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iron despotism that Government ever saw established, but we do say that his evil end can only be attained at the expense of alienating the hearts of his people, crushing the prosperity of his kingdom, and increasing tenfold the influence and mischief of those secret societies now plotting against his State. Nihilism is one of those parasites which battens only upon the miseries and sufferings of mankind. It cannot be stamped out by death or punishment; martial law and the rigours of a severe discipline fail to suppress it; it pays no heed to police supervision, the sentence of judicial tribunals, or the power of the sword. But its pestilential breath loses all its poison when once it has to contend against the fresh air of political liberty. We pray that He who is the King of Kings and Ruler of Rulers may so guide the counsels of him who wields the sceptre as the Czar of All the Russias that the painful agitation now rife in his dominions may be calmed by the introduction of a wise, a tolerant, and an enlightened policy.

ALEX. CHARLES EWALD.

ART. III.—ARE OUR SUNDAY SCHOOLS A FAILURE?

FEW more important questions can be asked in the present day than this—Are our Sunday Schools a success or a failure? The gradual rise of the intellectual standard in all our other schools, while it is of great value in expanding the minds of the young, and rendering them more intelligently receptive of instruction, has also led to the shortening of the time for religious teaching, and imparted a more secular tone to our elementary day schools. The absence of encouragement under the present Governmental regulations to Scriptural instruction has also undoubtedly weakened the interest taken in it except by pious and conscientious teachers. Other subjects pay; but the Bible does not. The test has therefore often proved too severe.

Then there is the impossibility in large and populous parishes of carrying out our Church's order of catechising on Sundays and holy days by the clergyman. George Herbert's beautiful ideal cannot be universally realised, however desirable it may be in the country. Nor does this, even when most effectively done, supersede the Sunday Schools. In the hands of a specially gifted catechist it may impart clear and correct knowledge of Divine truth. The great facts and doctrines of the Gospel may be questioned into and out of our children, and so impressed on the memory, and, with God's blessing, on the heart. Still, one essential element is wanting. The clergyman in the reading-

desk stands at too great a distance, and cannot exercise the individual influence so valuable in a class. There cannot be that close contact of mind with mind, of heart with heart, which often produces such happy results.

It may, indeed, be said with great truth that this is the special function of the Christian parent. We fully admit that the pious mother has a power that none can share. But how many parents have the requisite piety and knowledge, or leisure? As, then, neither the Church's ministers nor the parents alone can in most cases compass the work, and the Lord's command, "Feed my lambs," remains an inseparable part of His commission to His Church, some other agency is wanted, and what is there so suitable as that already existing in Sunday Schools?

Their growing importance is for these reasons generally admitted. But it is often anxiously asked whether the system is upon the whole fairly successful. Must we, as with an ominous shake of the head we are occasionally invited to do, candidly admit it to be a failure?

The centenary of Sunday Schools forces this question on every thoughtful Christian.

The institution has now existed for a hundred years, and may well be challenged for results. Any inquiry into spiritual results is indeed beset with difficulties; mere figures cannot represent them. Attempts to tabulate conversions are hazardous and presumptuous. Still, certain signs of spiritual life are to be looked for in all really successful work. An impartial comparison of some of these with the defects in the Sunday School system may therefore lead to a true answer to the question, and at the same time suggest a few practical improvements.

I. We will look first at the *favourable* side of our subject.

Here the remarkable and rapid progress of the movement at once demands our attention. Growth is an invariable mark of healthy life. The kingdom of God, though for the most part silent in operation, is always progressive. And if a work based on the principles of that kingdom is progressing, it may be assumed to be owned of God, and to be used as a channel of His blessing.

Now, that Sunday Schools have greatly increased in numbers and machinery even within the present generation, can hardly be questioned. We have only to go back to the year 1763 for their earliest germ. In that year the Rev. Theophilus Lindsay, Vicar of Catterick, in Yorkshire, made the first recorded attempts in this direction. But to Robert Raikes, a journalist, of Gloucester, with the co-operation of the Rev. Thomas Stock, then Vicar of St. Paul's in that city, has been attributed by general consent the first organised scheme of Sunday Schools.

Very happy is the conception of the artist, Mr. R. Dowling,

which it is hoped may be approved of by the Royal Academy, of representing, on the canvas, the origin of Sunday Schools. The first interview between Raikes and Stock is to be the subject of the painting. The scene is an old lane, now called Hare Lane, at the bottom of which Mr. Stock's house was situated. The figures of the two philanthropists are both portraits, that of Mr. Raikes' taken from an engraving, and Mr. Stock's from a silhouette now in the possession of his family. They are surrounded by groups of idle, dissolute boys and girls, engaged in fighting, gambling, and rude sports. Their future benefactors are evidently talking of the annoyance, and discussing the means of preventing it. That meeting was a simple incident, but resulted in momentous consequences. Well is it described by James Montgomery—

> Once by the Severn's side
> A little fountain rose;
> Now, like the Severn's seaward tide,
> Round the whole world it flows.

