

The Sunday School

What Is the Matter?

BY MILFORD W. POSHAY.

"Did you notice when the secretary read his report that he said our class had an attendance of ten to-day?"

"No," Bronson replied, "I didn't notice, Why?"

"Well," Stevens went on, "the class is about the same size it was six months ago."

"What of it? What are you driving at?" Bronson queried.

"How many do you suppose have drifted in and out of the class during these months?" Stevens still questioned.

"I don't know, I am sure," Bronson responded, slowly and thoughtfully, as he received an inkling of the other's meaning. "There have been a good many, come to think about it."

"Yes, 'come to think about it.' And I guess that's what we ought to have been doing before this."

"Why? I don't see any way to make them stick, if they don't want to keep on coming."

"But have we tried?"

"The class was a mixed one of young people from eighteen to twenty-five, and had numbered about the same membership for perhaps two years. During this time, but especially in the last six months, many had dropped into the class for a Sunday or two, and then were seen no more. That part of town where it met was growing rapidly—new people moving in all the time. This accounted for the visitors; but it was only recently that Stevens noticed the fact that the class was not growing permanently, and it set him to thinking of the possible cause."

Class organization had been attempted a year before this, but it did not seem to go. Some were not in sympathy with it; others thought the membership too small to make it necessary; and, all taken together, it had languished. It was now felt by Stevens that if they had a committee to look after newcomers results might be obtained in view of the influx to the neighborhood.

"Not in any particular way, perhaps," Bronson answered to his friend's question after a short pause; "but they are always welcomed to the class, and isn't that enough?"

"No, I don't think it is!" was Stevens's emphatic reply. "The fact that we don't make 'em stick proves I'm right. They wouldn't come at all if they were not available material; and I believe it's time we woke up and thought about who is the matter. I've been trying to do some of it, and I want your co-operation in a little plan. We're not organized, you know, although our teacher was in favor of it; so he'll be glad to have us do a bit of organized work. Let us constitute ourselves a committee to make new transients over into regular members of the class. My plan is simply this: When any one drops in, as has been occurring nearly every Sunday for several months, let us get his or her name and address, and find out whether or not he is a member of any other school. Of course he will receive the usual invitation to return, but I think it will be better not to try to get him to become a regular member. Somehow or other, this seems to scare them away. I've found that numbers of people seem to be afraid of being committed to something definite. But when any of those whose names we secure do not come back, let us look them up and show that we are interested. I know

what it is to be a young fellow in a strange locality, and he usually needs to be drawn into the right acquaintance."

"What do you say?"

"The idea is all right," Bronson answered heartily. "Anyhow it's worth trying, although I hadn't thought about doing anything before."

"That's exactly what's the matter. We haven't been doing enough thinking, and so we've let opportunities slip."

Now, it so happened that on the Monday morning preceding the Sunday when Stevens and Bronson were to operate their plan two young men went to work at the Orrin Tool Company's plant, in the neighborhood of the school. When Sunday morning came round, both attended for the two reasons that they were strangers and had nothing else to do and because they were in the habit of going to Sunday School when at home. They liked the class passably well, their names and addresses were secured quietly by the new committee, and each went his way.

On the following Sunday James Dimock attended the school again, and was welcomed, especially by Stevens and Bronson. When the latter remarked on the fact of his presence the second time, and hinted at the possibility of his becoming a regular member, he laughed and said: "Yes, I rather think I shall. I'm used to going to Sunday School, and the fact that you cared enough to get the name and address of a stranger makes a fellow feel a little at home right away."

The two members of the self-appointed

"This education forms the common mind.

Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined."

—Pope.

committee exchanged smiles of satisfaction, and got together after the session to talk over the absence of the other young man, Sanford Mills. They made an appointment to call at his boarding house on a certain evening. They went early and found him preparing to go out, so they made their visit brief. After explaining the reason for their presence, they chatted a few minutes about their desire to make their Sunday School a meeting place for strangers in the neighborhood, expressed the hope that he would come on Sunday, and arose to go.

"Well, now," Mills said frankly, "I think I'll be on hand. The fact is, I went the first Sunday because I didn't have anything else to do; but during the week I became acquainted with some of the boys, and we went for a stroll last Sunday morning. But now that you've taken the trouble to look me up, I think I'll take the trouble to respond," and he smilingly bowed them out.

He kept his promise, and was enrolled as a member of the class. The committee went on with its work, receiving active co-operation from the new members. The class doubled its numbers in six months; and when Stevens and Bronson talked over the development, the latter said: "The whole matter of former stagnation lay in not 'sizing up' the situation for ways of improvement—other negligence. The right procedure is to be constantly thinking, and then see that the 'think' gets to work."

The Big Brother Plan

The Big Brother plan, with modifications, is being introduced into New Movement classes to some extent. How much it may mean in the future, we cannot say. Much will depend on the wisdom of those who give it shape. It is of course in full accord with New Movement ideas, and will naturally find ready acceptance in case the little brother can be provided for in some way, in connection with the Sunday School, or in the class itself. The organized Bible Class Department of the New York State Sunday School Association has recently issued a leaflet. To the interest of this movement, entitled, "A Message to Big Brothers," which will be found interesting reading. A leaflet of suggestions to Big Brothers is issued by the Executive Council of the New York City branch of this association, which is also valuable.

The plan has met with large success in the New York City branch. It is Mr. Rockefeller, Jr., is the teacher. Mr. Rockefeller believes in a more practical Christianity than that frequently expounded. He believes men should be helped, not by gifts of money, but by the practical help that one brother can extend to another. He has carefully worked out details of a plan for a national organization including every Bible Class in the country, and which is to adopt as one of its features the Big Brother Plan. If it succeeds, as he has every reason to hope it will, every neglected boy in the country will have a "big brother."

The plan is simple and effective.

The work laid out for the Big Brother is as follows: "He is expected to call on the boy in his home and get acquainted with the parents, to find out what the lad's native interests are and plan some beneficial outlet for his energy, to take him to innocent places of amusement, to and him work or get him into school, to induce him to go to church and Sunday school, to give him something to read, to train him in good manners and in good habits, to invite him home, and in general to be a hearty, interested friend."

At a meeting of the Men's Club of the Central Presbyterian Church of New York, the matter under discussion was what to do with boys accused of minor misdemeanors before the Juvenile Courts. The decision was reached—a very wise one—that these boys need nothing so much as a strong brotherly friend to look after them when put on honor by the court and paraded. Left to themselves, they would drift into evil company, and evil courses, and become in time hardened criminals. But taken by the hand, guided, encouraged, it might be expected that they would develop into useful citizens.

At that first meeting forty men pledged themselves to act as "big brothers." The judge having wayward boys in charge was more than glad to use these consecrated men, to each one of whom he assigned a lad.

At present there are more than five hundred Big Brothers in that one association of workers. A central office has been opened for the purpose of keeping reports of the work done. Many hundreds of boys have already been assigned to the care of these workers, and only about a dozen have been reported to the court as incorrigible. The others are on the way to becoming good members of society.—A. B. C. Monthly.

"Good manners pay even if they do not make friends, because we cannot try to make others happy and to radiate sunshine without feeling better and purer ourselves."