

# The Church Guardian

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## CALENDAR FOR JULY.

- JULY 1—5th Sunday after Trinity.  
 " 8—6th Sunday after Trinity.  
 " 15—7th Sunday after Trinity.  
 " 22—8th Sunday after Trinity. (Notice of St. James).  
 " 25—ST. JAMES AP. and MAR. (Athenasian Creed).  
 " 29—9th Sunday after Trinity.

## SHOULD THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF BIBLE LESSONS BE INTRODUCED INTO CHURCH SUNDAY-SCHOOLS?

BY ANNIE TREADWELL.

From a Paper read before the Sunday School Teachers' Guild of Calvary Church, Memphis, Tenn.

"Why should we not adopt this plan into our Sunday-schools? What good in holding off?

What objections could you urge against it?"

Before answering any of these very natural inquiries, permit me once more to state the question:

"Should the International System be introduced into Church Sunday-schools?" Not, "Is the International System a good one?" for that it is good in more respects than one, we have already found.

Meritorious as we believe it, there are objections which, as a Churchman, I cannot fail to urge against the system. Grave faults, which must not be overlooked, faults not merely of manner and form, but of manner and substance.

In the first place, it starts out with a false principle, namely, that a man may be a Christian without being allied to any religious body, without belonging to any school of religious thought. As well expect a branch to blossom and bear fruit without being attached to any particular tree, but just lying around loose on

the ground. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Would your son become a physician, does he read any medical works he may find at hap hazard, without any plan or direction? On the contrary, you send him to a college of some particular school of medical thought where he may learn the peculiar tenets of that school whether Allopathy or Homœopathy.

Irregular physicians are called "quacks;" and there are too many Christians of just that stamp, men who calmly accept and acknowledge the truth of Christianity, in a general way, but whose view of the subject is so broad (?) and Catholic (?) they have never cared to choose a Church. In fact who consider one Church about as good as another, and who think that for their part they can get along very well without any.

This international system would never have produced a Charles V., I grant you, but at the same time, the world would never have known through its agency, the blessing of a Luther, a Latimer or a Ridley.

Nor can I believe that any advance towards Church unity would follow our adoption of this system into our Sunday-schools; and for this reason; the tendency of the whole thing is to give children the idea that our Christian religion and the Church are founded on the Bible; consequently any man who reads his Bible has the right of building for himself a little religious structure of his own just exactly to suit himself. A sort of private ant hill, as it were.

Again, the tendency of this system is to foster in the minds of children, in an intense degree, a spirit of individuality; each one thinking of himself, as a Christian (if at all) for himself and apart from others, not simply as one member of the great family of God.

This selfishness and undue self-importance, this exaltation of the individual has much responsibility in the numerous schisms which have rent in a thousand fragments the seamless robe of Christ! Could we only destroy the prominence of this idea, and substitute in the minds of men the more Christian thought that "we are members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people," Church unity would not long be, as now, an unknown factor in the history of the world. We can scarcely hope to accomplish this till the world has been brought to the appreciation of the fact that the Church is older by many centuries than the Bible, that it is a divine and not a human institution, "the pillar and ground of the truth," the very proof and witness of the Word of God!

While the international system may cause the pupils to take the interest in reading the Bible, we do not believe mere reading of the Book and familiarity with its contents would make very good Christians. On the contrary, not a skeptic of any note ever lived who was not conversant with biblical characters, nay more, who could not quote the very words of the Son of Man.

A former Rector of this parish, in discussing the international system, once remarked that his objection to it was this, "whereas it taught the geography, history, biography, zoology, and all the other ologies of the Bible, it omitted the teaching of the religion of that Book!" A rather severe criticism you may think, but true, at least in part. How can we believe the religion of the Word of God is taught, except there be definite instruction in the great essential principles of Christianity. For example, is no doctrine of baptism or laying on of hands taught in the Bible? Yet nothing is said of these things, because, forsooth, some churches (!) don't believe in confirmation, and others don't accept infant baptism! No stress is laid on the two great sacraments "which are generally necessary to salvation" because no particular view of them could be taken

without offending some Christian body using the system "He that believeth and is baptized," said the Saviour, "shall be saved." "Believe what?" asks the child. "Oh believe in Christ and what the Bible says: I cannot tell you explicitly," answers the international system, "for that would be to teach you a creed, and to touch such a dangerous thing as a creed I cannot consent, for I might tread on somebody's toes who don't believe in a creed!" Now shall we, as Churchmen, consent to introduce into our schools a system of instruction which ignores the creed, the charter of the Church, the heritage of the Apostles, that grand embodiment of "all which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's comfort?" St. Paul was not of opinion that studying the Bible we should avoid doctrine, for he states that as one of the reasons for its very existence. He says it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Now if any men, or class of men, or Sunday-school teachers, think it best not to teach doctrine from the Bible, perhaps they know, but the Church judges not so.

All these faults found in the system spring from the fact that other religious bodies do not view the Sunday-school as we see it. They think of child-life and child thought as something apart from the life of a grown-up Christian; believe that men are not fit for the religious life, till, having come to years of discretion, they are converted to God and are able to understand the mysteries of divine grace.

The Church, on the contrary, would take the new-born babe, and dedicate him to God in holy baptism, leading him gently and patiently through life. The Sunday-schools are the nurseries of the Church, where her children naturally, unconsciously, without wrench or strain or compulsion, grow up into the manhood of the Christian life. Men, she thinks, are but children of larger growth, so she would have her youngest children not merely nominal Christians, but loyal Churchmen as well. What broader Christianity than the Holy Catholic, which requires no narrower creed than the belief of the universal Church—the Apostles' Creed?

Again, though the facts and incidents of the Saviour's life are taught, I cannot allow that it is done in the best possible manner. It wants reality, is too much like studying the life of George Washington or the sayings of Benjamin Franklin! The children know Him as a great and wonderful Teacher, a little wiser than Socrates, a little better than Plato—one who lived a long time ago and whose life is only a faint shadow-picture dimly impressed on the minds of men.

Shall we be satisfied with such teachings for our children?

Has not the Church "a more excellent way" in the Christian Year? What incongruity, to be occupied in teaching the Sunday-school about the birth of Christ, for example, while the Church is following His fainting footsteps to Calvary's Cross? What better way to make Jesus a real, living, actual, personal presence than by taking the child's hand and leading his infant feet into the time-worn and unending circle of the Christian Year.

Let outsiders, who "care for none of these things," quarrel with us, as they will; call the Church narrow and a bigot; we will not answer with a taunt, but placing the little hands of our children in the tender palm of the Bride of Christ, we would teach them early to go aside with the Saviour into Gethsemane, take up His Cross, and bear it with Him to Calvary's top, and watch before the sacred tomb till the glorious sun of Easter Morn announce the Risen Lord!

What Churchman would have it otherwise? Who among us would wish to teach the coming generation of Churchmen to leave their Master "to tread the wine-press of the wrath of God" alone?