Very forcibly does that memorable conference remind us of the grain of mustard seed. Least amongst seeds was the first happy thought of those good men; but sown with earnest faith, and watered doubtless with much prayer, we now see it growing into a great tree, under whose branches multitudes of Christians have found shelter and safety.

(1) We may be asked for some estimate of the extent of the work. Its field is the world, and its world-wide character renders complete statistics most difficult to obtain. The Sunday School census, if made, would include the Continent of Europe, the United States, our Colonies and Missionary settlements—in fact, the greater part of the globe. This cannot be attempted, although we may observe in passing that the adoption of this institution by Christians of almost all denominations, from Roman Catholics to the Society of Friends, and even by Jews on their Sabbath days, is a presumption in its favour, and an indirect testimony of great weight to its necessity and importance. If, however, we limit our view to England and Wales, we may arrive at some approximate computation. As regards our own Church it is an encouraging fact that the Sunday School Institute has now about 2000 schools associated with it, contributing an income of 1005*l.* to its funds. The majority of our parishes, however, have not yet joined it, and until the expected returns from all the dioceses of England are received, complete statistics cannot be arrived at. But it may be reasonably believed that comparatively few of our 15,000 parishes are now without some gathering of children for Christian instruction on the Lord's Day.

With the Nonconformists there is no difficulty in obtaining full information about the extent of their work. They have been before us in developing this important agency. If we take the denominations represented by the Sunday School Union, the Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Union, and the schools of the Baptist body, the figures are ready to hand. Connected with the Sunday School Union are 4358 schools, 105,937 teachers (of whom 90,113 were formerly scholars), 964,305 scholars (of whom 48,489 are "church members"). The Wesleyan Methodists number 6169 schools, 117,516 teachers, 760,199 scholars, besides 74,429 young persons in Bible or select classes. The Baptists, who have no Sunday School Union, furnish an approximate return of 3476 schools, 42,216 teachers, 419,317 scholars. As, however, many of these last belong to the Sunday School Union, and the schools are not classified in the Report of that Union under their denominations, these figures will not furnish correctly the grand totals from all three sources. Still, if we were to assume that *all* the Baptist schools are included in the Sunday School Union, we should even then have an aggregate of 10,527 schools, 223,453 teachers, and 1,798,933 scholars. And if it should be found that equal numbers are connected with the Church of England (and this is surely a very modest assumption), we shall then have about 20,000 schools, 500,000 teachers, and 4,000,000 scholars in connection with the Church and Dissent. Contrast even such a numerical result with the little handful of neglected Arabs collected in Gloucester by Raikes and Stock 100 years ago, and do we not see most palpable evidence of satisfactory growth, and are we not ready to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"

(2) But it may be justly said that large numbers do not prove success. We are reminded that very many who had for years attended our schools now neglect all religious ordinances, and live as baptised heathen; and if this be so, are not the schools a failure? At first view there appears to be too much force in this objection. If this could be said of *all* our scholars the indictment would be proved. But we may reply both negatively and positively. Suppose that ever so small a remnant have been savingly benefited, where would they have been, and what would have been their influence upon society, but for Sunday Schools?

How many, again, though not actually converted to God, are at least restrained from evil, and made more honest, more sober, more chaste, more intelligent, in fact, better citizens and more useful men and women. Is not even this a decided gain? When, too, in sickness or bereavement, the hitherto careless are awakened, the slenderest modicum of religious knowledge proves of the greatest value. Laid up like a fuel in the memory, it may have been overlaid by the worldliness of later years, and ter-

ribly damped by sin, and yet it is at length kindled by the Holy Spirit into a flame of heavenly love and consecrated service.

More positive and direct results are by no means wanting, although they cannot be always traced. The lapse of too many scholars is indeed a mournful fact, patent to all observers. But the growth of the seed in good ground is not always so evident. The processes of spiritual, as of natural, husbandry are generally slow, gradual, and at first secret. The once heedless boy or girl grows after a while thoughtful and obedient. Impressions are made, which are deepened at confirmation. Then he becomes a regular and devout communicant. Under the faithful preaching of the Gospel and other means of grace his character ripens and develops into the happy and useful Christian. A variety of good influences have thus been brought to bear upon him, and no one in particular can be pointed to as the instrumentality God has been pleased to use. Still, in many such cases, the first germs of life may have been sown in the Sunday School Instances of this kind may be very frequently traced in every well-worked parish.

