

Sunday-School Reform.

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IN July, 1780, Robert Raikes, a printer in the city of Gloucester, in conjunction with the Rev. Thomas Stock, opened a Sunday-school in the parish in which he lived. Individuals had made tentative efforts in the same direction before this, but it is from this date that we can trace the continuity of the Sunday-school in our country. An account of the school published in his paper in 1783 brought him many inquiries from all parts of the country. The movement spread very quickly. Wesley remarks in his Journal of July, 1784, that he finds these schools springing up wherever he goes. They were introduced into Wales by Thomas Charles, of Bala, in 1789, and spread into Scotland and Ireland.

In 1785 the Sunday-school Union was founded. The Committee consisted of Churchmen and Nonconformists. The children were gathered together without any reference to the religious body to which they belonged, and were taught the great truths of the Christian religion. The effort was intended to reach those who were growing up in complete ignorance, and were likely to form the criminal class of the future. The hours of instruction were from four to seven.

Notwithstanding opposition and difficulties, Sunday-schools spread rapidly, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Sunday-school had become a regular part of Church organization. Where there was no week-day school it supplied secular as well as religious instruction to the children.

It would be invidious to select any individual Sunday-schools for special comment, but there was one of so exceptional a character and of such an interesting history that some account may be given of it without any fear of awakening the jealousy of others. I mean the famous Jesus Lane Sunday-school at

Cambridge. The history of its foundation is thus given by its historian, the Rev. A. C. Jones :

“In 1827 a small party of undergraduates, chiefly members of Queen’s College, used to attend the Sunday and Thursday evening services at Trinity Church, and they often returned together to the rooms of one of their number to talk over Mr. Simeon’s sermon. . . . One bright Sunday morning in spring, Wright and five others were in a summer-house at the back of 7, Tennis Court Road, where Wright lodged, and he remarked, ‘It seems a pity that we do not spend some part of our time in Sunday-school teaching,’ and he put it to the others whether there was any parish in the town where teachers were required. One replied in the negative, adding that he had gone round to all the Churches, offering his services, but they had been declined. It was then remarked, ‘Barnwell is a sadly neglected place, and near enough, why not try to do something there?’ It was then determined that a school should be held in Cambridge, and the Barnwell children invited to attend. A meeting-house belonging to the Society of Friends in Jesus Lane was mentioned as a suitable place, if it could be obtained. One of the original teachers writes of the parish which the school was intended to benefit : ‘It was in a most neglected state ; there were no schools whatever, except, I believe, a very small one in connection with the Methodist chapel in Wellington Row.’ A number of zealous undergraduates, several of whom were more than usually advanced in life, occasionally heard of and visited cases of unheeded sickness and distress. The heathenish and dissolute state of the parish was thus forced upon their notice. The young men went out, two and two, to canvass Barnwell for scholars. The University was canvassed for teachers, and the school commenced with two hundred and thirty-two children ; the number of teachers soon increased to thirty-two, the majority being supplied by Queen’s College.”¹

¹ “The English Church in the Nineteenth Century,” pp. 249, 250. By T. H. Overton.

From that day to this the school has been a power for good, and has maintained the reputation of being one of the best of Sunday-schools.

In 1843 the Church of England Sunday-School Institute was formed in consequence of the exclusion of the Church Catechism from the catalogue of the Union. The object of the Institute was to extend the Sunday-school system in connection with the Church of England and to improve the schools. The means employed have been the foundation of local associations, the publication of courses of lessons and other literature helpful to teachers, the organization of meetings for discussion, model lessons, the examination of teachers, the establishment of days of intercession, etc. In these and in other ways the work of the Institute has been invaluable to the Sunday-schools of the Church.

Coming to our own days, we find the Sunday-school system still in our midst and carrying on a much-needed and most helpful work. According to the latest available statistics there are now in Church of England Sunday-schools 220,290 teachers and 3,234,209 scholars.

Certain changes in our day-school system have enhanced the importance of the Sunday-school and rendered it more necessary to make it as efficient as possible. Until the year 1870 education was not compulsory, and every school was attached to some religious body, which determined the character of the religious instruction to be given in it. By the Act of 1870 education became compulsory for all, and where schools could not be provided by some religious body, they were to be built out of the rates. In such schools the religious instruction might be non-existent—though we thankfully acknowledge that this has been seldom the case—or it was to be religious instruction in which no formula distinctive of any particular denomination was taught. Such schools—council schools as we now call them—have steadily increased, and are bound to increase as time goes on. But the very neutrality of their attitude towards denominational religion prevents them, and rightly prevents

them, from seeking to attach the child to any particular religious body. Yet that by some means he should be so attached is most important, and thus comes in a special function of the Sunday-school, which is to take hold of the child on the Sunday and to say, "Come with us and we will do you good."

