

THE SABBATH-SCHOOL.

INFANT CLASS TEACHING.

I have occasionally heard the remark that a lady is not a sufficiently good teacher to be entrusted with an elder class, but that she "will do for the infants."

Poor infants! Of all the classes in the Sunday-school they are the most dependent on the skill of the teacher. As a general rule they cannot read, and therefore, all the information they receive is from her lips. Yet frequently a teacher who has neither the knack of gaining their attention, nor the still rarer aptitude of pleasantly imparting information, is allowed to take this important post.

The first requirement is that the teacher should be able to speak simply, use easy words and be brief. These characteristics are by no means common. It is far easier to get involved in long, complicated sentences, than it is to use simple, pointed language. No one accustomed to speaking will doubt that it is much easier to give a long address than a short one; as a parcel carelessly packed will probably be much larger than one on the packing of which some care has been expended. But however much extra trouble in preparation it involves it is absolutely essential that the lesson should be short.

This, then, is the first requisite—careful arrangement of subject matter, so as to avoid repetition or unnecessary enlargement.

Another essential is variety. A good infant class teacher will notice it the moment the attention of her scholars begins to flag. This will sometimes happen, even though the lesson be both short and interesting. If she is wise she will stop speaking at once, and let the audience do something else for a little while. Standing up while they repeat a single verse of a hymn will often be sufficient, but if they have been sitting still for some time it is better to have a rather longer change. Even the most fidgetty ones can generally be quieted by singing a hymn, marking the time by clapping their hands; they will then go back to the lesson with renewed interest.

In schools where a suitable room can be reserved for the infants it is customary in the middle of the afternoon to let them march round as they sing; either in single file or two or three abreast; but in rooms where this is impracticable they should have as much change of position as possible by standing up to sing or repeat verses, clapping hands or beating time in any other way. Children may sit still many minutes at a time.

Each child should be made to take his part of the lesson. In many cases a railway train to be made with a few sticks and a string, or a heavy burden suspended by a rope, or a yoke. The adaptation of a very bad-tempered man, which is always hindering him; it prevents him making friends with other boys; it makes him always miserable. This is Satan's yoke. The teacher hardly needs to portray to the children, if the previous description has been vivid, how delighted the poor weary man would be if some one offered to take away his uncomfortable, heavy yoke, and gave him a light, easy, well-fitting one in its place, with a very small weight attached to it.

Whenever it is possible, an example of the simile should be shown the children. For instance, illustrative of the verse, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow," nothing is easier than to have at hand, first, a piece of red paper, which should be talked about and explained; then, when that is understood, a piece of white paper may be held up, and the two contrasted. Teach them the text afterward, and they are not likely to forget it. Or, again, if mentioning one of the numerous promises in the Bible that God will give us a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone, they will perceive and remember the difference better if a stone is shown them first and they are allowed to feel how hard and cold it is, and then to touch their own warm soft flesh. The contrast will be understood at once.

Teachers sometimes find paper patterns a great assistance in interesting the children. There are many subjects in the Bible which can be represented by a cut-out symbol, which, if the teacher does not grudge the trouble, can be given to each child to take home and explain to its parents.

A new hymn may with advantage be written on the blackboard also; but it is most important to find out, by questioning, how much of it the children understand. It is a good plan to talk to them about the subject before repeating the words, and if possible tell them a story to illustrate it. This part of the teaching is quite as important as the lesson proper, and is much more likely to be remembered; particularly if the hymn is afterward sung to a lively catching tune; but how little attention is paid by many teachers to the understanding of the words is easily seen by listening to the singing of an ordinary infant class; the children will keep more or less to the tune, but the words they sing make utter nonsense, and are often

extremely ridiculous. I heard a class of girls the other day singing a Christmas hymn with a refrain, something about the shepherds "watching the sheep," but a girl near whom I was standing persisted in singing all through that the shepherds were "washing the sheets," which, to say the least of it, spoils the poetic idea.

I must enter a protest, too, against teaching little children hymns describing the deepest religious experience, or expressing weariness of life, and the constant struggle with temptation and sin. Such themes they happily do not and cannot understand; yet I have repeatedly heard young infants singing such hymns.

