

INFANT CLASS TEACHING.

[A Paper read before the Sunday-School Association for the Diocese of Montreal, on the 19th December, 1887, by Miss Evans.]

Wanted a Christian lady able to play and lead the singing, one who can interest children—possessed of an unflinching stock of patience, one who always looks bright and cheerful, yet has sufficient dignity to control the unruly. One who in spite of provocation never gets cross, and has sufficient strength of body and mind to brave all weathers. Such I once heard a clergyman give as his idea of a person fit to take charge of a class of young children, and I thought where will he find such a prodigy. I do not think humanly speaking such an one can be found, but it is possible to teach an infant-class successfully without possessing all or even many of these very advantageous qualifications. Two qualifications, however, are necessary; and any one proposing to take a class should carefully consider these two things:—First and most important, are you a Christian? I do not mean one in the general acceptance of the term, but, do you know yourself as by nature and deserts a guilty, lost, hell-deserving sinner? And do you know Jesus as the ONE DEAR LORD, who has died in your stead, and borne the punishment of your sins? Second, has God called you to the work? Perhaps by special request to take the class, or perhaps God shows you the need of the class; there is no one who can, or will take it, and you feel you ought to go. If this is the case, although you may possess no apparent qualification for the work, go forward in faith, and you will succeed.

An infant class is not the most difficult class to teach; it has its own peculiar difficulties; but what we need is to use our God-given, practical common sense, and a great many of these difficulties will disappear.

The infant class is perhaps the most important class in the school, especially if it is a large one; an unsatisfactory one to the teacher, who does not often see the fruit of her work; but if it is faithfully done "as to the Lord," the promise stands sure "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days." We may not see the seed springing up, but the foundation of faith, love and all true religion may and ought to be laid in this class. The Roman Catholic Church say that, if she have the training of the little ones, till they are seven years old, then she is sure of them; this shows us the importance they attach to early associations and our own consciousness reiterates the fact that the earliest impressions are the strongest. To use our time to best advantage, and to obtain the best results, three things claim our special attention, and on each I desire to say a few words:—1st. The scheme; 2nd. The Preparation and Helps; 3rd. Class Order.

First, the Scheme. This is a very important matter, in fact the success of the class so largely depends on the music and the Lesson Scheme, that they require very careful selection, and it is never a good plan to tie the infant class down to the same scheme of lessons as the senior school—though that the unity of the school may be maintained the two schemes should be as much alike as possible, and whenever the elder scholar's lesson can be taught with advantage it ought to be taken in preference to any other.

For many reasons, however, it seems well to have a special scheme for the infant class; 1st, the lessons learned by the little ones are always the most lasting, the young minds are easily im-

pressed, and an impression once made cannot entirely be effaced, therefore, it is well to endeavor to give them as comprehensive an idea as possible of the whole Word of God; besides, with some children it is the only religious instruction they receive; their parents never read the Bible, they do not go to Church; but they are glad to send the children to school to secure a quiet afternoon; perhaps when the little ones grow older they leave the Sunday-school and spend Sunday afternoon on the mountain, the river, or in some place of amusement; so while we have them, let us make our lessons as interesting and comprehensive as possible, that the little ones may enjoy them, and that the seed may be sown; for God's word shall bear fruit, it shall not return to Him void. 2nd. You cannot teach the children about a doctrine such as the depravity of the human heart, faith, substitution, the love of God; they would not understand the words used, and would soon become weary and troublesome; but let us take God's plan when the human race was in its infancy. He taught man by types and pictures, and now we have His own picture stories, written by His Spirit for our learning; preserved through the ages by His will; sometimes Jews, sometimes Gentiles, sometimes friends, sometimes foes, being called up as custodians of this Sacred book given now to us by God for our guidance; think you He has not had care for the arrangement too? That there is a Divine harmony which begins in Genesis, God with the sinless man in the garden of Eden, and ends in Revelation, sinful, but blood-washed forgiven man with God in His Kingdom of Heaven. And where God begins I think He means us to begin too. Although the little ones cannot understand what temptation means, the history of the Fall will teach them the personality of Satan, the fact that temptation is not sin, that the desire was not sin, the mere eating was not sin, but that sin was the unbelief that thought we shall not surely die, the pride that said we shall be as God, and which ended in disobedience and the breaking of God's law.