Again, no one can have lived through the last forty or fifty years without noticing the enormous advance which has been made in the day-schools. The buildings, equipment, staff, and methods have improved almost beyond recognition; but the Sunday-school has not been able to keep pace with the breathless rapidity with which the day-school has passed from one improvement to another, and the consequence is that children are beginning to draw unfavourable comparisons between the one and the other.

A crisis had arrived, and it was evident to those who could read the signs of the times that the Sunday-school must reform or close. It is at such times as those that one sees the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ. No one knew exactly how it happened, but there was a stir among the dry bones. Life and enthusiasm were in the air. The reform began. Churchmen and Nonconformists united together in a way which, alas! has seldom been the case in the past. On all sides courses of lectures, meetings for discussion, weeks of training were organized. New methods were introduced, new enthusiasm was kindled.

The Archbishop of Canterbury appointed a Committee to inquire into the Sunday-school system and the best methods of improving it. The Bishop of London's Council appointed a clergyman as Director of Sunday-Schools to devote his whole time to the work of strengthening and helping those schools. Let us consider some of the gains which have been won by this movement during the last five years.

The change which has passed over the educational methods of our day-schools is beginning to make itself felt in our Sunday-schools; and, indeed, this should be so, for educational method is one in principle, and the best method of

teaching one subject is *mutatis mutandis* the best method of teaching another.

Now, the radical change in our methods has been the substitution of experiment for memory.

A long time ago, when some of us were young, we learned our multiplication table by heart, with much sorrow and labour; the modern child builds up his bricks, plays with his beans, and constructs his own multiplication table. In our geography we learned the definitions of an island, a river, and so on; the modern child, with his clay and water, makes his island and his river. We learned our propositions in Euclid; the modern child measures and cuts his geometrical forms. The definition comes as a result achieved by thought. We do but put the scholar in the way of acquiring experience for himself.

In doing all this we carry with us the interest of the scholars, and we adapt the subject-matter to be learned to the changing needs of the children at the varying stages of their development. Until recently religious education as given in our Sunday-schools was not affected by this development in educational thought. Hundreds of teachers even now are trying to convey to the young child such spiritual truths as are really only suitable for the assimilation of the adult. Still, the change has begun.

“In the best Sunday-schools hymns and prayers are now carefully chosen and introduced to the scholars in such a way as to lead both to intelligent and responsive worship and to permanent appreciation and recall. The truths of religion are brought before the scholar’s mind by methods in line with that scholar’s fundamental interests. Our tiny children look at pictures and flowers and shells, and learn of the Fatherhood of God through their love for the bright and beautiful things which He has made. A little later the teacher’s vehicle for religious truth is found in the story drawn from the Bible or the mission field. As the child grows and develops, further foundations for faith are laid through vivid narrative and fascinating biography as the scholars become increasingly interested in the life of our Lord, in the heroes of the Christian Church in all ages, and in

God's witnesses in olden time. Meanwhile there is slowly growing up in the child a deepening interest in the development of his own character, an increasing consciousness of his own failings, and a gradual heightening of his ideals. All this has been stimulated by the stories and biographies presented to him, which have been wisely suffered to carry home their own moral, without any formal application. At this period, then, will follow instruction in the great truths and doctrines of Christianity, which can alone supply the spiritual needs of which the scholar is now conscious."¹

Thus instruction is graded to suit the age of the scholar. We no longer try to teach the same subject-matter to the whole school, taken in its full strength by the older scholars and diluted for successive ages till it reaches the younger. We now suit the subject-matter to the age of the scholar. This simple but important reform is slowly but surely winning its way in our schools, and those who have adopted it testify to the excellent results obtained from it. The Sunday-School Institute, the National Society, the Bishop of London's Council, and others are issuing books suitable for graded schools, and it is to be hoped that ere long all our Sunday-schools will fall into line in this matter.

There are difficulties, of course, such as the lack of separate rooms and the necessity of conducting separate preparation classes for the teachers of the different grades, but difficulties are made to be overcome, and the importance of the reform is so great that we must not let difficulties interfere with its introduction.

Akin to this subject is the method of treating the infants' school. It is not too much to say that the publication of Miss Hetty Lee's "The Reformed Sunday-School" in 1907 marked an epoch in the movement. The kindergarten methods introduced into the Sunday-schools have transfigured them beyond recognition. It is true that the plan has been severely criticized. The use of drawing materials, sand-trays, etc., have seemed to

¹ Miss Hetty Lee.

some inconsistent with the ideas of a Sunday-school. It has been said that nature-study was taking the place of the Bible, and so on. But even if the details require careful watching, the principles are sound, and we may look hopefully for good results, and feel confident that the infants will develop an affection for the Sunday-school of the future which they rarely felt for the Sunday-school of the past.

