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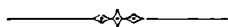
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of self to her highest needs ; many a hard-worked Vicar's voice will be at their ear, "Come with us and do us good ;" while above all the Master's voice will be heard (dare we doubt it ?), "Who will go for us ?" and for love of souls, and from a strong desire to put in the sickle to His harvest, the response will be ready, "Here am I ; send me."

JACKSON MASON.



ART. V.—OUR SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

THE purest gold has its alloy, and the brightest light throws the deepest shadow. The same law attaches to our best and holiest works, and Sunday Schools are no exception to the rule.

Sunday Schools, with their 5,200,776 children and 593,427 teachers, in this country alone, exclusive of those which belong to Roman Catholic Schools, stand high among the most potent agencies for good in the whole Church. They give to those who occupy the higher grade of society an opportunity to consecrate their own better education, and a noble work to do for Christ, to the good of others, and no less to their own great benefit—for it is truly said that we know nothing as we ought to know it till we teach it, and the promise is sure, "he that watereth shall be watered also himself." They bring the rich and poor into a happy and intimate relationship, and they give a pleasant and easy access to the homes, and an influence over the hearts, of the whole working population of the country. And, more directly, they place the minds of children, at the time when they are most malleable, in a very attractive way, under the power of refinement, love, and truth.

Blessed and owned and honoured of God, however, as are our Sunday Schools, they bear the stamp of a fallen world, and they carry their own special dangers and abuses. But that would be no garden of the LORD into which no evil found an entrance, and therefore we may be glad, and accept it as a token for good, and thank God, that Sunday Schools are not free from attendant dangers. Nevertheless, the injurious consequences are real, and demand careful consideration.

The first evil to which Sunday Schools are subject lies in the question, Do they not practically supersede, or at least interfere with, the highest duty of the parents of the children whom we instruct ? For what are the results ? The parents are deprived of a very high motive to read and study the Bible themselves ; and one very strong reason why they should

go to Church is also withdrawn, when others take their children there in their stead, and many a father would be much more likely to go to Church under the cover of taking his little child by the hand, and thereby escaping, to some extent at least, the ridicule of his companions. A check also is removed which leaves the day more free to the father or mother to spend it in doing nothing, or worse than nothing. And, in after life, the children can never associate, as they ought, their early religious impressions and their best memories with a father's knee or a mother's tenderness. And has not this sad loss much to do with that want of filial reverence which so characterizes the age? And, above all, it is to fathers and mothers, and not to Sunday Schools, that the Word of God says, "Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the LORD."

It may be answered that the parents of our Sunday-school children have not themselves the knowledge or the ability to teach the Bible to their children. This would have been a truer objection a hundred years ago, when Sunday-schools began. We live in an age when knowledge and intelligence are very widely diffused, and most of the parents were themselves Sunday scholars, and had the same teaching which they are now called to impart to their children. And even if the parents have not the necessary knowledge, they might and would attain it, if they had only a sufficient motive, and no alternative. Doubtless the higher and better educated class of society has the greater knowledge, but does this single fact outweigh all the very grave considerations on the other side?

At least we are doing a very responsible thing when we take upon ourselves to sever in any degree, in a child's mind, his religion and his parents.

Are we, then, to close our Sunday Schools? No; by no means; as the case stands at present, the evil of such a course would greatly preponderate over the good. But we can be more discriminating in respect of the children we take into our Sunday Schools, and in every case we can do more to enlist the co-operation of parents, and to make the religious teaching a partnership between the school and the home.

Another difficulty which attaches to the whole subject of Sunday Schools is how far the teaching should be intellectual. And, as the religious element, especially in the Board Schools, is increasingly separated from the secular, the subject becomes more important and more involved, and the demand for the intellectual is increasing every day.

Let us consider, therefore, the more carefully how the case stands.