On the subject of the address there is so much to be said that it is difficult to say anything which can be compressed within the limits of one short paper, and I can do no more than give a few suggestions.

I have already said be short. I would add to that, have only one main topic. Impress one thing at a time, and do not try to make your scholars remember many points on one day. If you do they will probably forget all, but by keeping to one subject, to which text, hymn and everything shall refer, there is at least the possibility that they will remember what has been said.

Then, again, do not be afraid of repeating the same subject, if they do not all appear to have grasped the meaning of it. Every lesson should begin with a short resume of the previous Sunday's work, particularly the text learned; but there is no harm in taking the lesson entirely over again.

I once remonstrated with a child on having forgotten something which I knew I had told her the Sunday before, adding that she remembered lessons at the day-school which were far more difficult. "Yes," she said, "but at the day school we do the same lesson over and over again till we can't help remembering it."

There was a great deal of truth in this, and any teacher who expects children, particularly infants, to remember anything, after only once telling, is sure to be disappointed. By constant repetition the idea must be implanted in the child's mind. When once fixed there it will never be forgotten, for even in old age the lessons learnt during childhood are remembered, whilst the events of middle age are often lost.

If the children do not at once catch the meaning of a verse or lesson, a tale illustrative of the subject will probably give them the idea far more quickly than explanations. Children are wonderfully quick at catching the meaning of an allegory, and frequently see a good deal more in it than their teacher. Take, for instance, the verse, "Take my yoke upon you," and so on. A child accustomed to personate anything, will make a railway train to be made with a few sticks and a string, or a heavy burden suspended by a rope, or a yoke. The adaptation of a very bad-tempered man, which is always hindering him; it prevents him making friends with other boys; it makes him always miserable. This is Satan's yoke. The teacher hardly needs to portray to the children, if the previous description has been vivid, how delighted the poor weary man would be if some one offered to take away his uncomfortable, heavy yoke, and gave him a light, easy, well-fitting one in its place, with a very small weight attached to it.

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The one just mentioned, a heart, can be cut out in paper; or for any subject, such as the prayer, "Create in me a clean heart," there might be two patterns—one in black paper, one in white. There are many other subjects which may be illustrated in the same way, as a change from the blackboard: crosses, crowns, stars and innumerable others, both easy and effective.

In conclusion I will only add, be animated, and speak in a natural voice. One occasionally hears a speaker whose matter is excellent, but his manner spoils it all. He entirely fails to interest his audience, solely through his dull, uninteresting voice and style. Though his language is plain and simple, and his anecdotes just to the point, he talks on and on in a melancholy monotone, till his audience, if seniors, go to sleep, and if little ones, they fidget and talk till the speaker, noticing them, suddenly drops his "Sunday" tone, and startles his audience by abruptly returning to his "week-day" voice, and scolding them soundly for being naughty, poor little creatures.—*Dora Hope, in Girl's Own Paper.*

HINTS TO TEACHERS ON THE CURRENT LESSONS.

(From Poloubet's Select Notes.)
January 15.—Mark 1: 29-45.

ILLUSTRATIVE.

I. "Christ the antidote of sin." The poison bush.—At a sabbath-school anniversary in Brooklyn some years since, Rev. Dr. Hodge related the following interesting fact. During a visit he made to the Bahama Islands a shower of rain unexpectedly fell. On this occasion a little colored boy was caught in the shower at a distance from home, and, having no place to go for protection, crept under a bush that was near. Its foliage, however, was not dense enough to keep him from the rain, and he was wet by the water trickling through the leaves. Unfortunately for him the bush was a poison-bush; and the water falling on the leaves caused the poison to strike into his little limbs, so that in a short time he was dead. After the shower he was found, and carried to his home. Dr. Hodge was requested to attend his funeral. The circumstances of his singular death excited his curiosity, and he wished to learn something more about the fatal poison-bush. An aged negro told him that it grew abundantly upon the island, but that by its side there always grew another bush which was its antidote; and that if the little boy had known it and had rubbed himself with the leaves of the healing bush, the poison would have done him no harm. What an illustration is this of the sad fate of those who have been poisoned by sin and know not how to escape from its dreadful consequences! But for this fatal poison there is a sure remedy, provided by the same God who placed the antidote beside the poison-bush. The cross of Christ is the tree of life. Let the suffering and the dying come to that, and they shall be saved; for "its leaves are for the healing of the nations."—*The Christian Weekly.*

PRACTICAL.

