

## "UNIFORM TEACHING IN SUNDAY SCHOOLS."

A Paper read at a Meeting of the Toronto Sunday School Association, at St. Matthias School-house, March 11th, 1886.

BY GEORGE B. KIRKPATRICK.

Believing that a much larger measure of success would attend the work of our Sunday Schools if the subject of this paper was faithfully carried out, I have no apology to offer for taking up your time for a few minutes while I bring before you a few thoughts that have occurred to me time and again while I was a Sunday school teacher. It was not what I could say on the subject that made me suggest it as one of the topics worthy of consideration by our Association; but rather the hope that discussion of a question, so to speak, the property of all, might elucidate some of those occult reasons for continuing a system, the necessity for which, if it ever did exist, to my mind does so no longer, in these days when the art of teaching has been reduced to a science, and when the best possible methods must be followed if as teachers we are to be a success. Without further preface, therefore, I would ask your attention to three points. (1) *What is meant by Uniform Teaching?* (2) *Is it desirable?* (3) *Is it attainable?* On each of these I want to be as practical as possible. Our time is too precious to spend in theorizing, and our work too high and noble not to endeavor to get the very best results possible out of it; or to use a common expression, "to work it for all it is worth."

*Uniform Teaching.*—Perhaps I may be allowed first to show what it is not. For some time during enforced idleness, I visited a number of Sunday schools during the hour of teaching so as to observe the different methods in use, the lessons taught, and, as far as possible, the visible effects of such teaching. It became at once apparent that each school was conducted on a system peculiar to itself, no two being alike. I observed in some instances that the teacher was not confining attention on the lesson set down for that particular Sunday, but had apparently made his or her own selection at hap hazard; and this both in the catechetical as well as the Bible lesson. And these cases I found by no means isolated ones. Now what is the effect when the Superintendent comes to sum up this teaching at the close of the school, in such a case? He finds on asking a few leading questions, that instead of getting answers from the whole school, some of the scholars have neither been reciting or studying the subject for the day. Confusion is engendered in their minds, and the intelligent ones are not slow to draw conclusions and comparisons by no means complimentary, when contrasted with their day school. Again, I found that in less than twenty minutes many teachers had got over the whole work of the day, and as far as they and their classes were concerned, were ready to be dismissed. I found on the other hand, many who could not get time to teach half the lesson prescribed. Some teachers have told me that to teach the catechetical lesson took up their whole time; others I have observed made no attempt to teach it at all, but have plunged at once into the Bible lesson. I may add that once or twice I have seen the story book produced, and read diligently to the class. Again I found another school where there was no Bible lesson at all taught. Now I think that in all these cases which I have cited, you will agree with me there is no uniform teaching. That there has been a dissipation of force, and that the best results need not be looked for. Let us come now to a definition of what it is. Again, if you will allow me, I will give you a practical example: I found several schools in which the time was divided up into the requisite number of periods according to the subjects taught, so much for each, as experience had shown. Here it was impossible to give undue prominence to one branch of study to the exclusion of another. We are sometimes apt to forget that Sunday school teaching is something more than mere recitation. I hold that every portion: the singing, the reading of God's word, the opening and closing prayers, even the taking up of the collection are, and should be made to be, valuable adjuncts to the more direct work of the school. St. Paul gives good sound advice in I Cor. xiv, 15, 16, which, though alluding to the public services of the Church, may be usefully applied to the Sunday school. He says: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also; else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest." Here you see he joins the spirit and the understanding together, showing how necessary it is that for any real benefit, the two should go hand in hand.

In these Sunday schools that I have in my mind's eye, I found attention given to the singing hymns chosen that all could understand, all urged and en-

couraged to sing, in fact the singing was a prominent part of the instruction. In the form of service for opening and closing I found no two schools to agree, as a matter of fact we differ quite as much as non liturgical bodies of Christians. I am strongly in favour of a short responsive service of some sort, as tending to educate the scholars up to their taking more than a silent part in the services of the Church. A fixed time then for the catechetical lesson and the recitation portion whether it be verses of the Bible, or the collect for the day, or a hymn, then I found what I could not but recognise as a good idea, evidently a compromise between those who find the hour a great deal too long to teach in, and those who find it all too short. At the stroke of the bell all ceased what they were at, and a hymn was sung, thus affording a change of position, a rest for teacher and scholar, and a point of departure to commence the Bible lesson, which after occupying its stated time was brought to a close by the superintendent's review of the work of the day. I do not intend, in this paper to put in a plea for any particular scheme of lessons. If my Sunday school experience has taught me anything, it is that there must be no driving by any one. Whatever advantage might be gained by the use of the same lessons in all our schools, they would be dearly bought at the sacrifice of that spirit of confidence and mutual regard which lies at the bottom of successful work. I would strongly advocate, however, for all the classes except the infant, graduated lessons on the subject taught in the school, examples of which may be seen in the current numbers of the *Church Sunday School Magazine*.

To come now to the second point. *Is Uniform teaching in our schools desirable?* I think that the advantages are so plain if we only think of them that we shall have no difficulty in arriving at a conclusion. Now that all school teaching is improving, and only the best methods are retained no matter how venerable may be those rejected, if tried and found wanting. I think we must no longer go on satisfied with what has been. *Excelsior* must be our motto. As better methods crop up we must seize upon them, graft them on our system, and each labour for the one common end, which I take to be the development of the Christian life of our scholars, and their education up to a point, at which, with charity towards all, and a hearty recognition of their worth, they can, *ex animo* be firmly fixed in their attachment to their own Church, as a true branch of the Catholic Church, so that with God's blessing, we may have done our best, hope that no storms in their after life may cause them to drift from their moorings, or make shipwreck of their faith.

