

difficulty which has never yet been satisfactorily met and which is becoming more and more perplexing.

It is the parents' duty personally to give religious instruction to their children. The word of God insists on this. It is parents and not any other class of teachers who are commanded (Deut. vi. 7), to teach God's word diligently to their children. It is parents and not others who are enjoined (Eph. vi. 4) to bring up their children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. If parents do their duty faithfully where is the necessity or the place for the Sabbath school.

At the same time the faithful performance of the duty systematically, as in the Sabbath school, will prove an inestimable blessing to parents and children. What treasures of knowledge and experience parents would acquire if for years they had pursued in their homes the vocation of the Sabbath school teacher? What development of mutual love and the love of home would thereby result in the case of the children.

It is true that there are circumstances which would justify the delegating of the work to others, but these circumstances are not common.

It cannot be urged that parents are generally incompetent. A large proportion are far fitter to teach their own children than the majority of the teachers that we have hitherto supplied or indeed are likely to supply.

It cannot be urged that parents generally have no time. The Sabbath afternoon, the time almost universally assigned to the Sabbath school, is a portion of the week which parents with scarce an exception can devote to the work.

We dare not set forward the Sabbath school as the children's church, as has been imprudently done by some. The tendency to that idea is an admitted evil in our present system and one that requires sharp vigilance to keep down.

There is something in the plea that the Sabbath school has means of instruction which the home can seldom afford. But is it not a fact that this advantage on the side of the Sabbath school is the result of the concentrated and exclusive attention hitherto paid to the latter to the neglect of the home.

But it is said, (and this is the main argument urged), that some parents will not teach their children at home, and they will not send them to the Sabbath school unless they are kept in countenance by the example of others.

There is a difficulty here, and the Sabbath school as now carried on meets it. But such a resolution of it is open to grave objection. Certain persons will not discharge their duty. The church interferes to do it for them; but they will not even submit to this unless it is made to appear that others are as neglectful as themselves, and the Church yields. Surely this is not the right way to meet the difficulty however it is to be met.

There are thus no over-mastering reasons why the Church should carry on the present colossal Sabbath school enterprise. But on the other hand there are evils resulting from this system which demand immediate consideration and remedy.

1. Children well brought up at home are exposed to evil influences from improper associations, and are sometimes led into habits of Sabbath desecration when going to the Sabbath school or coming from it.

2. The Sabbath school in appropriating the Sabbath afternoon takes away the more suitable opportunity which the majority of the working people have of personally instructing their children, and the best opportunity which parents and children have of becoming mutually acquainted.

3. It tends to weaken the parental sense of obligation to teach the children personally.

4. It tends to weaken the sense of obligation in children to attend the regular worship of the congregation. This tendency has already been so largely developed as to require a strong counter effort.

5. The Sabbath School by thus taking away the opportunity of Sabbath teaching at home removes one of the most powerful incentives to self-improvement on the part of the parents.

6. It throws upon the Church a great amount of work which does not belong to it, and which so far it has been utterly unable to perform.

Now, my proposal is this:—Relegate back to the God appointed teachers their legitimate work. Why should the Church stagger under a self-imposed burden, while the responsible bearers are standing idly by.

But to make the proposition practically effective it will not do to disband the Sabbath school and say to parents, Teach your children at home. We have hitherto turned the whole organizing force and ingenuity of the Church towards the development of the Sabbath school system. For the home, in this way we have done nothing. To make the home Sabbath school effective, it must share fully not only the countenance, but also the *practical support*, and the *systematic help of the Church*.

To this end I would propose the following plan:—

1. Organize in every congregation a "Home Sabbath School Association," comprising all parents and guardians, who shall engage to teach the children at home on Sabbath afternoons with the *same regularity and system as children are taught in the Sabbath School*.

2. Let such children as parents will thus undertake to teach be drafted into the Home Sabbath School, and let the names of parents and children be enrolled in the pastor's book as regular Sabbath School teachers and scholars.

3. Let the present International system of lessons, or any other common system, be employed, and let *parents be afforded all such help as is now freely given to teachers*.

4. Let a united meeting of the Schools be held quarterly in the church, when the work done shall be reviewed by superintendent or pastor.

5. Let such children as cannot be taught in this way be supplied by the Church with instruction either in the present or some other method, and take their place with the rest at the quarterly meetings.

Such is the scheme that in all humility, and not without much diffidence, I beg to suggest. It implies a vast and radical change upon present working methods. It will therefore meet with much opposition—the inertia of parental indifference, and the momentum of current ideas. But if the system proposed is right, if it is scriptural, we ought to grapple with the difficulty, and grappling with it, shall surely succeed.

