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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Meanwhile the dear spot we will cover
 With green leaves, and violets in bloom,
 And the stone and the name shower over
 With dewdrops of breathing perfume.

H. C. G. MOULE.



ART. III.—THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE IN SCHOOLS.

AT a moment like the present, when, for the first time after the lapse of a quarter of a century, the claims of Christian parents to recognised religious teaching for their children are admitted by those in power, it seems a fitting opportunity to present to the readers of *THE CHURCHMAN* a few ideas respecting Scriptural teaching, its difficulties, and the efforts that are being made to overcome them.

As there have been no School Boards or "Codes" to repress teachers in Secondary Schools, religious teaching has been maintained in most of these without a struggle, a matter which has been productive of more or less good, according to the character of the teacher and the influences of the home. Thus, it has been no uncommon thing even for the child of Agnostic parents to obtain distinction in Scripture, considered as an examination subject, and the parents have doubtless felt a natural exultation in their child's achievement. Few things, on the other hand, are more painful to the religious-minded teacher or pupil than to note the glib readiness of a child both to study the Bible and to answer questions at examination times when that sacred book is regarded like any other text-book, as something to be "got up" with credit, if possible, but, in any case, so as to "satisfy the examiner."

A friend of the writer's, the head-mistress of a large secondary school, stated, after some years' experience, that she felt as if the teaching of Scripture on present lines was "little short of sacrilege." All earnest-minded teachers at one time or another have had a similar impression. The late Mr. Thring, of Uppingham, is said to have regarded it as a matter of congratulation that throughout his head-mastership not one of his boys had obtained the mark of distinction for Scripture in the University Local Examinations. The reason is not difficult to discover. An examiner is led to suppose that a particular text and commentary have been studied by certain examinees. He finds that a diligent student, whose study of the book has been commendably thorough, ought to have

acquired a knowledge, not only of the sacred text, but of certain Jewish usages, civil and ecclesiastical, matters of Jewish history and tradition, etc., and he proceeds to test the accuracy of their information. Consequently, when sending in pupils for examinations, the teacher must either risk failure, more or less frequent, or insist upon their mastering pages of uninteresting and disconnected matter with sufficient lip-readiness to reproduce at least a respectable portion six or eight months from date. The study of a gospel in this fashion is deadening to all spiritual life. Nor does the evil end here. It may happen that a child who carefully "got up" one Gospel, is launched next year upon a second, and eventually upon a third. Yet, if Scripture is taught as a class subject, parents like it to be included in the examinations. In certain public local examinations this can, indeed, only be avoided by a declaration on the part of the parent that he has a conscientious objection to the subjects being offered for examination. In one leading college the head-mistress takes it upon herself to sign this declaration, and perhaps in no school is there a higher religious tone. If a different method of teaching is followed, and the moral and spiritual aspects of our Lord's life are chiefly dwelt upon, and the harmony of the Gospels is brought out, instead of confining the attention to one narrative, it is a mere chance whether the candidate will be furnished with information which will "satisfy the examiner." The choice seems to lie between academic success and a vital interest in the subject, and young pupils can hardly be blamed who are inclined to think that instruction which aims at the latter, rather than the former, object is of the wrong kind.

In the teaching of the Old Testament the risks run are even greater. Some earnest teachers deliberately discontinue the study of Old Testament history, keen though the interest be which it usually excites, as soon as the point is reached when learners must make use of a commentary upon the text. They feel too greatly the responsibility of suggesting to immature minds possible inaccuracies in the transcription of names and numerals, or difficulties in the subject-matter which are not likely to occur to the ordinary reader. To the very young nothing is either marvellous or impossible, and no explanation of an extraordinary phenomenon is looked for, nor does the destruction of a tribe or race in Old Testament history involve in their minds any moral problem; while to suggest the "principle of accommodation" so widely received and occasionally mentioned in existing manuals, tends to shatter the very foundations of childish faith.

While thus ruminating with a "large discontent" upon

Scripture teaching as it is, and as it ought to be, and feeling more than half resolved to teach the subject no more for her own part, and devolve the responsibility upon others, there was, happily, brought under the notice of the writer an admirable "Comprehensive Scripture Lesson Scheme," which seemed to meet the demands of the "examination fiend" without sinking the moral in the utilitarian teaching. The scheme in itself is so large that it has occupied some years in publication, and even now all its parts have not been issued from the press. Yet that so excellent a scheme is so far matured as to be ready to furnish the armoury of the teacher of Scripture at this momentous time, seems to be little less than providential.

The editor, the Rev. Charles Neil, M.A., Vicar of St. Matthias, Poplar, has fully explained in the preface the three-fold character of the work. It consists of three "departments." First, "The Teacher's Synoptical Syllabus," with all needed tables for ready reference.