And now what shall I say on the third head? *Is such teaching attainable?* I confess I approached this question with diffidence; a lion is in the path; if we could only catch and chain him up for a time, I believe his teeth and claws would be harmless, and he would henceforth be powerless. Some call this lion by one name, some by another. I call it *self conceit*, each goes on in his own way quite happy and contented with his own method, it is such a trouble to make a change, the teachers and scholars are used to our way, and although it must be confessed that the results are not what we should wish, yet it has been our way so long that we dislike the thought of introducing novelties. My friends, the Christian virtue of self sacrifice comes in just here. If it can be demonstrated by this night's discussion that a change would be for the best interests of the Church, then in God's name let us not be deterred by difficulties, they can be overcome by united action.

At the last meeting of our association at Holy Trinity, Canon Damoulin struck the keynote when he proposed a meeting of all the superintendents to discuss their work. Let some one take the lead in this. If they can agree on common action the thing is done, for I firmly believe that if a superintendent kindly and plainly points out to his teachers how the school can be improved, they will all heartily fall into line.

I need hardly say to you as teachers that I am assuming throughout the co-operation of the clergy; without that failure is certain; but I don't propose to entertain the idea for one moment that you will not have their cordial assistance. I read the signs of times wrongly if I don't see that all are coming to see the folly of isolation, I was going to say, the sin.

With agnosticism rearing its hideous form all around us, now, if ever, is the time to present a united front to all foes, and see that the young people committed to our care are sent out into the battle of life as far as we can do it, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ expects nothing less at our hands.

My time is up. Let me in concluding express the hope that the outcome of the discussion to-night may be action, the thing is feasible, it is worth an effort. Let us give it a trial.

## Home &amp; Foreign Church News

From our own Correspondents.

## DOMINION.

## MONTREAL.

MONTREAL.—The late Col. Dyde, C. M. G., and de camp to Her Majesty.—At a meeting of the corporation of Christ Church Cathedral, held on March 6th, the following minute was passed:

The corporation having heard of the sudden death of Colonel Dyde, who was the oldest worshipper in the church, and was for many years a cathedral warden and member of the select vestry.

It was resolved to place on record their deep regret at the sad event, and their sympathy with the afflicted family, and that out of respect for the memory of the deceased this corporation do now adjourn.

The rector was requested to send a copy of the above minute to Mrs. Dyde.

On March 8th, the funeral of the late Colonel Dyde took place from his residence in McGill College Avenue. All day the remains of the gallant veteran lay at his house and were visited for the last time by many old and faithful friends. The expression upon the face of the deceased was as natural as life itself, and a slight smile gave the countenance a look of peace and content. Wrapped around the coffin as it lay in the room were two old flags, those of the regiment he first served in, and of which he was a lieutenant, presented to the regiment by the wife of the then Governor, Lady Cathcart. Many floral offerings, beautiful in design, were sent, including one from the Montreal Garrison Artillery. The funeral was private, judged suitable, owing to the circumstances of the deceased gentleman's death, but the respect and affection felt for Col. Dyde was evidenced by the number of citizens, young and old, who flocked to pay the last respect to his memory. He was ninety-one years of age.

At the morning service in Christ Church cathedral, Rev. Mr. Norton said before commencing his discourse he should say a word of respectful and loving sympathy with the family of the late Colonel Dyde, on the great sorrow which had befallen them—a sorrow which was shared throughout the city, and especially in that congregation where Col. Dyde was so well known and esteemed. One of the most beloved and respected men in Canada, had gone to his rest full of honors and full of years, and while all they could say could not alleviate the distress of the stricken ones, yet he asked that they should be remembered in the prayers of the congregation, that God might send them strength to bear it. Col. Dyde was a perfect gentleman, an honorable and gallant Christian soldier, and had left behind him a name and memory with which it was an honor to be connected. All must be glad and proud to have had him as a member of the cathedral, which he loved and had worshipped in. The rev. gentleman closed with a further expression of sympathy with the bereaved family.

The members of the Canadian branch of the Royal Caledonian Curling club met on Saturday afternoon at the Thistle Rink, and appointed a committee to draft resolutions of condolence with the bereaved family. It having been learned that the family did not desire a public funeral, the idea of the members attending the funeral in a body was abandoned.

## ONTARIO.

BELLEVILLE.—Christ Church Vestry Meeting.—Sitting on the "aggrieved parishioner."—A vestry meeting was held in Christ Church last evening, at which a large number of pew holders were present. Rev. E. W. Sibbald, rector, in the chair. After the meeting was opened, the following resolution was moved:

That in view of many of the holders of pews in Christ Church, who are in arrears, and also owing to the fact that a number of applications for pews, which on account of position required cannot be accommodated, this vestry therefore suggests and recommends the churchwardens be urged to take steps as they deem advisable and to the interests of the church, towards settling as to arrears in pew rents, and also arrange for pews for those who may require them, as well as to declare a forfeiture of pews against those who have neglected to pay for the same, and to grant or withhold pews as they may deem best for the interest of Christ Church.

It was moved in amendment that the following be added to the resolution: "But in no case where parties now holding pews desire to retain the same shall they be disturbed in their possession, so long as they continue to pay the rent."

The chairman ruled this amendment out of order, and refused to put it to the meeting.