Cain's life will teach, how the small beginnings of sin if unconfessed and unpardoned lead to utter ruin, also God's loving kindness and mercy to save. In the flood we have clearly taught God's hatred of sin, His justice, His mercy, and His eternal, unchanging, faithfulness. While Babel teaches the utter impossibility for man to reach heaven by His own works. There is no doctrine necessary to salvation, which may not thus be taught, over and over again, out of the Bible stories, for the New Testament is hid in the Old, while the Old lies clearly revealed in the New. Let us, therefore, try and illustrate our lessons largely with Bible stories, endeavoring in all things to hold up Jesus Christ as the great, the central figure, using the Bible, the whole Bible, and as far as possible nothing but the Bible.

Good pictures and a black board are great helps, very materially lightening the teacher's work and often impressing what could in no other way be taught, and in selecting a scheme these important helps should not be overlooked.

CLASS ORDER.

Never go to class without prayer; be early in class, first if possible, to welcome each child with a smile and pleasant word. Your presence will act as a wholesome check on the children, who, if the teacher is not present, are apt to run riot; and order once lost is very hard to restore. Try and get each child in front of you, so that not only you can see them, but that they can see you. A little study of the childish characteristics will soon enable you to place the little ones advantageously; sometimes two boys placed together, will so excite each other that the whole order and harmony of the class will be destroyed, whereas those same boys if well placed might be efficient helpers in the maintenance of order and discipline. Make your rules few and clear, but let each child feel that your word is law, that y-es means yes—

nothing more and nothing less; this once established you have little to fear. Sometimes, however, a child will prove refractory; then, oh! be careful, remember, the nearest way to each child's heart is round by God's throne. Jesus is at your side, and a moment's pause, while your heart cries, God help me, is the most powerful weapon you can use. These very children whose strong wills, restless temperament and sunny infectious smiles, make their naughty times so trying, will, if won for Christ, make leaders in all good things; but to win them you must know them, and to know them you must visit them in their own houses, and you must know them not only in school, but out of school; better smile and bow to twenty wrong children than pass one who knows you as teacher.

If the children seem to be so restless you cannot control them, sing a hymn; those that have a simple refrain are best. In a hymn like "The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin; the Light of the world is Jesus"; every child, even the youngest, can join, and bright earnest singing often proves a great safety valve. Another great help is to ask a question, and tell all to rise and answer together; if done by word of command, they will soon rise in an orderly manner and take pleasure in doing so. As I said before, stand so that every child can see you, and occasionally ask them to turn and look at you; you can thus secure undivided attention, or if one child still continues to look away, ask some pointed peculiar question; but except as a last resort don't speak to a child by name, or every little head will be turned, and all the little brains wondering what Johnny or Mary is doing. Do not reprove a child before the whole class, except in extreme cases; walk home with the naughty one, tell him his good points; how his naughty acts grieve Jesus, and please Satan. Use plain words that there may be no misunderstanding; then ask him to try and help you next Sunday; most children will gladly promise and will faithfully endeavor to keep the promise too. But if the class is a large one, one teacher is not sufficient, and it is well to try and make the Infant class a training class for young teachers, which can easily be done by bringing some of the elder scholars in as assistants; they can each be made responsible for a small number of children, and can do various parts of the work, e.g., let the questioning on last Sunday's lesson be taken by each in turn; this should always be done before the lesson for the day is given. Let one or more take charge of the roll, which should be quietly checked, not called over, as the latter plan takes too much valuable time, and the order is lost; also let them teach the selected Bible verse, or hymn, not simply by rote but explaining as they go along; this will oblige them to study God's word carefully, much more so than if they were scholars; so it will be no disadvantage to a girl to be brought down as an assistant, while we will have the advantage of the warm first-love of our young Christians; they will be a living link between the elder head and the juvenile member. Young people like to be asked to help, and if started early will work from the first without the disadvantage of self-consciousness which is the greatest stumbling-stone to older Christians.

Try and use short words, and occasionally question and see if the words used are understood. Never think anything too simple, it is best to teach with they understanding the children know nothing; if they do know they will like to hear it over again, and often times they pay most attention to those things they know best. If a word is difficult to explain, tell the little ones a story which will shew what it means, and choose if possible a Bible one; for example in Matt. v. 5, we have the words Blessed are the meek; a child finds it hard to understand what the word meek means; but turn to 1 Kings xiii, 1-10 and shew them the prophet from Ju-