

Sunday-School Organization.

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PRINCIPLES of Sunday-school reform have now for some time been freely discussed amongst Church-people, and the signs of the times show that we do not intend to lag behind our Nonconformist friends in meeting the crying needs of the day. We must provide our children with religious instruction in the Sunday-school, more especially now that our hold on the day-schools is becoming less firm, and above all we must see to it that their Christian education rests on a sound basis of Churchmanship.

It is not the purpose of the writer of this article to try to say anything new about proposed systems of teaching. Everyone to-day who is interested in Sunday-schools is acquainted more or less with the system of grading, and probably will admit that in some form or other the system must be adopted if the work of the school is to be carried out efficiently in accordance with modern theories of education. Many admirable books dealing with this subject have been recently published, so that those who wish to make a careful study of teaching methods will not be at a loss for guidance. It is, on the other hand, the purpose of the writer to call attention to some of the difficulties which lie in the way of the ordinary average parish Sunday-school, and to try to encourage Sunday-school workers to meet these difficulties.

Now, all our difficulties will be found to fall under two comprehensive divisions—namely, Accommodation and the Teaching Staff.

Let us take the first—Accommodation and Equipment of the School. Now, it is an axiom that we must make the best of what we have, but when we have done this it is a very useful corollary to add that we must get more. We must not placidly sit down and say that essentials are luxuries, and that, as we are

“only a country parish,” we can get along very well without them. We must decide what are essentials for our own particular school, and when we have decided this we must use our enterprise to raise additional funds, if need be, to provide them.

Take a fairly average example. Here is a country school with 200 scholars on the register. What may we consider the bare essentials for accommodating these scholars? Now, suppose we are adopting the Three Grade System.¹ We shall probably have some five or six classes in each grade; clearly, it would be impossible to have anything like order and good teaching if we attempt to carry through the lesson in one room. Supposing, however, we have only the one large room where the children assemble for the opening and closing hymn and prayer, or at best, perhaps, we have one or two classrooms in addition. Now, obviously this is a case of having to do the best we can with what we have, for we cannot make classrooms without considerable outlay. It is, however, possible to improvise a substitute without very serious expense. It may be desirable to partition the room for the three grades, and if so curtains will be found admirable, because they can so easily be closed or opened as required. But in many rooms it may be found that a sufficient number of screens placed between classes will be preferable. If the size of the room permits, both methods in combination may be adopted with good success. In this latter case we should have the room divided by curtains for the three grades, and each grade subdivided by screens according to discretion.

So much for division. It must not, however, be overlooked that the chief reason for screening at all is the blackboard. It is impossible to have blackboard lessons in one room for many classes without one class distracting the attention of its next-door neighbour. In many Sunday-schools the blackboard is

¹ The children are grouped into three sections, or grades, according to their standards. Sometimes there are several classes in one grade, but in any case all the children in that grade are taught the same lesson. Each child spends two years in each section, and there are different lessons for each of the two years.

still out of work ; and even though it is within call, where the Sunday-school and day-school are one, it is always allowed and expected to keep Sabbath rest. It is often urged, in defence of this attitude towards the blackboard, that we do not want to introduce a day-school atmosphere and day-school methods into Sunday-school. There is certainly something to be said for this view. From a psychological standpoint alone, it is most desirable that the Sunday-school atmosphere should be completely different from the day-school atmosphere, but the difference is not necessarily attained by making Sunday-school methods entirely different from day-school methods. If the principle of education is sound at the root, the method which carries it out effectively in one case should be equally effective in another. It is the subject-matter of the lesson which constitutes the difference, and if a "schooly" element is introduced into the Sunday lesson, it is not the blackboard, but the teacher, who is at fault.

Let us, then, regard the blackboard as one of the essentials of the Sunday-school furniture. If, however, we have some fifteen to twenty classes in the school, as a matter of economy the blackboards will probably have to be shared. It would be possible to work with one or two blackboards to each grade, since all the classes in one grade would be doing the same lesson ; but this arrangement would mean a certain amount of co-operation on the part of the teachers, and in many cases it would not work happily. It is far better, if it can be so arranged, to have a small, light blackboard at the disposal of each teacher. The teacher, provided with a blackboard, and the class adequately screened off from neighbouring classes, will be able to keep the attention of two or three times as many children as the same teacher could when seated at the apex of a triangle of restless little beings, who are either bent on trying what they can find to do to annoy one another, or craning their necks to see what the next class is doing.

The blackboard, however, is not the only method of maintaining the principle that "eye-gate" helps "ear-gate."