Very early in the movement attention was rightly turned to the training and helping of teachers. Courses of lectures have stimulated, encouraged, instructed, and helped Sunday-school teachers in the many centres in which they have been given. Of even greater value have been the training weeks for teachers. Within my own knowledge eighteen of these were held in 1912, and there may have been others of which I have not heard. The testimony of the teachers who have attended them is unanimous as to the gain, intellectual, educational, and spiritual, which they have received.

It has been abundantly proved that Sunday-school teachers are ready to take every advantage of the helps that are placed in their way.

The foundation of special colleges for Sunday-school teachers is another significant fact. St. Christopher's College at Blackheath opened in 1909 with three students, and it was doubted whether the college would fill. Within two years the available accommodation was fully occupied, and the Sunday-School Institute had to hire two additional houses. During the past year there have been forty-six residential and six non-resident students. The students of this college go forth not only to work as Sunday-school teachers themselves, but to hand on to others the methods which they have been taught, and thus give to those who cannot go to colleges some of the benefit which they have received from them. For all this we thank God and take courage.

And now as we look forward into the future we ask, What is the work that lies before us?

First, we have to see that these reforms and improvements are brought within the doors of every school. That is by no

means the case at present. The work so far has been pioneer work. We must not rest content until the cords have been lengthened and the stakes strengthened.

Secondly, we must take serious account of the very large number of children who are at present outside any Sunday-school. By personal visiting and by the missionary activity of our own scholars much may be done. But as the schools become efficient, attractive, interesting, they will draw the children. Then there is the grave and perpetual question of retaining elder scholars. The record in some parts of England is better in this respect than in others; but it is of the greatest importance that the scholar should be kept in touch with school and Church during the critical period of adolescence and not be allowed to drift away, perhaps never again to be recovered. While on this question, can we not address ourselves to the ruinous and demoralizing rivalry of school with school in the matter of treats and prizes? The amount of money spent in this way, which is sorely needed for the better equipment of the schools, is lamentable. Fifty parishes in the London diocese taken at random, but including different types, report their general expenditure at £729 2s. 7d., in addition to which they spend £1,245 8s. 5d. on treats and prizes. Twenty parishes in an agricultural district spend on maintenance £47 18s. 3d., and on treats and prizes £142 8s. 9d. It is much to be hoped that the authorities of all schools, Anglican and Nonconformist, will confer together and enter into some agreement by which this wasteful expenditure may be stopped and the money spent on making the schools more efficient.

Lastly, in the midst of all this effort for the improvement of teaching, methods, organization, and equipment, we must not forget the spiritual life of our teachers. It is only by the deepening of our spiritual life that we can bring to our scholars that all powerful influence which emanates from those who are guided and ruled by the Holy Spirit of God. Such agencies as "the quiet day," the meeting for prayer, the devotional service, should form an essential part of our Sunday-school equipment. The life of our Lord Jesus Christ was a fuller and more occupied life

than ours ; but it was carefully punctuated by intervals of retirement for prayer and communion with the Father. How much greater is our need for this source of spiritual strength. It is too fatally easy to become immersed in busy activity, in religious work, in multiplied calls, till the spiritual life, deprived of its proper nourishment, sinks lower and lower, and the spiritual force is no longer powerful for good. The teacher must seek inspiration for his teaching, holiness for his life, and power for his weakness from the Holy Spirit, who alone can teach, sanctify, and strengthen.



Studies in Texts :

SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMONS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

V.—DIVINE STANDARDS.

Text :—"The ark of the covenant, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant, and above it the cherubim of glory."—Heb. ix. 4.

[Book of the Month: "EGYPT AND ISRAEL"¹=E. Other references: Hastings' Dictionary = HDB.; Conder's "Bible and East" = C.; Kellogg's "Leviticus" = K.; Macalister's "Civilization in Ancient Palestine" = M.]

"WE read that contents of ark were a rod, a vase of one omer, and two stones. These might well be used as standards of length, capacity, and weight" (E. 62). "Hebrew weights of stone" (HDB. iv. 904 and Heb. in Lev. xix. 36, etc.). Rods used for measurements (Ezek. xl. 3). The rod must have been fairly long, said to be comparable to a serpent (Exod. vii. 12; Num. xvii. 10). "Vase stated to be an omer. Ten commandments easily engraved on even one stone size of hand" (E. 62 and *cf.* C. 64, confirmatory). Business

¹ "Egypt and Israel." By Professor Flinders Petrie, D.C.L., F.R.S., etc. Published by S.P.C.K. Suggestive, illuminating, sane, and on the whole conservative.