



## THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

"The Bible Studying Service of the Church."



### The Preparation of a Lesson

BY REV. A. P. ADDISON, B.A., B.D.

(This is the first part of an admirable paper read at the North Bay S.S. Convention. The second part will be given in our next number.—Ed.)

The preparation of a lesson must be, a dual process; first, a preparation of the lesson itself without any reference whatever to the class; and second, a preparation of the lesson as it is to be taught.

#### I. THE LESSON ITSELF.

In the preparation of the lesson itself by the teacher, there must be no intruding thought that this lesson is prepared for a class. There must be here no blind leading of the blind, no teaching of what seems to be so, or of what others have thought to be so. No matter what seas of difficulty the teacher has to cross, he simply must arrive at the promised land of certainty. To the teacher the thing taught must be complete and true. There must be a rigid, honest, fearless search after the truth for the truth's sake, and not in the slightest degree for the sake of the class.

There must be in the background of the teacher's mind so accurate and so comprehensive, if not an exhaustive, knowledge of the history of the Bible peoples and of its geography. We must know where Jerusalem is, where Jericho lies in its humid heat, where Hermon's snow-lit peak rises, where the vale of Esdraelon and the lake of Genneset. We must know of the chronology of the Kings of Israel and of Judah, of the sins of the people to whom the prophets preached, who the writers of the books of the New Testament were, and, if possible, who wrote those of the Old. We must be able to repeat the ten commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. We must know these things and others; but these are only the fringe of the garment that is all glorious, these are but the hedge about the King's garden, while inside lie the gardens themselves where the angels of God go to and fro, bringing strange and glorious revelations of truth to the people of all ages. With these angels we must keep company, these messages we must hear,—to this revelation we must attend.

The first task then is to study the lesson as a piece of literature. This must be done sympathetically, striving only to know this—"What did the writer mean and why did he express himself in this manner?"

To this task we do not give sufficient heed. Our very faith in the simplicity of the Bible message may lead us astray. Some of the needs of life are so pressing and so obvious, and the application of the Bible to them is so plain, that we are satisfied when we secure this easy result.

But is Paul, with his deep insight into the plans and purposes of God, with his comprehensive philosophising concerning the things that are in heaven and that are on earth, apt to write a letter without deep meaning? Yet I am persuaded that when the Sunday School lessons happen to be in the Epistles of Paul, they are often read with no more attention than that which is given to the letters of a friend who describes the affairs of the hamlet he lives in. And the people who treat the Epistles of Paul with such base indignity are sometimes they who prate loudest concerning the inspiration of the

Bible, though in their own lines they make the Divine inspiration of these writings to be no more than that of the man who writes of business, or the girl who writes of gossip. The gold of the Bible is never given save to those who mine it. Its greatest truths are only for those who search. We mine the gold that is in the earth, not that which is already mined and in our bank. We do not search for that which we consciously possess. The Bible yields its new and refreshing truths only to those who search with the enquiring mind.

I am not in this pleading for accuracy of scholarship, or for any long hours of painstaking study of difficult and tedious books. I am only pleading for the earnest reading and the careful study of the English Bible in the Revised translation as if it were a serious business,—as over against the flippant reading of a passage when half asleep as a task that is to be done as quickly as possible that we may get to bed and in the land of forgetfulness,—or the rapid reading of the Sabbath School lesson and then a headlong plunge into the Lesson Helps. Is this inspired Word never to bear any message, to the teacher save at second hand? Is the teacher never to teach anything as of himself? Is the teacher called and appointed of God and of the Sabbath School only for this,—that he become a funnel through which the accurate common-places of a lesson help may be poured on a class? These lesson helps are but helps at the best, and the teachers simply must put themselves into the preparation of a lesson if there is to be the highest profit to the class.

Through the lack of this study the Bible has never become to many of us a living book. It is a dead book. It was written in dead languages. It is as dead about folk that are all dead. It is as dead and as uninteresting as if it were written only about the Dead Sea and the pillar of salt, of the valley of dry bones, or the tears of Jeremiah.