Pictures, diagrams, and models, will be of great service to the teacher in the lesson; but let us be duly fastidious—it is far better to have nothing to do with them unless they are good. Such, however, can be procured at a reasonable outlay, and, with a little amount of judicious distribution on the part of the superintendent, blackboards and pictures can be made to “go round” amongst the teachers. A picture in the hands of a clever teacher will often be quite sufficient help without the blackboard.

Let us now turn our attention to the other main class of difficulties which fall under the head of the Teaching Staff. Here, in reality, the greatest difficulties are involved, because no amount of equipment will be of avail in making a good school, if we can only put a staff of inefficient teachers on the ground. But, on the other hand, if we have a staff of trained and efficient teachers, such teachers will eventually demand the necessary equipment, and, what is more, they will see that they get it. Now, we do not mean, let it be always understood, the mere gratification of fads, but the equipment necessary for organizing the work of the Sunday-school on the basis of a definite system of education, and thus enabling it to take its rank side by side with the elementary and secondary schools of our day.

We are not now, however, considering the case of one of those favoured few schools which has a staff of trained and efficient teachers. In many a parish, either in the country or small provincial towns, we may think ourselves fortunate if we can number one trained teacher on our staff. But here again, as with the equipment, it is our business to make the best use of the material at our command. Moreover, it should be recognized that trained teachers, though very desirable, are not always essential to the welfare of a Sunday-school. It is often possible to find volunteers for the work, who, though they have never had any training or experience, have a natural faculty for teaching. This faculty can always be developed, and where such would-be teachers are to be found ready to hand our difficulties will be

greatly diminished. It is, however, a more common experience that, instead of having to draw recruits from this excellent "raw material"—if we may use the phrase without any disrespect to this really valuable class of workers—we find ourselves already supplied with teachers of a much less plastic type. There is, for instance, the teacher who follows one fixed routine, and cannot find a use for any other; or there is the well-meaning but incapable teacher whose main qualification is willingness to work. In such cases the difficulties of the superintendent will be great; but special cases require special treatment, and tact, one of the most essential qualities for a superintendent, will be constantly in requisition. It may be worth while remarking, by the way, that the experience gained by one superintendent might often be of service if passed on to another. We also venture to hint to superintendents that the "raw material" of which we have been speaking can often be found if searched for, but very seldom presents itself uninvited.

Let us now leave the teachers and turn to the superintendent. It will not be very far wrong to say that a good superintendent is the making of the school. Experience shows this to be the case. A well-disciplined school will very soon become slack in the hands of an incapable superintendent, while a school that is worked up from the start by one who is keenly in touch with his or her work, and in sympathy with the children and teachers, will not be very long before it makes its influence felt in the district.

I remember hearing some years ago an amusing incident connected with a few village Methodists who prided themselves on the readiness with which all hands were put to the plough. One of the leading "members of the society," on being questioned by the visiting minister about the work of their Sunday-school, replied: "It goes right well, sir: we're all teachers—that is, those who're old enough." "But you were telling me, Thomas," said the minister, "that two of your oldest members could neither read nor write." "I was just about to explain that, sir," replied Thomas. "You see, we thought, as

they couldn't hardly manage the teaching, we'd best make them superintendents." Village Methodism has advanced many stages since this incident was recorded, but we are not sure that, apart from village Methodism, the old idea has quite died out, that any senior man who walks the room can fill the office of superintendent, if he will. We do right to emphasize the fact that we must have more than a figurehead.

The entire organization of the school work devolves upon the superintendent. In addition, however, to the more obvious duties, such as the allotment of suitable classes to fit teachers and direction of the general course of study, there are other duties which are apt to be overlooked. To hold the office does not mean the mere giving up of an hour on Sunday afternoon, and calling an occasional teachers' meeting in the week. A good superintendent will wish to know something of the children in their homes; and, although it should be strongly advocated that teachers should at least attempt to visit their own absent scholars, it is most desirable that the parents should know that there is such a person as the superintendent, and that they should know this, not merely from hearsay, but from direct personal acquaintance.

To maintain good discipline is a very difficult work. It does not simply mean to keep order. That is a great thing, but there is no really effective discipline without sympathy. Take, for instance, the superintendent, on the one hand, who only recognizes in all the children a number of little living creatures to whom in time he learns to attach different names. Then, on the other hand, take the superintendent who knows the children as definite personalities, not only the forward or attractive children, but also the shy, retiring little mortals who never speak unless they are spoken to—whose little faces brim over with eagerness to answer a question, yet they dare not stand up to say so uninvited. The difference between discipline, which simply means order, and really effective discipline, very soon reveals itself. If Grade III. is in perfect order when the superintendent is present, but all out of hand as soon as his attention is con-

centrated upon Grade I., then it is certain that neither superintendent nor teachers have mastered the principles of effective discipline.

