduous care. No one will pretend that the latter are second in importance to the former. We all admit, that it is the moral nature of man, which raises him into the sphere of immortal beings, connects him with the infinite, and stamps an incomprehensible value on the soul. The subordinate part, therefore, assigned to the cultivation of these feelings in youth, cannot be accounted for on the assumption of their inferior importance. It may be, there is an impression on many minds that these powers are less susceptible, or stand less in need of cultivation. That this impression is erroneous, it needs only a moment's reflection to perceive. Were this the case, it would be an anomaly in our whole constitution. All the other faculties, whether of mind or body, which God has given us, are susceptible of cultivation, and are dependent on it, for their

right development and exercise. What would the mind be without truth on which to exert its powers?—and what would the body be, if never exercised in the manner adapted to its improvement? All experience shows, moreover, that the moral faculties are just as susceptible of culture as any other of our powers. If it were possible to bring up a child entirely removed from the influence of moral truths, his moral powers would be as dormant as his mind would be, were he confined from birth in a dark and solitary cell. This, however, is impossible. Every one born into the world, is brought under ten thousand influences, favourable and unfavourable, by which his character is formed; and it depends, not entirely, but predominantly, on the nature of these influences, what form the character assumes. We say not *entirely*, because man is a free agent, and may resist the tendencies, good or bad, of the influences under which he is placed. Still the history of the world proves that evil communications corrupt good manners; which is but the statement of one aspect of the more general truth, that the character is formed by the *ab extra* influences brought to bear upon it. If this were not the case, where would be the use of religious education? for what purpose would we labour for the establishment of Sunday schools, or take any other means to form the character of the young? Can men differ more in any respect, than do the children of a well-ordered Christian family, and those of superstitious and licentious Pagans? A proportionate difference is found in the character of children of different Christian countries, of the various sections of the same land, and of different families. It will, doubtless, be suggested, that we often see the best adapted means ineffectual, and the children of the pious becoming profligate; and, on the other hand, the children of the profligate moral and exemplary. True: and so, too, we see the means of intellectual culture often thrown away on those unwilling, or unable, to profit by them; and, on the contrary, minds rising from the greatest obscurity in brightness, developing themselves with the greatest strength, under very unfavourable circumstances. Do these instances shake the confidence of any man, in the general efficacy of proper means of intellectual culture? Does it not still remain true, that education forms the man. The individual cases of the inefficacy of moral culture in securing its appropriate result, may be traced often to various causes. In a multitude of instances, it is erroneously assumed, that because a child has had pious

parents, or at least professing parents, he has therefore had good moral and religious culture. The truth is, there is no point in which such parents are more frequently lamentably deficient in duty. The immoral or irreligious character of their children, is nothing more than might naturally be expected from the mode of their education. They are often brought up, as completely surrounded by the influence of the world—of its manners, opinions and spirit, as though their parents did not belong to the Church of God. Such cases are not to be appealed to, therefore, in proof of the uselessness of moral and religious instruction. In many instances, there are counteracting causes, which cannot be traced; and there is much to be referred to the wilful opposition of the heart to all good, and the determined resistance to salutary impressions. There is, moreover, the same diversity in the moral susceptibilities of men, as in their intellectual and bodily powers or appearance. There is a native integrity and strength of character in some, which enables them to withstand the temptations which lead others astray. There is a liveliness of feeling, which admits of impressions which the more callous never experience. Admitting these and other causes, which prevent an uniform result from the same system of means, it still remains a truth sanctioned by Infinite Wisdom and general experience, that if a child be trained up in the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it. We are not leaving out of view either the doctrine of human depravity, or the necessity of divine influence, doctrines as clearly taught in scripture, as they are intimately related to each other, and inwoven in all Christian experience; and we consider every system of education, and every mode of operation in which their practical influence is not pervadingly felt, as radically defective. Neither the difficulty to be encountered, nor the means of surmounting it, are at all in view, where these great truths are kept out of sight. But what is the remedy which God in his wisdom has revealed for the “diseases of the mind”—what is the appropriate corrective of the hidden evils of the human heart? Not ignorance—not error—but divine truth. And it is clearly taught that the Spirit operates with and by the truth, on our hearts. Where that truth is never presented, we never see the effects of the Spirit’s influence. God has determined that men should honour his word—for his word is truth—and that they should honour his Spirit, not taking to themselves the glory, by ascribing to

