

The Sunday School

Sunday School Class Organization.

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We are told that the Greeks had a statue which long centuries ago was destroyed, but the following epigram, descriptive of it, is still extant:

"What is thy name, O statue?
I am called Opportunity.

Why art thou standing on thy toes?
To show that I can stand but for a moment.

Why hast thou wings on thy feet?
To show how quickly I pass by.

But why is thy hair so long on thy forehead?
That men may seize me when they meet me.

Why then is thy head so bald behind?
To show that when I have once passed I cannot be caught."

Our opportunities for usefulness are swiftly passing by us in the Sunday School, and how true it is that they do stand but for a moment, and if not seized when met, are gone, and can never be caught. Those of us who have been teaching for only a few short years can recall to our minds golden opportunities met, but not seized, and we can only sadly think of them as gone forever. We sometimes meet boys and girls, who, at a former period were in our classes, when the thought that they are now beyond our influence presses upon us, and then we are harassed with the question, "Did I make the best possible use of the opportunity their presence in the class afforded?" But

"Time was is past, thou canst not get it recall;
Time is thou hast, employ the portion small;
Time future is not, and may never be;
Time present is the only time for thee."

And although "time was is past," the present with its opportunities, just as golden, is with us still, and we can in a measure redeem the past if we faithfully "act in the living present."

What we need to do is to properly appreciate the importance of the work we are engaged in, and as we look into the bright faces of our scholars realize that they are the hope of the future; that the seed sown in faith in their hearts is falling into the richest soil, and that when we are doing the best we can for them we are doing the best we can for the world.

In merely meeting them on Sundays during the session of the school, our contact with them is so different to anything else in their experience that we are bound to leave our impress upon their lives. If we make it a rule to be in our places in the school every Sunday fifteen or twenty minutes before three o'clock, and it is understood that we are there to talk about anything and everything that interests them, from marbles to balloon ascensions; from dolls and parties to real live babies, and weddings, our influence will be very much greater, and better order will be maintained during both the opening exercises and the teaching half hour. But if in addition to all this we have an organization that is confined to the members of our class, having a distinctive object, necessitating the occasional meeting together of the members during the week, we may train and mold our scholars almost as we will. This is what is meant by class organization, and the teacher who is desirous of making the very most of his opportunities will not be slow to avail himself of the advantages of such an organization.

Possibly this means more than might be apparent on the surface, for thought, time

and toil are involved, but if we appreciate aright our privileges as co-workers with God in this most fruitful portion of His great vineyard, the consecration to the blessed work of the very best that is in us will not be considered any sacrifice.

What is absolutely necessary in the adjusting of our speech and actions to our scholars' understanding; to see things THROUGH THEIR EYES, and to keep as young in thought and as buoyant in manner as they. Those of you who have read "Captain Courageous," Rudyard Kipling's splendid story of the boy Harvey Cheene who was picked up out of the Atlantic by a fishing smack—of the old persuasion—will remember that the shrewd old Gloucester sea captain knew invariably where fish were to be caught, his great reputation necessitating a continual shifting from one point to another to escape from other vessels following him. The secret of his knowledge was due to the fact that when steering his vessel to a place frequented by cod, he retired within himself in silence and profound cogitation, and was supposed by his crew to be thinking and reasoning about the manner of cod-fish. The successful teacher will realize that human nature requires at least as careful study as cod-nature.

We cannot expect to do a great deal with our scholars if we live and think in a different world, talk in an unknown language, understanding nothing of their modes of life and of thought. As already stated we can to a great extent exert an influence over the members of our classes even if we meet them on Sundays only, but we cannot expect to become thoroughly acquainted with them, and to fully understand them with such limited opportunities. And this is one of the greatest advantages of class organization, that it furnishes the opportunity of a better acquaintance of teacher with scholar than a meeting together on Sundays only could possibly give. But while this is a very great advantage, so great that if no other benefit could be claimed it would be folly not to organize, it is not the only advantage by any means.

