

The Sunday-School Lesson.

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(Continued.)

III. A carefully prepared and well arranged plan of study needed.

1. *The Uniform Lesson Plan good, but not sufficient*—It is obvious that this problem cannot be solved without a carefully prepared and well arranged plan of study. Haphazard work here will surely be imperfect work. The adoption of a uniform lesson rescued Sunday-school work from the chaos into which it had fallen twenty-five years ago, and reduced it to courses of seven years each. This was a long step in the right direction. But the uniform lesson system has developed its own formative ideas to the utmost, and with its present principles, whatever their advantages at the outset, is incapable of further progress. The effect of this is seen in the prevailing impression that the system revolves in a circle. It has accomplished a great work in unifying Sunday-school interests, but its best friends are not backward in declaring that its results in imparting Biblical knowledge have been unsatisfactory. No one is bold enough to contend that it is the final step in Sunday-school lessons. Its great mission has been to prepare the way for something better.

2. *The plan adopted should be comprehensive, progressive and complete.*—What is needed now is not simply that we take scattered lessons, selected alternately from the Old Testament and the New for six months or a year at a time, making the round of the whole Bible in six or seven years; but that a system of study be arranged which shall take into account all the principle contents of the Bible, determine their relative importance for Sunday-school study, divide them into systematic and progressive courses of study, and with wise foresight apportion the lessons in these courses in such a way as to take up each topic or phrase of Bible study in proper order and give to it due prominence. Such a system should include not only all the Biblical facts and truths that we can reasonably expect children and youth to study in the Sunday-school; but should also make such provision for subsequent Bible class study that adults shall be able to make constant progress in Biblical knowledge as long as they continue in the school. In this way, and in this only, can Sunday-school Bible study become what it ought to be in method, purpose and results.

IV. This plan should be educational in aim.

1. *The Homiletic Method Radically Defective.*—The object of the Sunday-school is instruction in the facts and teachings of the Bible with especial reference to the influence of the truth in producing and developing Christian character. The emphatic words here are *instruction* and *character*; the emphatic idea is instruction for the sake of character. The question is: How to secure this end? Some think that it can be best attained even in the Sunday-school through the homiletic use of short and detached portions of Scripture. But this overlooks the most important function of the Sunday-school. It endeavors to transform every teacher into a miniature preacher and every class into a diminutive congregation. It trusts more to the teacher's application of the truth than to the power of the truth itself; more to the human element in the work than to the divine.

2. *The Educational Method the natural one for school work.*—I would not overlook the educational value of even the most distinctively homiletic series of lessons. We cannot study the Bible at all without learning something about it. But I am speaking of the lines along which lessons should be laid out in order to secure the best results, and my position is that these should be educational rather than homiletic. To seek its ends through instruction is the main purpose of a school. That is what its name implies. The Sunday-school is the only department of the Church devoted to this work. The practical application of short passages of Scripture reigns supreme in the pulpit, and exhortation dominates the prayer-meeting. The Sunday school is on a different plane and exists for a different purpose. It monopolizes the strictly teaching function of the Church, and has therefore an exceedingly important mission. The disappearance of the Bible from the public school

and the greatly diminished use of it in the family and in private only increase the responsibility of the Sunday-school in this respect.

3. *The Educational Method secures the best spiritual results.*—Besides, and this is really the most important factor in the case, the homiletic value of the truth becomes much more apparent, and its practical applications come much more closely home to the heart and conscience, when the truth itself is taught in its fulness. If we will but teach the Bible we need not be troubled about its practical influence. "The seed is the word," said Christ. What it needs is to be sown, and the fruit will be forthcoming. The word is "the sword of the Spirit," said the apostle. What it needs is to be wielded, and results will follow. Mistakes on this point are full of danger. Sunday-school lessons should be educational, not to the exclusion of the spiritual, but educational because in this way the best spiritual results can be obtained. Everybody tacitly assumes that the Sunday-school will give the children and youth all the Biblical instruction necessary for them. Should it fail of its duty only spiritual wreck can follow. With its success the future is secure. It must not fail. It must not temporize with half-way measures. It must become more and more the training-school of the church until the young people growing up in it shall, like Timothy of old, know the Scriptures. Anything less than this is insufficient.

(Continued next issue.)

Australia.

As the Blue-book of our Church does not come into the hands of many of our people, I transcribe one of the paragraphs from the report on Religion and Morals, submitted to last Australian Assembly, says the *Australia Presbyterian*. The report is founded on rather partial statistics, as only 61 charges out of 155 reported. In regard to church attendance, I find the following:—There are in many parishes difficulties of a distinctly local character, e.g., dairying and mining; but the chief difficulty lies in the heart, rather than in the surroundings. . . . One replies that he has "nothing to complain of in this respect, except extreme heat, extreme cold, extreme wet, extreme drought and extreme indifference." A second says the people are too fond of their beds to attend a morning service, and another says that nothing short of "a nigger entertainment" would attract them. . . . Depression and consequent poverty are frequently alluded to as a reason for non-attendance, want of clothes and seat rents being the difficulty. Church debt and congregational squabbling play a more important part than many imagine in the empty pews." Thus far the report, to which I may return. Meanwhile, in the above short extract, there is food for thought for all—not only for those who do not attend church, but also for those who do attend. Debt and congregational squabbling have, doubtless, no small effect on church attendance; but, after all is said, the grand difficulty is the indifference of the heart to what is good. Workers in all lands come finally to this as the great obstacle in the way of the success of their efforts. A man is just as his heart is. Where there is a will, there is a way of getting to church.

Evidently the question of the permanency of pastoral relationships is a pressing one in Australia as well as in Canada. The Moderator of the New South Wales Assembly in his closing address referred to it in the following terms: "There are one or two questions which I would respectfully suggest for your consideration during the year, which seem to me to be of considerable importance to the working of our Presbyterian system:—(1) What assistance could be given by the Church to a vacant charge in selecting a suitable pastor? A congregation, perhaps small and isolated, cannot be regarded as the best judge of a man whom it has only heard for a couple of Sundays. (2) The second is nearly connected with this: By what means could the Church facilitate a permanent interchange of spheres of labor between ministers? If one of our ministers want a change he can only obtain it by seeking a field in one of the other colonies, and his services are lost to this Church. This is a very unfortunate way of granting relief, both for our ministers and ourselves."