This title in no way conveys an adequate idea of the value of the work. The volume consists of a very carefully drawn up, and artistically printed, analysis of the books of the Bible usually studied in schools; viz., the Pentateuch, the history of Israel and Judah as included in the series from Joshua to Nehemiah, and the Book of Daniel. The portions of the New Testament offered are the Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. The practical teacher will value the brevity and clearness of the analysis, the suggested division into lessons, and, above all, the incomparable arrangement of the reference tables, maps, and diagrams. It is not unusual for the enthusiastic teacher, who has carefully prepared a lesson, to bring into the class-room a whole library of volumes, at the risk of terrifying a not particularly intelligent class; yet who, knowing that "tout est dans tout," and that an apparently simple narrative opens up wide questions of archæology, chronology, geography, etc., dares to trust to the memory, facts about obscure dynasties, unknown localities, and other matters with which any curious inquirer may bring one face to face? Such a teacher, however, may now take heart, as in the book to which reference has been made (a volume of moderate dimensions) will be found, digested and ready for use, information usually culled, with much expenditure of time and toil, from the vast encyclopædias and dictionaries of the Bible which it was formerly necessary to consult.

The second department of the scheme is called "The Teacher's Catechizing Bible." Though exceedingly useful, and, indeed, indispensable as regards the combined narrative of the Gospels, this section may not commend itself so in-

stantaneously to the untrained teacher. By the brain-weary or preoccupied veteran its full merits will be recognised from the first. How many jaded teachers could at the end of a day marshal in accurate and parallel rank the records of the Evangelists, so as not to ascribe to one what is only found in the narrative of another? Yet this clearly defined and accurate knowledge is necessary, or one will accept slovenly, patched-up answers culled from other sources than the particular gospel which is the subject of study. The editor of the "scheme" combines the four sacred records, selecting for the text the most graphic details given by each, clearly marking the authorship, and relegating to a footnote the co-ordinate narratives, so that the teacher can easily discriminate the line taken by each.

From this combined narrative we learn another fact, which not a few students have already discovered for themselves, namely, that the more critical study of the life of our Lord, which in point of time should succeed the simple reading of the Gospel in the earlier standards, should not be in the separate, but in the combined form. How much partial knowledge would be avoided by employing three or four years in the reverent and gradual development of the Divine story, instead of rushing through consecutively the writings of each Evangelist, leaving the various accounts to harmonize and adjust themselves in the youthful mind as best they may. Is there not a risk in this mode of teaching that we may sow the seeds of scepticism and infidelity by allowing an intelligent pupil to arrive at the conviction that it is hopeless to try to reconcile the narrative of the fourth Evangelist with the records of the other three? That the study of the Gospels should be followed by the Book of Acts is self-evident. The writer would suggest that the study of the combined narrative should in primary schools coincide with the fourth standard, and be entered upon in secondary schools at the age of twelve, the course being completed at seventeen. Such training would so ground pupils in the knowledge of the truth that the adversary would find them armed against some of his most insidious darts.

The third department of the scheme under consideration is termed "The Teacher's Classified Lesson Material." This is a book which, unlike the second section, will commend itself more to the tyro in the art of teaching than to the veteran. The young teacher has probably had little time for Bible-study, and will be grateful for the information supplied to elucidate the text. The editor does not attempt to overlay the written Word with all the erudition, human and Divine, which might be brought to bear upon it. Though intended

for the teacher's private study, one might without hesitation place the "lesson-material" in the hands of an intelligent pupil of sixteen or seventeen. Most of us older teachers are choked with commentaries, and it requires some independence of thought to resolve upon which of three or four conflicting views we shall adopt. In this respect, possibly, the possession of the "classified lesson material" may assist many to arrive at a decision.

It should here be stated that one method runs through the three volumes. A lesson marked 1 in the synopsis has its corresponding number in the "Catechizing Bible" and in the "Classified Lesson-Material," so that the three resemble a threefold cord so intimately bound together that one is not complete without the other two. In this consists mainly the usefulness and originality of the scheme.

One advantage of using this series is that two or more teachers, working in one school and following the scheme, must always work in harmony, and nothing learnt in one year is likely to be controverted in the years of school-life that follow.

The cost of the series is considerable, and might to some appear prohibitory (the advertised price of the completed work is £3), but it can be purchased in separate parts as required, at a cost of 1s. 6d. or 2s. each, so that none need be deterred at the outset by the expense, and the valuable collection may be gradually completed during the course of years. To the clergy and to heads of schools the writer recommends the purchase of the large volumes at the first. It is worth even the sacrifice of a needed holiday to procure them, so greatly do they minimize one's toil.

One more thought before closing. The time is ripe for educational experiments. Why should not some Educational Board elaborate a course of religious instruction based upon such a scheme as that before our notice, set annual test-papers upon each section, and bestow certificates which shall be acknowledged to be superior to passes and distinctions in the University Locals, because based upon a more devout recognition of the real aim of Bible study?

The Bible would then be restored to its place as the Book of books, and be removed from the list of text-books to be learnt by a system of unwholesome cramming.

C. M. BIRRELL.