If, however, we would see results in a more distinct form, and on a larger scale, we must visit the Sunday Schools of Lancashire and Yorkshire. The impressions of such a visit are not easily forgotten. There we find this institution occupying a place in the Church's machinery, and even in the social system, seldom attained elsewhere. Not only are the numbers large in those teeming centres of population, and are they carried on with an intense, though rude heartiness, an *esprit de corps* characteristic of the North, but we are struck with a mark of success too rare in our Southern or Midland counties.

It is delightful to enter large rooms, and even churches, filled with hundreds of young men and young women, who have grown up in the schools, and with the ripening of their intellects are athirst for more spiritual knowledge. The Sunday School has thus become a religious and social factor of such importance amongst the good influences at work in those crowded hives of industry, that the late eminent educationist, Sir Kay Shuttleworth, did not hesitate to attribute to it in great measure the exemplary patience and heroic courage of the operatives during the Cotton Famine. We may not, of course, claim for this or any other human agency the production of unmixed good. Two important drawbacks often cause serious anxiety. There is the danger lest so popular an institution degenerate into a mere system of routine. In some cases, too, it is apt to become the rival, and not the handmaid, of the Church, and there is danger lest attendance at the class be substituted for regular worship in the House of God. Still, looking at the general, and often very blessed results, we can hardly admit such schools to be a failure.

(3) Connected with this last, one more class of results must not be omitted from even this cursory review of the subject. The Reports of the Church Pastoral Aid Society furnish important testimony to the value of these schools as the nucleus from which the entire system of parochial organisation has grown. An instance known to the writer, and recorded some years ago, will serve our purpose.

A conventional district was formed out of three parishes of a large manufacturing town, and a curate appointed to the charge of it. It was almost virgin soil, which the clergy of the original parishes had been unable to cultivate, and consequently was overrun with weeds. A good infant school was the only existing institution, and the two large rooms of the school-house the only centre of operations. Services were begun in the upper room, and largely attended. But it was soon found that the permanent success of the work would be best promoted by the formation of a Sunday School, and a Bible class for young men. So the event proved. These became the principal feeders of the Church, and sent forth a healthy influence throughout the district. The parents and friends of the scholars were thus brought under the sound of the Gospel. In about two years, regular and devout congregations filled the upper room, with a proportionate band of communicants. And now, after ten or eleven years, that district has grown into a well-organised parish, while a beautiful and well-filled church overtops the original school-house, as a tall and handsome daughter might look down on her much-loved, but diminutive mother.

II. We have now heard one side of the question. The impartial and judicial mind will ask, What has the other side to say? By listening to their objections we may learn more than from the panegyrics of too partial friends. What, then, are the alleged signs of failure? They are not hard to find, and are sufficiently humiliating.

(1) We hear much said, and with too much truth, about inefficiency of teachers. Because we cannot always command the same disciplined minds as in the day schools, the efforts made in Sunday Schools are despised. But must not they who make light of the work on account of the weakness of the instruments, have forgotten St. Paul's words—"You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called" (1 Cor. i. 26)? A clear understanding of the Gospel, and a heart full of love to Christ and His little ones, these are indeed essential; without them no success can be expected, however shining may be the other qualifications. Aptitude for teaching is also most important, but may be acquired by practice. Is there, then, no truth in this objection? We must shut our eyes to the facts if we were to

say so. May not St. Paul's rebuke to the Corinthian Church be applied with respect to this to the Churches now? "Do you set them to *teach*, who are least esteemed in the Church?" It is still too often thought that any ignoramus will do for a Sunday School teacher. The youngest and least experienced are impressed into this service without much inquiry into even motives or piety. If so, can we be surprised at the difficulty in keeping order, the hazy, indefinite quality of the teaching, and the absence of results? But this is just the problem which, in many places, appears insoluble. In rural parishes, and not a few of the poorest in towns, better material is not forthcoming. What is to be done? One of two courses lies before us. We must either improve what we have, or find better. The recruiting sergeant under our system of voluntary service cannot pick out at will the finest or most respectable young men as recruits. Within certain limits he takes what he can get; and then, by drill and discipline, moulds them into shape. It is often the same in the Church militant, and much may be done by Bible classes, model lessons, and the like, to raise the tone of our schools. Moreover, in many cases the other alternative may be more practicable than it seems. Persons of higher culture and riper experience sometimes need only a little more persuasion to serve. They are slow to put themselves forward, and wait to be invited. In this matter, too, should not the more opulent parishes stretch out a helping hand to the poorer?