the skill or felicity of their exhibition, the effect which the Holy Ghost only can produce. It is the union, therefore, of the faithful presentation of the truth, with a consciousness of entire dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the whole duty of men in bringing sinners, whether young or old, to Christ and salvation. When, therefore, we contend for the efficacy of religious education, we are only maintaining that the Gospel is the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation; that God blesses obedience, and frowns on disobedience; blesses the faithful and humble use of the means of his own appointment, and punishes their neglect by a loss of their appropriate results. The world is full of instruction on this subject, both for encouragement and warning. The success of the preached Gospel is more uniformly in proportion to the degree of attention paid to the religious instruction of the young, than to any other circumstance. There are indeed, doubtless, many other things which influence this success: the frequency, purity, pointedness and humility of the manner of exhibition. Still our remarks, we think, will bear the test of experience. We see revivals of religion most frequent and most pure in those portions of the country, where religious instruction of the young is the most general and faithful; and how often is the fact recorded that the members of bible classes have been the subjects of renewing grace, during such special visitations of mercy. If this is true—if, as a general fact, the religious instruction of the young is of all means the most efficacious in bringing them to the saving knowledge of the truth, then is it clear that, of all duties, none can be more obvious, none more imperious, than that of faithfully using this means. This duty presses with peculiar force on parents, pastors and instructors. Did parents but duly feel how much, under God, the salvation of their children depended upon them, the solemnity of their responsibility would weigh constantly and heavily on their hearts. In reference to this subject, we would remark, that the end to be effected, viz. the right formation of the moral and religious character, can only be accomplished through the instrumentality of the truth. This, as the sun, is the source of those quickening and forming influences which call forth and mould the moral and religious principles of our nature. The question, therefore, is, how can parents most efficaciously bring the truth of God to bear on the expanding hearts of their children. To do this requires much skill, and much spirituality.

It is obvious that the mode of exhibition must be adapted to the comprehension of the child. Nothing is gained, where nothing is understood. The mere storing the memory with abstract propositions, although embodying the most important truth, can have no effect on the present character of the child. It is true, that these propositions may be retained in the mind, until it is sufficiently advanced to be able to comprehend them, and they may then become effective. But until this period arrives, they must be inoperative.

The evil, however, of pursuing this course, is not merely negative; there is more than the loss of a good, which might be attained. It is not to be expected, that the mind can receive cordially, what it does not understand. There is always, more or less of opposition excited to the repulsive statements which the child is obliged to commit, without comprehending their import. We think, therefore, it is one of the most important principles, with regard to early education, that the child should not be made to get any thing entirely beyond its comprehension, and there is happily no necessity for this course. All the leading doctrines of the Gospel may be so exhibited as to be as adequately comprehended by a child, for all moral or spiritual effect, as by those of maturer years. That there is a God, who is a Spirit, i. e. a being of the same nature with the thinking principle of which the child is conscious in his own breast; that this Spirit knows, loves, disapproves—not imperfectly, but perfectly—a child may understand as adequately as persons of maturer years. That this God is good and merciful, the child may be made to feel. And a consciousness of its relation to this Being, must be at once attended by a sense of its obligations. So the doctrines of the sinfulness of the heart, of regeneration and redemption, may be brought within its grasp. It is a matter of great importance that the facts of the Bible should be early impressed upon the minds of children, and the character of the blessed Saviour be clearly exhibited. We think there is no more effectual method of conveying religious instruction than from the Bible itself. It is adapted to every age. The child can treasure up its facts, and when properly aided, be made to understand its leading truths. Were parents sufficiently attentive to this duty, they would be surprised to find how rapid would be the progress of their children in divine knowledge.

But truth must not only be communicated in a form suited to the power of comprehension, it must be urged on the heart

and conscience. A constant application to the case of the child should therefore be made, and made with love. The power of love is almost without limit. We can hardly conceive of the effect of a constant exhibition of divine truth urged with tenderness and skill on the youthful mind. Parents never should forget too that their children are always learning; that it is not merely in the hours allotted to instruction, their minds are receiving ideas and impressions. Their eyes and ears are ever open. All their parents say, all the manifestations of character which they make, affect deeply their minds. Hence the indispensable importance of a constant exhibition of the true spirit of the Gospel. How can an exhortation to meekness, kindness and love, counteract the effect of an exhibition of anger, or malice on the part of the parent? How can the command of Christ to "seek first the kingdom of God," be effectually urged by a father, whom the child sees evidently more anxious to secure this world, than heaven? Parents cannot be too much under the influence of the truth, that their habitual spirit and conversation exert a more powerful influence over the minds of their children, than all their occasional instructions. Here as every where else, to do good, we must be good. We must try to bring up our children under the influence of the true, full, consistent spirit of the religion of Jesus Christ.

Parents perhaps too seldom expect present fruit from their labours. They seem to act under the impression, that youth is the seed time when truth is to be deposited in the mind, while its fruit is only to be expected in riper years. That youth is the seed time, no one will question; and that the full benefit of religious instruction is not exhibited immediately, is also true. But it is no less true that the infant heart is susceptible of piety. That God can, and often does, produce a saving change in the very morning of life. This result therefore should be desired, aimed at, prayed for, and expected.