The congregational Sabbath school is a glorious institution. Let no one think that I despise or undervalue it. But it has its own sphere. That sphere has reference entirely to the children of parents who either will not or cannot teach their own children. Wrought within that sphere it forms one of the most important aids of the Church, and should claim our most earnest endeavors to make it efficient. Travelling beyond that sphere it becomes cumbersome, unmanageable, a hindrance and an evil. It has done much evil already in weakening the sense of parental responsibility and the efficient working of the Home School. Let us go back to original institutions, duties and responsibilities. Let us begin to carry out the division of labor which God Himself instituted. Let us try "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers." So shall this teaching difficulty vanish, and other and graver difficulties, shaping or shaped already, shall be taken out of the way, and home and congregation shall share the blessing.

SABBATH READING.—A WARNING.

In these days of keen competition for public favor, even the "religious press" needs to be jealously watched if growing evils connected with the above are to be guarded against. Especially I refer to publications circulated through our Sabbath schools. One would hardly think it necessary to warn our elders or Sabbath school teachers, not to mention ministers, against the "Northern Messenger," issuing from the "Witness" office, Montreal—a very excellent little *secular* sheet, "devoted," as it tells us, "to temperance, science, education, and agriculture;" but for the claims its publishers make—on what ground I cannot imagine—to have it introduced into our Sabbath schools, and the fact that some of our simple-minded Sabbath school officials are disposed to accept it on the recommendation of its publishers, and on finding in it some religious reading. Not long ago I had to negative such a proposal in our own school, and not long after a large parcel of "Messengers" came through the post-office "to be distributed in the Sabbath school." Instead of doing this I wrote to Mr. Dougall as an old friend of the "Witness" publications, remonstrating, and asking him if this course had his personal approval, and warning him of the bad effect upon Sabbath observance it must have. These enquiries were thrice repeated in as many weeks, but no response was elicited beyond the unceremonious stopping of my "Wit-

ness," paid for to the end of the year, without any explanation whatever, though promptly written for. However, the publication of this in your columns may have the desired effect of checking an insidious evil. From a member of the Assembly's Committee on SABBATH OBSERVANCE.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN RELATION TO CHRISTIAN WORK.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE CONFERENCE AT SHANGHAI BY THE REV. GRIFFITH JOHN.

The subject before us is not one of mere speculative interest. It is, on the contrary, one in which we are deeply concerned; for the relation of the Holy Spirit to our work is essential and vital.

The Gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation; and salvation from the guilt and dominion of sin—from mortal and spiritual misery—is the great need of the world. Believing this, we devote ourselves to the supreme work of making known the truth as it is in Jesus as fully as we can, and of commending it to heart and conscience in every possible way.

This is a *great spiritual work*; and to secure success in it, we need the abiding presence of the Spirit, and, through the Spirit, such a full baptism of power as will perfectly fill each one of us for the special work which God has given him to do. We are assembled now to pray for power, for *spiritual* power, and for the *maximum* of this power. We do not disparage other kinds of power. Natural gifts and graces are valuable talents. Superior intellectual power, for example, is a precious gift. It lifts its possessor to a position of imperial eminence above ordinary men, and assures him a commanding influence over their minds. There is, also, a sort of magnetic power with which some men are richly endowed by nature. It gives them the pre-eminence in every circle in which they happen to move, and clothes their words with a peculiar charm. These are valuable gifts, and great spiritual forces, likewise, when subsidized and sanctified by the Spirit of God. But there are comparatively few men who possess them in an eminent and commanding degree. There is, however, a power accessible to every minister, and to every convert, with which every one may be completely filled, and through which the weakest may be girded with everlasting strength. This is spiritual power, for the endowment of which we are entirely dependent on the spirit of God. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Let us now try and realize our dependence on the Holy Spirit for every spiritual power essential to the accomplishment of our work.

In the first place, consider *our dependence upon the Holy Ghost as*

THE SOURCE OF ALL SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION.

In ancient times, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Bible is our only authoritative record or standard of revealed truth. The "things of God," as fact and doctrines, are fully revealed in this blessed Book. That anything essentially new in Christianity, in this sense, is essentially false, is a maxim of orthodoxy. Still the Bible is not enough for us. The vital question is, How are we to *know* "the things that are freely given us of God?" How are we to reach the sunlit summits of full assurance in regard to them? As teachers of a religion which claims to be alone Divine in its origin, and absolutely true, the power of clear vision and deep conviction in regard to its eternal verities is indispensably necessary to us. Without this power the minister must be weak and sickly. His words will not have in them the clear and emphatic ring of the earnest man of God, his work will be performed in a listless perfunctory manner; the heathen will listen to his message unmoved and unconvinced; and the churches under his charge will be devoid of light and power. The minister, of all men, needs to be able to say—*I know*. Doubt to him means nothing less than paralysis. He has constantly to deal with the very foundation truths of the religion which he is attempting to introduce; and if his eye is not clear, if his convictions are not absolute, and if his heart is not full in regard to these, his work will be to him a fruitless, joyless, burdensome task. But it is not easy in these days to abide in the region of absolute certainty and cloudless vision in respect to the verities of religion. The age in which we live is intensely atheistic and materialistic in its tendencies. The spirit of scepticism is abroad, and the citadel of our faith is persistently and furiously assailed. Miracles are declared to be incredible, and belief in the