1. Christ heals every kind and degree of evil.
2. We have the spirit of Christ and are true Christians in proportion as we are helping and saving men.
3. We cannot save sinners, but we can bring them to Christ the Saviour.
4. Ver. 35. Every one, like Christ, needs seasons of retirement and prayer. Spiritual growth comes from activity in Christian work, and seasons of restful communion with God.
5. Learn from the leper how the sinner should come to Jesus and be saved. He felt his disease; despaired of human help; believed in the power of Jesus; he came with his leprosy, and submitted to the will of Jesus.—*Clark.*
6. Ver. 41. We need to give men the touch of sympathy: let heart meet heart.
7. The healed by Christ are his living witnesses that he can save men. Even enemies must acknowledge the change.

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS.

In this lesson is set forth Christ, the great Physician who has come to this world to heal the diseases of the bodies and the souls of men. (1) He healed a dear friend of his disciples (vers. 29-31), as he is glad to heal those we love, if we bring them to him. (2) Then he healed great multitudes (vers. 32-34) showing the nature of his religion to heal and to help. (3) He prepared for his great labors by solitary prayer (ver. 35), as we need

the most strength. do. (4) through (5) and its illustration of salvation

January

I. "Eastern he Capernaum, as is e were like those of n same region, low, very reached by a stairway court. Jesus probably su lewan, or interior court, and around and in front of him. carried the paralytic, not being able at him for the press," ascended to removed so much of it as was necessary let down their patient through the aper. Examine one of these houses, and you see once that the thing is natural and easy to be accomplished. The roof is only a few feet high (made of beams three feet apart, covered with bushes, mortar and a coating of earth); and by stooping down and holding the corners of the couch—merely a thickly-padded quilt, as at present in this region—they could let down the sick man without any apparatus of ropes or cords to assist them. And thus I suppose they did. The whole affair was the extemporaneous device of plain peasants, accustomed to open their roofs and let down grain, straw and other articles, as they still do in this country. I have often seen it done, and done it myself to houses in Lebanon. I have the impression, however, that the covering at least of the lewan was not made of earth, but of coarse matting, . . . or boards, or stone slabs that could be quickly removed.—*Thomson's Land and Book.*

PRACTICAL.

1. Ver. 3. Sin is like a paralysis—a weakness and torpor of the conscience, and the will to do good.
2. It is our privilege to bring those to Christ who cannot or will not come of themselves.
3. Faith will find or make a way to come to Christ.
4. Ver. 5. We can have faith for others as well as ourselves.
5. The first need of the soul is forgiveness; then follows the healing of the soul from its sinful nature.
6. Ver. 7, 16. The wickedness of hasty and superficial judgment of others' conduct.
7. Ver. 8. Christ knows our innermost thoughts and motives—a terror to the bad, but a comfort to the good.
8. Three proofs of forgiven sin: (1) consciousness, (2) Christ's promises, (3) souls cured of sin.—*Thomas.*
9. Ver. 14. A bad business is a poor excuse for not following Christ. Follow him out of it.—*Abbott.*
10. Ver. 15. Matthew, an example of a fisher of men: called himself, he calls others.
11. Note the marvellous courage of Jesus in facing the popular prejudices of his age.
12. Ver. 16. Do not expect in doing good to fare better than your Master, whose best deeds were criticised and found fault with.

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS.

We have in this lesson an "enacted parable of sin and redemption," together with Christ's example in dealing with sinners. (1) The paralytic—a type of sinners (vers. 1-3). (2) He is brought to Christ (vers. 3, 4), as we must bring sinners by our labors and our prayers. (3) He comes in faith, and finds forgiveness (ver. 5). (4) Forgiveness is proved and followed by healing (vers. 6-12), as renewed lives follow and prove the forgiveness of our sins. (5) Then sinners, even of the worst class, are called to be the disciples of Christ (vers. 13, 14), and may make excellent Christians. (6) Jesus Christ goes among sinners in order to save them (vers. 15-17)—an example to us.

