

How Shall we Secure the Children of To-day as the Church of To-morrow?

ELEANOR L. KELLER, in the *Sunday School Magazine*.

One of the most promising signs of the future of the Church lies in the growing interest she takes in the education of her children. It is a very significant fact that one of our ablest rectors, after over ten year's work in the most crowded city of this continent, declares he is just reaching the people of his neighborhood through the children. To see this church, Sunday after Sunday, crowded with rich and poor, one would think he had always reached them. But many are but transients, and most of the congregation come from a distance, while those near-by, in the poor, crowded districts, who have drifted away from the Church are now just coming back to her. How were these people finally reached? Thousands of dollars were spent and much earnest work was done through the missions, but you can count on your hands those who were permanently held by this means. But it is impossible to count the men and women of to-day who have come to love and live by the Church, through their attendance as children and still young men and women in the Sunday school.

But on the other hand, other churches have endeavored to save and hold the people through the Sunday school. They have reached the children, held them until they were confirmed, perhaps, but then, alas! they have drifted away, and while their Sunday schools are crowded their churches are empty. Why is this? I think the reason for this lies mainly in the ungraded condition of the Sunday school, or the lack of intimate connection between the spiritual life of the Church and the work of the various clubs and organizations which draw the young people together during the week.

Let us consider first the graded Sunday school. In many schools the primary classes are large, but the promotions to the main room are small in comparison, while the Bible classes, into which the children of the main room should pass, disappear altogether or are out of all relative proportion to the other classes of the school. There is a drifting away, a leakage in every onward step. Should this be? Is the truth we teach so poor a thing that it loses its power and effectiveness as life advances? Have those we teach received so little love or enthusiasm for the truth that there is created in them no desire to go forth and bring others into the light? With sorrow we must confess that oftentimes the truth is not taught by those who really love it and live by it, and long to bring it to others, and so the children under them drift away. But while many teachers are willing to do earnest work, the Sunday school organization is at fault.

If the schools are carefully graded, promotions made regularly from one department to another, and the lessons adapted to the ability of the pupils, there would be a greater interest in study manifested by the scholars, and a greater desire to persevere and move on from class to class. This grading would also be seen to affect the teachers. In a graded school the responsibility of the teacher would increase with his experience. The new teachers could be made assistants in large classes where they would hear the lesson taught by an efficient instructor, while they questioned their divisions on the lesson, kept the attendance, etc. If in addition to their experience from Sunday to Sunday they should attend the teachers' meetings, they would be preparing themselves to become independent teachers of classes in the main room. When the regular time for promotion comes they could go up stairs with the advanced portions of the primary classes. Do not let the superintendent take anybody who may present himself as a teacher. Let the applicant prove his fitness by attending the teachers' meetings, by coming for a few Sundays and observing the instruction in some class, and assuming his duties as assistant before he be given full charge of a class. Oh, the classes that are broken up by putting anybody who may come in charge of them! Better throw two classes into one, or, if necessary, the whole Sunday school into one class, and have it taught from the platform by an efficient and earnest teacher, than entrust young, growing souls to careless, irregular and unprepared teachers. Be sure, however, that there are teachers' meetings held regularly, where those who wish ultimately to teach will be able to learn. Little by little, men and women will volunteer, especially if there is a means provided whereby they may study, and class work offered which they may be able to do. Better far start with large classes and subdivide them as good teachers are ready to take them, than have classes fall off and break up, because some have undertaken duties which they fail to perform.

There always should be prevalent in the Bible classes of a Sunday school the feeling that in some way, either by teaching or acting as officers, the scholars are ultimately to be found as workers among the younger pupils. Fifteen minutes of every hour, or one hour per month, might well be devoted to normal training. The

members of the Bible classes may then be taught how the lesson they have studied should be presented to younger scholars. It would also be well to have the elder scholars present once or twice a year at the teaching of a lesson, say, in the primary room. In this way, an insight would be gained into methods, and an interest aroused in the work which would lead these students to become teachers in the school.

One school in Philadelphia has a certain number of the Bible class scholars present each week at the teachers' meetings, in case their services should be needed as substitutes on Sunday. In this way, they are being trained as teachers, and, substituting from time to time, have an experience which helps them when they assume classes of their own. It is interesting to know how eager these young men and women are to be the chosen substitutes. The supply always outnumbers the demand.

But it is, above all, necessary that the teachers themselves should feel very deeply, in order to impress this on their scholars, that a Christian life and experience should, if it is a true one, be such as would lead them naturally to wish to impress it on others. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," should express the feeling of those who leave our Bible classes.

Now, for the other point—the intimate connection which should exist between the various works and the spiritual life of the Church. Are there Girls' Friendly Societies, with their associates; are there Kings' Daughters, with their leaders; are there Dram and Fife Corps, with their master; are there older Sunday school classes, whose members have been confirmed? Let them all meet regularly the various heads of these organizations, with their young members at the Lord's Table. It is well to do as the Rector, to whom I referred before, does: appoint a certain time, the early celebration on the first Sunday of the month, for these young people to meet with their rector and their leaders. Then will these young people feel that the Christian life is a growth—a growth in body, mind and soul; then will they realize that confirmation is not the end but the beginning of another experience, and that the Master Church that calls them wishes them to grow on into the stature of perfect men and women in Christ Jesus.

Teachers, officers, leaders among the young, be faithful, be faithful. "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful." You shall have more than your reward. The young of America are flocking to the Church. She has a positive truth to teach in these days of skepticism and doubt, she wishes to make her boys and girls noble, true Christian men and women as well as members of an historical Church. Let the training of the young show this. Let the teaching of our schools be so graded that the little ones be grounded in sound ethical principles, that they may discern the truth aright. The church, like a loving mother, throws her arms about them, and feeds them with that food from heaven which strengthens them for the battle of life and leads them to see what a noble thing it is to be a Christian. They will not see it if those who lead them do not see it, feel it, and act as stewards of a trust.

Are not those who wish and pray for the welfare of the Church beginning to feel that her future lies in the education of her children? Effort spent here repays ten-fold effort spent in missions; for here we deal with causes, in missions we deal with effects. While so many parents, though adrift themselves, are willing to give us the children to educate, shall we not thank God for the promise this sign contains, take heart, look up for light and direction, be faithful to our trust, that through our efforts, feeble though they be, the children of to-day be found in the Church of to-morrow.

The oldest questions are always being brought up and asked anew by young minds. The new generation asks questions of the older, and in turn will be asked them over again by the ones who follow. In one sense many things are settled. In another sense they are not. Even the multiplication table is new to some people. We need not wonder when we meet people, old and young both, who are not clear as to the great doctrines because they are not familiar with them. There are many things for the young house-keeper to learn that are familiar to the one more experienced. There are many things as to method to be learned by the young Sunday school teacher and the young preacher. To ask questions in regard to religious truth does not mean skepticism always, but much oftener simply unfamiliarity. He who asks questions puts himself in the way of becoming wise.

If people would but provide for eternity with the same solicitude and real care as they do for this life, they would not fail of heaven.—Tillotson.

Where Christ brings His cross, He brings His presence; and where He is, none are desolate, and there is no room for despair.—Mrs. Browning.