(2) But, again, there rises up the oft-canvassed question, How shall we retain our elder scholars? At the age of fourteen or fifteen they drift away from us. The girls go to service, while the lads enter situations at a distance from home, or assert their independence. These are hard facts which sorely try the faith and patience of clergymen and teachers. It is true that this difficulty has been often surmounted amongst ourselves. Perhaps the Nonconformists have more successfully grappled with it. In the Report of the Sunday School Union for 1879, it is stated that 11,335 scholars have become "Church members" during the year, and that the total number of such members is 48,489, or five per cent. of the whole. These are gratifying results. But what of the great majority who do annually elude our grasp? The fish somehow slip out of the net. Is there not a cause? Are the meshes too wide? The length and want of heartiness in our Church services increase the natural distaste for religion. Sermons adapted to educated adults do not interest or instruct ignorant children. In the schools, moreover, sufficient regard is not always paid to their advance in years, if not in intelligence, and scholars who stand on that ambiguous border-land between childhood and maturer years, resent being treated as children. More judicious classifi-

cation into separate Bible classes may therefore lessen the evil. Special services for the young in the church, if short, bright, and simple, as well as school-room services for infants during the hours of public worship, all tend to make religion more attractive, and attach the young to it.

(3) Once more it is urged that the crass ignorance of the simplest facts and doctrines of Christianity betrayed by many that have passed through our schools is a proof of failure. We sadly admit the premiss, but deny the conclusion. In the parable of the sower three parts of the seed are lost, while the remainder bore fruit. So it has always been, and yet the Kingdom of Heaven is not a failure. At the same time must we not in candour set much of this ignorance to the account of the want of system and completeness in the teaching? More general adoption of uniform and consecutive lessons, such as are provided by the Institute, would be likely to leave more distinct and lasting impressions.

(4) Lastly, not to notice other than serious objections, we are told that even of those really benefited, the greater part join the ranks of Dissent, and forsake the Church of their fathers. At the recent Diocesan Conference at York a clergyman is reported to have said—

> He thought in very many of our country parishes, Sunday Schools were a *dead failure*. They had a certain number of Sunday School teachers, most estimable persons in themselves, who had the will, but were entirely without the power, to teach; and a good many Sunday Schools were doing harm instead of good. When he went to his present parish some years ago, he found that some of the teachers were teaching the children in the morning, and going to the Meeting-house themselves in the afternoon. In many parishes he would substitute children's services for Sunday Schools.

It is hard to see why this clergyman should not have thought of improving, instead of closing, his school. The Archbishop of York, in his reply, while warmly defending the system in general, admitted that "there was a great deal of looseness as to the teaching in the Sunday Schools;" but his Grace traced this evil to its true source when he added—"It was the clergyman's fault if the teaching in the schools was not sufficiently definite, because he himself would take care to regulate what it would be by the classes of instruction which he would form." This is undoubtedly the best remedy for the defect. It cannot be denied that too often, under the soundest Evangelical influence, there is amongst the lower classes a great absence of such an understanding of the distinctive principles of our Church, as would enable them to join intelligently in her services, and keep them from straying away to other communions. Yet this would be much seldomer the case, if the clergyman, being himself sound

in the faith, were to make his personal influence felt in the oversight of his schools and the training of the teachers. By a skilful interweaving of the Catechism, Articles, and Formularies of the Church with the great foundation principles of the Gospel, the scholars would, as a rule, grow up Churchmen as well as Christians, and while they learn to love Christ best, would value their Church also.

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? Is it not this, that while we cannot for one moment admit that an agency which God has so manifestly blessed, and is becoming so increasingly necessary, can be pronounced "a dead failure," it is, after an existence of a century, still in its infancy, and needs to be fostered and guided with the utmost care and wisdom in every parish, if we would not abandon the lambs of Christ to the secularising influences of the age?

For the results achieved let us thank God, and resolve, by His help, to see greater things than these. The promise is unto us and unto our children, and if the Church will plead that promise more believingly, and put forth her energies more unitedly, God will pour out a more abundant blessing on her offspring.

WILLIAM BURNET.

ART. IV.—THE AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT OF "THE IMITATION OF CHRIST."[1]

AMONG the triumphs of religion over materialism and mere speculative dogma, not the least is to be found in the latter history of the Four Books of Thomas à Kempis concerning the Imitation of Christ. The French dreamer, Auguste Comte, whose career was to a great extent a systematic and unwearied warfare upon the foundations of religion found it necessary to work out a kind of philanthropic cultus before he died; and, in his dogmatizings on what he called the "religion of humanity," he had to support the religious feeling necessary to his latter aims by means of other fuel than could be gathered from the teachings of the positive philosophy. Of the Comtists, the sect who made, and perhaps still make, some attempt to reduce to practice the quasi-religious *régime* of their master, we hear but little

[1] "The Imitation of Christ:" Being the Autograph Manuscript of Thomas à Kempis, De Imitatione Christi, reproduced in Facsimile from the Original in the Royal Library at Brussels. With an Introduction by Charles Ruelens, Keeper of the Department of Manuscripts, Royal Library, Brussels. London: Elliot Stock, 62, Paternoster Row, E.C. 1879.