Though we have said thus much on the duty and hopefulness of early religious instruction, we would by no means have it supposed that we imagine that any degree of fidelity in the exhibition of the divine truth, can of itself effect the sanctification of the infant mind. We firmly believe, as others have strongly expressed the idea, that the unrenewed soul of man would expand unsanctified in the midst of the light and purity of heaven. Nothing is more clearly taught in the word of God than that the influence of the Holy Spirit is essential to give

his truth effect. Parents therefore dishonour God, and labour for nought, who do not bear this truth constantly in mind, and act under its influence; commending their children to that God to whom they are dedicated, for the renewing and sanctifying influence of his grace. This feeling of dependence is not only consistent with fidelity in the use of means, but is urged in scripture as the strongest motive to diligence. Though we would be far from presuming to affirm, that all parents who thus depend on divine aid, and thus appropriately, constantly, and tenderly bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, will have the unspeakable joy of seeing them walking in the ways of God, yet we think it clear from the scriptures and experience, that this will be the general result, and that a fearful responsibility, therefore, in this matter, rests on all those to whom God has committed young immortals to train up for eternity. We recently heard an anecdote on this subject, which strongly impressed our mind, and may be useful to others. A mother of a large family, whose children all seemed to evince the spirit of genuine religion from their infancy, being asked how it was that her children were so early pious, answered, she did not know; but that she never remembered taking any of them to her arms, without silently lifting up her heart to God for his saving blessing to rest upon them.

The care of the young is not, however, confined to their parents; teachers and pastors have a most important duty to discharge, in respect of their religious instruction. It is a question of the deepest interest, how religious instruction can be most advantageously secured for the rising generation throughout our land. That there are hundreds and thousands of families where the parents, from want of disposition or capacity, neglect this business, no one will question. It is therefore clear that some other provision must be made for this object, or we shall have a large portion of our population growing up ignorant of the first principles of moral and religious truth. The evils, which must result from such a state of things, to the temporal and eternal interests of our fellow men, are beyond calculation. This is admitted; but the question is, how shall they be prevented? how shall the truth of God be brought to bear clearly and uniformly on the minds of our youth during the forming period of their being? That much may be, that much has been accomplished by our infant and sabbath schools, and that much more may be accomplished by these means than has yet been effected, we have no disposition to

question. We believe there are few institutions of the present age, more extensively useful than the American Sabbath School Union. Still this system does not and cannot embrace all our rising population; and being confined to one day in the week, cannot be so thoroughly operative as is desirable. We think, therefore, that it should be a constant object with the friends of religion, to try to secure a religious character to the instructions of the common school. Here every thing depends upon the teacher and the system. If a proper sentiment pervaded the community, it would be universally felt that the Bible is the best book to be used in forming the minds and hearts of children, and should, therefore, be made the basis of instruction in all our common schools; not to be used as a reading book, merely, but to be studied, much on the plan which is pursued in the Sabbath schools. If there were one lesson of this kind a day, the children would obtain a familiarity with the sacred volume, and a degree of moral and religious knowledge which would serve to enlarge and purify their minds, to enlighten their consciences and impress on them a holy character. It would be well too, if this plan could be introduced into our higher schools, so that at every stage of advancement the mind might be brought under the influence of divine truth. This, in more advanced seminaries for English education, might easily be effected, and in our grammar schools the Greek scriptures might form most profitably the subject of one of the daily exercises of the students. Even our colleges would be greatly benefited by the adoption of the same plan.

It is not to be expected, however, that in a country like ours any one system will ever be universally introduced. Hence the necessity of suggesting various means of accomplishing the same grand object, some of which may be suited to one region, and some to another. The importance of having teachers of every grade, properly qualified, both as to their mind and heart, for this work, cannot be questioned. And until some means be devised for securing a supply of competent instructors, the business of education can never be satisfactorily conducted. Would it not be well for every church, or congregation, to have its own school? Wherever there are Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, or Methodists enough to form a congregation, there must be children to form a school. And this school might then be conducted in a manner fitted to train up Christians. Or if the different denominations were, in any place, willing to have a school in common, they might unite

on the same principle which secures their cordial co-operation in the Sabbath school system.

We have recently heard from a friend of the cause of religious education, the idea suggested, that much good might be accomplished in many parts of our country, by having properly qualified and pious men employed to teach a school for a couple of hours every day on the plan of a Sabbath school. The children being previously prepared, would attend, say early in the morning, and spend two hours with the teacher, and then return to their other duties. These two hours would, no doubt, be as profitable as the six spent in the usual manner. On this plan, the same teacher might conduct several schools at the same time, assembling at different hours of the day, and in different neighbourhoods. In destitute regions where the population is scattered and poor, this plan we think, might be very advantageously adopted.