The training in practical Christian work which the scholar gets is of immense and lasting value; the sympathy with and interest in others which are inspired by a contact with them, are of incalculable benefit; and the advantages of mind and character development, the result of such an organization, cannot be estimated. Why should not every class, no matter how large or small it is, organize for some specific purpose? The purpose would of course depend largely upon the age, sex, and number of scholars in the class, and would have to be determined by the scholars, guided by the teacher. There are many, many ways in which classes can be useful. A class of girls or boys of almost any age might organize for the purpose of supplying the superintendent's desk in the Sunday School with flowers most of the year round; the flowers afterwards to be sent to some sick member of the class, or school; or they might be sent regularly to some afflicted "shut-in."

The cost would be very small. A few packages of seed would have to be bought in the spring and divided among the scholars of the class, who would plant them in their own gardens, and in the fall a few hyacinth and Chinese lily bulbs purchased and distributed in the same manner. Another object might be the making of scrap picture books for children in the hospitals. This plan has been adopted by the members of a class in a New York Sunday School and probably something similar is being done in our own city. The plan of the class referred to is given in the following item from the *Sunday School Times*.

"A young lady teacher of the Adams Memorial Presbyterian Sunday School, New York, has been giving a part of her spare time during an outing at the sea-shore to the preparation of picture-books, and the girls of her class have been doing she same thing

at home. The leaves of the books are made of brown paper muslin. Each leaf is a single sheet, perhaps fourteen inches long and ten wide, with button-hole stitches around the edges. The leaves are sewed together at one end, thus making them into books. Picture cards of all sorts, which the girls have been collecting for months, will be pasted upon the leaves with their paste. The whole expense is very small, this coming even within the means of girls whose parents are not wealthy. The teacher has repeatedly invited the girls to her west side home. Now her plan is to take her class soon to visit two or three of the children's hospitals in New York to arouse their sympathies, and to enable them personally to present the picture-books.

Many children in St. John's Ward, and even near home, who are not in hospitals would be gladdened if presented with such books, and as I presume pretty advertising cards such as are distributed at the Exhibition might be used, the expense would be very little indeed.

A sewing circle might be formed out of a class of older girls or young ladies, one member reading aloud while the others worked, taking turn about, if desirable. Some games and refreshments might follow.

Nothing more helpful to the members of a class could be formed than a READING CIRCLE. The wise teacher would incidentally direct the reading of the members, and in this way an appreciation of and a love for the best and purest literature would be cultivated.

In addition to these plans might be mentioned the gathering and distributing of good literature among the inmates of hospitals and reformatories; the formation of a debating club; systematic work in connection with poor people; the holding of class sessions occasionally; the formation of a magazine club with a class paper; committees to visit hospitals, aged people's homes, etc.; committees to invite young men and young women, strangers seen at the church services, to attend the Sunday School, and various other kinds of work.

In organizing the teacher will require to exercise great wisdom and tact. He will have to direct the scholars in their plans, and at the same time remain himself in the background. If he is wise he will have his organization well officered and will be a private member himself. He will make his officers responsible for the work outlined to be done, and will make them feel that the responsibility rests upon them. He will see that cliques are not formed; that social distinctions are not resorted to, but that the class spirit is fostered by the members. He will think, plan, and work hard himself, inspiring his scholars to do likewise, and will then pray to God to bless the living God to bless all that is done in His good name.

Again allow me to emphasize the necessity of appreciating at its true value the work we are engaged in. The Sunday School claims the best that is in us, and many things that we deem of great importance should be subordinated to it. Remember, to keep the young from straying into evil paths is a greater work than the restoring of those who have turned their backs on the loving Heavenly Father and are living in sin.

Fellow-workers our opportunity is now.

THE annual Convention of the Sunday School International Field Workers' Association, of which Mr. Alfred Day is president, will be held at Toledo, January 10th-12th.

No teacher should get the idea that fluency of speech is a necessary qualification for his work. No doubt readiness of speech is a desirable thing, if there are ideas to express. But mere fluidity of diction is abominable. It is a bad thing to have "a river of words and a spoonful of ideas." Aim to have something worth the saying, and you will be a thousand times more interesting and effective.—*Pleasant Teacher*.