Suppose, for instance, that the lesson should be Paul's defence before King Agrippa. Those who have failed of this preparation will be bored by this lesson, as will also their classes. How can one such teach of a trial and a defence, of King Agrippa, and of this matter of conversion about which Paul preached? To such teachers, and to such classes, Agrippa is a man of wood, Paul a doll stuffed with sawdust, and the whole teaching but a sort of solemn Punch and Judy show. It has been robbed of all life.

On the other hand where could one find a lesson that throbs with intense life, the blaze and glory of the court, with Festus and King Agrippa and Bernice present; the ensigns, and the insignia of their office and position; the pretorium with its severe decoration and its high ceiling; the severe soldiers at their posts; the secretaries, the chief men of the city; all in holiday garb because of the Queen's presence. And over against this pomp and show is the little short-sighted man, surrounded by his jailors, a man whose bodily appearance was at all times contemptible, but now, pale with two years' imprisonment, doubly so. But when he speaks all eyes are upon him. He tells of the manner of his life, of its constraining motives, of its dominating passion.

Now, after the testing of the years —when Bernice is but a name, and these ensigns no longer flutter in the breeze and the Imperial eagles no longer glisten

on the helmets of the centurions, these words of this undersized man are studied by over five millions of persons in Sabbath schools of this continent alone. It is a victory of the spiritual over the material, of the moral forces over the vainglory of this world. What passion there is in the little man! It is so powerful that Festus, satirical, haughty, disdainful, cries out "Thou art mad" and King Agrippa is moved to say "With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian." Are not such words, so proven, worthy of the most serious study? This then is what I say. It is but little, but if granted, our teaching would be deemed completely from the haphazard, the commonplace, the trivial,—that we give earnest study to the text of the lesson, that we read it carefully, knowing the meaning of every word, and then rest quietly, and it may be with eyes shut; till we see the whole scene, hear the tramp of the soldiers, and the commands of the officers of the court; that we put ourselves in the place of Festus, of Agrippa, of Bernice, of the onlookers and of Paul. And then we read with the most attentive attention, until the complete nobility of Paul's speech, as being on the one hand a comprehensive defence of his conduct, and on the other an earnest preaching of Christ, so possess us that the heart beats faster and a new shining is in our eyes. Surely this is a wonderful lesson!

But it may be dead to the children, only the trial of a man who died long ago, and just a part of the Bible. If it is dead to them it is because it is dead to us. If we are not able to move them, it is because we are not ourselves greatly moved.

This is, however, perhaps a special lesson. It may be so, but every lesson has this. It is not once in the year that a lesson is placed in our hands which lacks the life. All lessons must force themselves on us as this one does, but all lessons will come to possess us and move us if we but live with them sufficiently, and give to them a serious enough attention. The ore will yield its rich metal if we but heat the furnaces. And there is no lack in this mine of ore in paying quantities.

### Some Problems of the Primary Class

MRS. COYNE, LEAMINGTON, ONT.

The Primary Teacher is the foundation builder. The true teacher is impressed with the responsibility and privilege of training an immortal soul for this life and for the life to come. For this the scholars should be individually studied and their needs understood. Then it will become a delight to instill into the child's mind the truths of God's word, a love for which will lead to a growing sense of the beauty, sublimity, and greatness of the revelation of God's will.

#### ORDER.

The teacher should be in her place before the school opens, ready to greet her scholars with a hearty welcome. Different people have varying ideas of what constitutes order in a Primary Class. What one teacher calls enthusiasm another deems confusion. If it means to have the children sit still and keep quiet, a dead-and-alive teacher with a few stupid children might approach the ideal more closely than an enlivening teacher with lively boys and girls. Good order is not a good thing if obtained at the expense of life and interest. Attention and order are associated together. Disorder is the result of inattention. Interest assures the kind of order of which we grade in the frequent cause of disorder.

Some teachers have big boys and girls of eight and nine years together with little ones scarce able to speak plainly.

"Charity should be the warmest when the weather is coldest."