Our limits forbid our enlarging on this interesting subject. We had intended to offer a few remarks on the importance of Pastors paying more special attention to the religious instruction of the young, but we must wait for some other opportunity. We were led into this train of reflection from the mere title of Dr. Sprague's work, "LECTURES TO THE YOUNG." We regret that we have not had an opportunity of expressing at an earlier date our sense of the service which the author has, in the publication of these Lectures, rendered to the cause of religion. As they have already reached a second edition, it is certainly unnecessary for us to descant on their merits, or to enter on any detailed account of their contents. With these, the public are already acquainted. The "Introductory Address," by Dr. Miller, on the peculiar importance of religion to the young, and especially to the young in this favoured country, has served to deepen our impression of the importance of this subject. His remarks on the necessity of bringing educated youth, the children of the rich, under the influence of religious instruction, ought to be very deeply pondered. We venture to extract the following paragraph on the bearing of this subject on the prospects of our country.

"There is another thought of deep interest which occurs in this connexion. The highly favoured, but most responsible population of this land, is now conducting an experiment of incalculable importance to ourselves and to mankind:—the experiment whether men are capable of self-government? In other words, whether they can live permanently in peace under rulers of

their own choice, and laws of their own formation; or whether they are destined, until the Millenium shall open on our world, continually to vibrate between anarchy and despotism;—between the manacles of privileged orders, and the exactions of an established church—and the infuriated licentiousness of popular profligacy, which refuses to obey any law, either of God or man? This experiment, as I said, is now going on; and it will probably be decided by the men of the next generation; by those whose principles and characters are now forming. Of course, every youth who is decisively won to the side of Christian knowledge and practice, is so much gained to the cause of our national hopes. If, then, we wish to transmit all our privileges, civil and religious, unimpaired, to the latest posterity, let our young men be deeply imbued with the spirit of the BIBLE.—If we wish to avert from our country the curse of an ecclesiastical establishment, that bane of both church and state, let the BIBLE, and NOTHING BUT THE BIBLE, be impressed upon the minds of our youth, as the ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE. Here, and here only, do we find those principles which are equally opposed to slavery and licentiousness. Every young man who has been trained in the spirit of the Bible, will be, as far as his influence goes, an impregnable barrier against every species of oppression, civil or religious; and equally against every species of disorder. Only let the great mass of our population, for the next forty years, drink deep into the spirit of the BIBLE, and we may probably consider our stability and happiness as a nation finally secured.”

Dr. Miller expresses the following opinion of the work before us:—“So far as my opportunity of examination has extended, it is rich and judicious in matter; neat, perspicuous, and attractive in style; and peculiarly adapted to engage and reward the attention of enlightened, reflecting, and literary youth. Indeed, if I were asked to point out a manual, better suited than any other within my knowledge, to be put into the hands of students in the higher literary institutions, I know not that it would be in my power to name one more likely to answer the purpose than this volume.” A judgment which the voice of the public has sustained.

Dr. Sprague's first Lecture is on “The importance of the period of youth.” Those which immediately follow are on the various peculiar dangers to which the young are exposed, and are introductory to those discourses which are intended to arouse the attention of the careless, to guide the inquiries of the anxious, to exhibit the nature and evidence of real religion, and to direct the course of the young convert. Our limits forbid our indulg-

ing ourselves in making extracts. We close with an earnest recommendation of the book to our youthful readers, and the expression of our sincere desire that it may be made extensively useful.

ART. II.—ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIETY.

The Advancement of Society in Knowledge and Religion,
by James Douglas, Esq. Hartford, 1830. One Vol.
12mo. pp. 315.

IF ever there was a time, when the general appearance of human society bid defiance to all conjecture respecting the changes soon to be expected, such is the passing moment. We say not, passing year, or month, for, truly, we know not even "what a day may bring forth." The continent of Europe is the scene of a conflict whose extent and fierceness has seldom, if ever, been equalled. There are moments, indeed, but mere moments of calm, between the shocks of the mighty earthquake; but, even during these intervals of solemn suspense, the listening ear catches the low and hollow murmur proceeding from the very foundations of the solid earth, and foreboding desolation, undefinable in extent and horror. Thrones are tottering and dynasties falling, but we fear no sufficient foundations are yet laid for better forms of civil administration, or permanent peace, among different States.

To the American spectator of European affairs, there appear some signs of advancement in the state of society—some signs of an approaching period, when the power of nations, instead of being arrayed against the best interests of the millions governed, will become a most important element in the means of promoting their own welfare. Yet we dare not confidently anticipate the immediate result of the commotions which agitate or threaten every European State. The example of France, where the success of any new form of government seems so questionable—where a lawless democracy seems one of the points to which things are verging—such an example, where we might hope for more success in the business of self-government than in many other nations, throws a dark shade over the immediate prospects of the whole European continent.

If we look at society as a moral mass, its ferments are almost equally striking, and, as to their immediate results, al-