

The Sunday-School Lesson.

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This paper is intended to be constructive not destructive. Its object is to sketch the general principles on which Sunday School lessons should be arranged in order to accomplish the best results, and to state briefly the steps already taken toward putting these principles into practice.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF A CORRECT SYSTEM OF LESSONS.

The lesson is the matter of central interest in the Sunday-school; all else is subordinate to this. But it is not a question of the individual lessons so much as of the system of study to which they belong. The importance of this can hardly be over-estimated. Poor teaching of a good system will accomplish more than good teaching of a poor system. The lines along which one teaches are in the end much more important than the individual lessons taught. For if the system is right, its results, even if incomplete, cannot be wrong; while if the system is wrong the more complete its results the worse the failure. What we want is good teaching of the right system. Good Biblical training in the Sunday-school of to-day means spiritual power in the Church of the next generation. Biblical ignorance among children and youth now means spiritual weakness then. The twentieth century, brilliant with promise, but black with portents, is dawning upon us. Its greatest need is divine truth manifested in human lives. This can come only through the influence of the Bible. The principal means of imparting Biblical truth to the rising generation is the Sunday-school. The matter before us, then, is not one of to-day only; it is weighted with the future. Neither is it a question of the convenience or the availability of any given series of lessons, but of the effects in the long run of a correct system of lessons. If that can be secured, the results are certain; if not, we have need to tremble for the future of the Church.

II. DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF ANY SYSTEM.

1. *Difficulties arising from the nature of the Sunday-school.*—Notwithstanding the acknowledged importance of Sunday-school Bible study, the difficulties in its way are many and great. Among them are these: That the Sunday-school can give but little more than a half-hour a week to any lesson; that its work for both teachers and scholars is wholly voluntary; that attendance on the school is irregular; that many of its teachers are confessedly incompetent; that the school has to compete with a great pressure of outside work and pleasure; and that many, if not most, of its pupils remain in the school but a few years. No study except that of the Bible could succeed at all against so many adverse influences.

2. *Difficulties arising from the nature of the Bible.*—Other difficulties arise from the nature of the Bible. It is a large book. It covers a wide range of history, biography, poetry, precept, law, philosophy and doctrine. As we have it, it is not a book, but more than three-score books bound together and arranged with but little regard for either logical or chronological order. But it is the charter of the Christian Church, the foundation of good government, the hope of the world. The question is: How can its contents be so arranged and taught that, in the ordinary years of Sunday-school life, our young people, as a rule, shall become reasonably well informed regarding its principal facts and teachings, and have a good working acquaintance with the book as a whole?

3. *The solution of these difficulties a hard problem.*—That this is a difficult problem none will deny. Some declare that it is impossible of solution; that the most we can expect of the Sunday-school is that it make practical application of some of the great truths of the Bible and give a fragmentary knowledge of some of its principal facts; but that for a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, an acquaintance with it such as every young person ought to have, we must resort to outside classes. To say this is to prophesy Biblical ignorance in the next generation. Such outside classes cannot be arranged

on a scale large enough to meet the need. The Church as a whole has no place for another department of Bible study. The problem of Bible study must be solved in the Sunday-school, or the Church fail of its mission. That so many in the Church seem unaware of the importance of this subject is one of the most ominous signs of the times. That a rapidly increasing number are becoming keenly alive to it is cause for great encouragement.

(To be continued.)

Synod of The Presbyterian Church in England.

The Synod of the Presbyterian Church in England opened its twenty-first meeting on the 27th of April in Regent Square Church, London, with a sermon from the Rev. R. Leitch, of Newcastle; the retiring Moderator, on "The Gospel which Paul preached."

The Moderator cleft was Dr. McGaw, the general secretary, who gave in his opening address a resume of the position and progress of the Church during the year. It was a vigorous appeal to sustain the forward movement initiated a year ago to raise a quarter of a million dollars for church extension in England. Nearly one-half the amount has already been subscribed, and the balance is likely to be forthcoming before very long. There are seventy towns in England of 20,000 inhabitants and upwards, in which there is no Presbyterian Church, but in which it ought to be represented.

On Wednesday forenoon the Sustentation Fund first occupied the attention of the Synod. The equal dividend of £200 is still maintained, and the fund seems to be in a healthy condition.

College matters came next. Though ten candidates competed in September for undergraduate scholarships, there were no candidates for entrance to the theological classes of the first year. For the first time, therefore, the college last session was without any first year students. Evidently the intended removal of the college to Cambridge is connected with this, and points to the necessity of making the transition period as short as possible. The plans of the new college buildings at Cambridge were on view, and evoked general approval. The style is Jacobean, which is a favorite at Cambridge, and the cost will be about £20,000. The site and £5,000 have been presented by Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson. Presbyterians in the university are very sanguine as to the prospects of the college. It was proposed to call it St. Columba's College, but the name has not been finally fixed.

On Wednesday evening the committee on praise reported favorably as to the progress made in the production of a joint hymnal for use in all the Presbyterian Churches in Scotland, and which, it is hoped, other Presbyterian Churches in the British Isles and Colonies will adopt. It would be a much-needed "outward and visible sign" of the unity of all the Presbyterian Churches.

In connection with the report of the committee on intercourse with Colonial and other Churches, the deputation from the Irish General Assembly was heard. The Moderator (Dr. Buick) and Mr. Alex. Caruth, Ballymena, were absent, but the other deputies, Rev. Wm. Wylie, Rev. Robt. Wallace, M. A., and Mr. Thomas Irwin addressed the House in a very effective manner, and were well received. The speech of Mr. Irwin, not reported with the others in your last issue, was finally conceived, will delivered, and touched the hearts of the audience.

Before the Synod separated for the night, a strong resolution was adopted, urging "The British Government to take immediate steps, in co-operation with the Government of the United States, to secure the establishment of a permanent Court of Arbitration representing both countries, to which all matters in dispute between the two Governments shall be referred for settlement."

On Thursday the first business of note was the setting apart of five brethren to act as Synod evangelists during the year. The Moderator's address to them was very impressive.

Thereafter a piece of new legislation was finally adopted—viz., the ordination, under suitable regulations, of probationers acting as assistants and ministers, or in charge of preaching stations. Much doubt exists as to the wisdom of this change, and the report embodying it was adopted without any enthusiasm. As the result the church is likely to have a class of ordained preachers, whose status will be peculiar. Ordained, yet without charge, and having no right to a seat in Presbytery or Synod.