It is very desirable that the superintendent should be able to hold weekly classes for the teachers. A lesson-book for each grade may be used, and perhaps should be used ; but even then the teaching will be far more effective if the teachers meet regularly for instruction or discussion. The class should not be regarded as a mere help for the teacher to make a lesson—which every teacher thinks that he or she is quite competent to do without such assistance—but it should be regarded as an opportunity for one teacher to find out how another teacher goes to work, and to profit by interchange of thought and experience. Moreover, the method of grading will amount to nothing if it is not carried out by the teachers in unison.

We must not, however, say that it is essential for the superintendent to conduct the teachers' classes. In many parishes it may be possible for the Vicar to do this himself. If he has the faculty for it, such an arrangement is excellent, because, although the responsibility of organizing rests with the superintendent, the Vicar is ultimately the head, and must make himself responsible for what is taught in the school. But, on the other hand, he can control the teaching through the catechizing without making himself responsible for the teachers' classes ; and if he has a really competent superintendent, he will in most cases be glad to be relieved of the responsibility. But where the Vicar, or one of the assistant clergy, conducts the classes, it is certainly very desirable that the superintendent should be able to take some responsibility in training or assisting the younger teachers for their work. The difficulties of religious teaching at the present time are very great, and it is essential that teachers should be to some extent abreast with current thought. We must not, however, expect very much knowledge on the part of young teachers, nor, if they possess it, would it be safe to leave them to strike out lines for themselves. In view of these considerations, we should have a tremendous advantage if we could appoint

superintendents thoroughly competent and qualified to guide the study and preparation of the teachers.

Now, if a superintendent is to undertake such duties as we have sketched out, it is easy to see that a fit person must be chosen, and that such a person will be difficult to find. The question is sometimes proposed as to whether a woman is more desirable for the office than a man. It is a question that cannot be answered by "Yes" or "No." Fitness for the office depends entirely upon individual personality. As a matter of experience, we have seen schools admirably managed under women's superintendency. The work is, moreover, eminently suitable for women who have the ability and qualifications for it. Further, in most parishes it will be more difficult to find a layman who possesses the necessary qualifications, and who at the same time has sufficient leisure for carrying out the work efficiently. If a layman is chosen, it would generally be desirable to enlist the assistance of a lady for supervising the junior classes and helping the young teachers to master the difficulties of their work.

Where can we find a "fit person"? In many parishes we look round, and are tempted to say we give it up. In such cases it is usual to fall back on one of two alternatives—the parish priest or an unfit person.

We are glad to see that it is now becoming more widely recognized that Sunday-school work is a work for the laity. The parish priest already has his hands full with duties in which laymen cannot help him. It is therefore neither fair to himself that the burden of Sunday-school work should rest on his shoulders, nor to the school that the superintendency should be undertaken by one who can only give a small fraction of his time to it, and who may often have to be replaced by a deputy. When the question turns round the "unfit person," surely we ought to decide that this is not a case in point where we have to make the best of the material ready to hand. If there is really not a fit person in the parish, it does seem to be a case where outside help should be sought. We are not very keen to advocate the appointment of paid professional workers, but it is worth while considering the desirability

or otherwise of appointing paid workers for such important posts. The point at stake is whether or not our work will progress without them. We have nothing to say against the principle of paid work in such a case, it simply falls on the same level as the case of organists and choristers ; the main difficulty will be, as in all other cases, to raise the funds. Of this difficulty we can say nothing here ; each parish must determine for itself what is possible and what is impossible in this respect. We do, however, wish to lay stress on the importance of using every available means to attain a really high standard of work in the Sunday-school.

May it be permitted in conclusion to say a word about the term "reformed" Sunday-school? To the present writer the term is, to put it bluntly, objectionable. It is not unlike giving a repulsive name to some deft culinary art, and, by so doing, turning at least the epicures against it. And even if we are all agreed upon setting a high ideal as our standard, we are not all agreed about the method of attaining it. It is hardly fair, therefore, to designate any particular method by the term "reformed."

Let us, however, continue to set our ideals high, no matter if we never attain them, nor would they be ideals if we did. We aspire to have the children in our Sunday-schools instructed in the Catholic faith and the Bible by a body of well-equipped teachers, inspired with a sense of duty and the nobility of their work, conversant with the subject-matter of their teaching, and, more than this, fully awake to the presence of new phases of thought which must be grasped and sifted—not shunned, but welcomed as leading to a fuller and richer revelation of the truth. If we can raise the standard of our work to such a level, then we may take courage and go forward, confident that in our Sunday-schools we are erecting a strong bulwark which will prove invincible against irreligion and scepticism in the coming generation.

