

TEACHING A HYMN

A TALK WITH PRIMARY TEACHERS

Children love to sing, because it is part of their being to do so. God, who made such perfect harmony in nature, did not neglect it in His greatest creation—mankind; and the gladness of heart bursts forth almost as freely as from the songsters of the trees. It is on this account that singing holds the prominent place it does (or should) in the training of the young.

That which is comprehended in rhythm is remembered long after other words are forgotten, and if set to music will be sung over and over at home when the teacher has dropped it out of the class list, because (she thinks) we have sung it so long and are tired of it. Therefore it behooves us to be careful in our selection. Children at their most impressionable age should have presented to them that which is pure and beautiful and worth remembering, and at the same time pains should be taken that they shall understand what they sing.

A hymn, the words of which have been repeated line by line until the children can say it through in a sing-song manner, is *not* a carefully taught hymn, although a difficult word here and there may have been explained. It is preferable even to have a few words beyond their comprehension if they have caught the spirit, than *vice-versa*; for unless they sing with the heart there can be neither worship nor true expression.

A well-taught hymn will be presented to the child in much the same way as we are accustomed to give the lesson; and again and again when sung, a few questions will be asked, or an illustration of this line or that verse will be given until the words are full of life and meaning, and remain so. Thus, when the time of need comes, as it surely does to every life, the hymns learnt in childhood will be a real help.

Suppose we choose a hymn and find out one way in which it may be presented to little children so that they shall understand it.

Let us take "Around the throne of God in Heaven" (Hymn 595, Book of Praise).

Have a blackboard and some colored chalks at hand. (Manilla paper will do if you have not a blackboard, or even a slate or sheet of foolscap, if the class is small enough for all to see it.)

It is not necessary to be an artist in order to

use the chalk with benefit to the children. Anyone can draw an outline of a country, a square for a town, a line for a person, etc.

When the attention of the class is yours, as it will be almost immediately when you stand quietly before it with your chalk in hand, begin somewhat thus: "Little children, I have a wonderful story to tell you to-day, of something which happened long years ago. Right here, on the blackboard, I will make a little bit of land. (Draw a somewhat egg-shaped outline for the Isle of Palms about the centre of the board. A few dashes of green for grass, and a little brown drawn with the side of the chalk for rocks, will make it more realistic; but unless this is done rapidly it is better omitted.)

"This is an island with deep water all round it. Up here was a very large country. I will just have to make a little bit of it, our board is not large enough to show it all. (Make outline of part of mainland across the top right hand corner.)

"One day a boat came sailing over here from the mainland to the island. (Indicate on the board as you say the words. If you have a simple trapezoid cut out of brown paper it will help the understanding, and make more interesting. The plain piece of paper is much better than a real toy boat, for it answers the purpose without attracting the attention from the thought you want to illustrate.)

"Some men were in the boat, and when it touched the island they put off one man, and, sailing away, left him there without any boat to get back home. He had been told that he was to stay there, that they would not have him back at home. Poor man! it was almost like putting him in prison, this leaving him alone in a strange place.

"I think you will be very much surprised when I tell you this man was John, the disciple whom Jesus loved so much, and he who wrote in the Bible the beautiful lessons we are having just now.

"Do you think John had ever been naughty, that they put him away from his friends? No, it was the people who sent him away who were naughty. They did not want to listen to the things which Jesus had told John to teach. Jesus had gone back to heaven at this time, and, though John could not see Him every day as he used to, he