

**AGATHOS, AND
OTHER SUNDAY
STORIES. PP.1-165**

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SAMUEL WILBERFORCE

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AGATHOS,
AND OTHER
SUNDAY STORIES

BY SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, M.A.
ARCHDEACON OF SURREY.

"MY SPEECH SHALL DISTIL AS THE DEW, AS THE SMALL RAIN UPON
THE YUNDSH HERB."—DEUT. XXXII. 2.

"EVEN A CHILD IS KNOWN BY HIS GOINGS." PROV. XX. 11.

FIFTH EDITION

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PREFACE.

THE following allegories and stories have been actually related by the Author to his children on successive Sunday evenings. He began the practice with the earnest desire of combining some sort of occupation suitable to the Lord's day, with something which might amuse his little ones. Few parents can, he thinks, have failed to feel the want which he would here hope in some measure to supply.

On the one hand, if the conversations and employments of Sunday are not early marked as different from those of other days, how is it possible that our children can grow up with a deeply-rooted reverence for its holiness? On the other hand, if the day is one which they remember only for its dulness, how can children grow up in the love of this blessed season? "Everlasting droopings,"* their young hearts least of all will "bear." And if on other days they are used to amusing employments, if they love (and all children should be made to love them) the times of relaxation in which they see their parents as friends, and in some sort companions; what else can happen, if on this day all amusement be banished, and all interest removed, but that they will grow

* Herbert's Country Pastor, cxxvii.

insensibly to feel the Lord's day a weariness. But if the week-day's tale is changed for the Sunday story; and if the child is really interested in it; he learns, even unawares, to separate in his own mind the first day of the week from its common days; and that by a pleasurable separation.

Such has been, to a remarkable degree, the effect of the first telling of these stories in the Author's family; and such he cannot help hoping may be more widely their effect when they are given to the public. The questions at the close of each are designed as tracks, not as grooves; and they may easily be multiplied or reduced in number, according to the judgment of the parent, or the age and intelligence of the child. Some of them are the very answers he received from his children.

One word more should be said about

the plan of these narratives. The Author's greatest care has been, while interweaving in them as much instruction as he could about the Holy Scriptures, its allegories, and some of its most striking narratives, to keep as far as possible from all lowering down of holy things, or making the mysteries of the faith common and cheap to childish imaginations. Against this most dangerous evil, which appears to him to infest and poison many of the current religious books for children, he begs here most earnestly to protest, as against that which is laying unawares the foundation of untold evils, in accustoming the mind to look curiously, and with levity, on things which man must never approach but with humiliation and adoration. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy

ground." This should be from the first the temper carefully wrought into our children's minds, if we would have them approach God with acceptance.

To teach them to think boldly of mysteries, in the vain hope of explaining to their childish minds what, in the fulness of their highest understanding, they can never truly comprehend, may make them shrewd and forward questioners, but cannot make them meek and teachable disciples.

It only remains further to say, for what age these stories are intended. The author's children reach from five to nine years old, and are of ordinary powers of comprehension. Of these, the eldest has been fully interested by the simplest narratives, and the youngest has understood the most difficult. All the applications of the allegorical tales, they of course will

not understand at first; but in the author's judgment, this is the very excellence of allegorical instruction. The minds of children may be fatally dwarfed, by never having presented to them anything but that which they can understand without effort; whilst it is exceeding difficult to devise anything which shall at the same time attract their attention and stretch their faculties. It is exactly this want which allegory supplies: the story catches the attention of the youngest; glimpses of the under-meaning continually flash into their minds; and whilst it is difficult to say exactly how much they have fully understood, it is clear that it has been enough to give them interest, and arouse their faculties.

May God hereby bless some of the tender lambs of His fold.