On the one hand, "knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth," and, therefore, if knowledge is separated from love, and espe-

cially from the holiest love, the evil preponderates over the good. The time of a Sunday-school lesson also is, and ought to be, short, and it scarcely affords space for any more than the simplest religious instruction. The teachers, too, as a general rule, have not been highly educated, and unhappily the least educated are usually the most ambitious to be, or to appear, intellectual. And, still more, if the Sunday-school be the substitute for home-teaching, it should be what a pious father's or mother's teaching would be to their child—simple, practical, loving, about every day's duties or temptations or pleasures; and the love of God, and Christ and His salvation, the sum and substance of it all.

On the other hand, we have the command, "With all thy getting get understanding, and wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times and strength of salvation." Also, true religion requires in some of its parts the highest exercise of intellect, and secular knowledge adds interest and animation even to the most spiritual subjects.

It is also of very urgent importance, in these sceptical days, that every young person should be able to meet the objections to revealed truth which they will hear on every side. And all these considerations demand intellectual teaching.

Perhaps we shall come to the right conclusion if we say, Let the teaching be intellectual, so far as the teacher is really competent to make it so, set to the meridian of the mind of the scholar, and introduced only in illustration of the higher subject which is under consideration—the spiritual being always the focus of the intellectual.

For instance, the power of all teaching depends very much on illustration, and especially to the little-educated and to children; and it is very desirable, therefore, that the teacher should be able to use and explain the analogies of nature and art which are used in the Bible, such as light, seed, water, pastoral life, agriculture, architecture, music, and such-like—all of which require thought and study. Some knowledge also of dates and contemporary history, and of the habits of the age, and geography, is very useful, and gives life to a lesson.

And even above and beyond this, the deepest and most cardinal subject, such as the proofs of inspiration and of the Deity of Christ, and the history, formation, and preservation of the Bible as a book, may be made very pleasant and useful even to a child, if only the teacher knows his subject well. But no teacher needs to fear that he will lose caste with his scholars if he says, in answer to any question which may be asked, "I do not know; I will consider and inquire, and tell you another time;" the class will appreciate his honest manliness, and only respect and love him the more.

There is also another grave difficulty respecting Sunday Schools—how far discipline should be carried, and in what way it should be exercised. Punishment of every kind is always alien to the spirit of a Sunday-school. Tickets, and good or bad marks, are, next to the teacher's moral influence, the best, and ought to be sufficient, means of securing order and good conduct. If more is wanted, it is best for the teacher to refer the whole matter at once to the clergyman or superintendent. The teacher should very seldom, if ever, punish; any punishment of shame is to be avoided, it soon hardens into nothing, or worse than nothing. A child should be always treated with respect. "*Magna debetur puero reverentia*" should be the motto of every schoolroom.

There is one conclusion to which these and many other important questions respecting Sunday-schools necessarily lead: the extreme importance, and almost necessity, of regular, not less than monthly, meetings of the clergyman and his teachers. At these meetings all such subjects can be discussed with the requisite knowledge of the particular circumstances and requirements of the case. It is not too much to say that without such meetings for prayer and consultation, no Sunday-school can maintain a high tone and efficiency, and no minister can really know, as he ought to know, or do his duty to, the younger members of his flock.

There are two points which both minister and teachers must never forget: One, that the end and aim and power of all Sunday teaching is not secular knowledge, but the increase of faith and obedience and love and piety; for, if the emblem is permissible, the week-day teaching is to fill the barn with wheat, and the Sunday School is to turn that wheat into bread,—and the other, that the Sunday School is the cradle of the parish, and the future of the Church.

The following books will be found very suggestive and helpful guides to Sunday-school teachers:

Eugene Stock's Lessons on the Life of our Lord and Acts of the Apostles.
The Cambridge Bible.

Edersheim on the Old Testament.

Lessons, by S. G. Stock.

Commentary, by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.

Teacher's Bible.

Teacher's Prayer-Book.

Prayer-Book Interleaved.

Norris on the Prayer-Book.

And just in proportion as a teacher is really able and competent and well-informed will be the measure of the previous study and prayer which he gives to his Sunday lesson.

JAMES VAUGHAN.