

and if in our blindness we refuse to take your Christian counsels now, later on we will thank you for giving them.

I often, in my imagination, picture to myself an ideal church, fully equipped for the Master's work—a church that shall understand fully the laws and precepts of God. I sigh and pray for the coming of that day, when the minister of God will not be constrained to warn the unconverted to flee from the wrath to come, because there will be no such persons to warn; when his heart will not be anxious and perplexed in seeing the dangers to which souls are exposed on the one hand, and the indifference of these souls on the other, together with his inability to lead them to the ark of safety. I sigh for the day when we shall be an army of ransomed, marching under our great general with no foes to conquer. I don't expect to see that day on earth, but I am glad to look beyond to the bright home of God. I know that there, already, thousands and thousands are found. For them all mysteries are solved, all sorrows are forgotten. They are with God; they serve Him untrammelled by earth's ties. Their mind is satisfied; their heart is filled. I would like to be there and swell their number. But, brethren, God needs us a little while here. We are the "salt of the earth," "the light of the world." Let us do our part well. May all who come in contact with us feel it and derive good. Let us keep our lamps burning, well trimmed and full of oil, that we may give light to others and not be in the dark when at midnight the bridegroom shall come. Let us work faithfully, serve gladly, fear no hardship, grudge no labour, and especially when all is done and borne for God. Can we not say:

"Labour is sweet, for Thou hast toiled;
And care is light, for Thou hast cared;
Let not our works with self be soiled,
Nor in unsimple ways ensnared."

We look forward to the reward; but we should toil, chiefly because He who had not where to lay His head, spared no toil for us to save us and make us happy. God bless you all, Christian disciples. May this week be of much comfort. May your Father soften your difficulties and make life's burdens lighter. Lean on Him when weary and discouraged. You will find His arm strong and firm; and when you have given to the world your light, feeble and pale as it may have been, you shall shine as bright stars in the firmament of your God. Amen.

NORMAL CLASSES FOR SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHERS.

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That we may come to a correct judgment on this subject, to which attention has of late been earnestly directed, we must have a correct and definite understanding of the place which the Sabbath school teacher occupies in relation to the religious instruction of the young. The necessity of this appears from the simple fact that assertions are being repeatedly made which imply serious misapprehension on this point. These assertions imply that the work of the Sabbath school teacher is that of a *profession* or *vocation*, in the current sense of these terms. This is very far from correct; so much so, that a *professional* training, as ordinarily understood, is, I am persuaded, out of the question, as a thing quite impracticable, if not simply utopian. The Sabbath school teacher's work, as such, is not his *vocation*, in the following of which he has the natural right to receive from those who get his work the equivalent of a decent maintenance. His work is not his vocation as is the work of a minister of the Gospel, or of a physician, or of a lawyer, or of an artisan. Any training, therefore, that may be helpful to him, is not to be put in the same category with the training that may be requisite in the case of any of these. He is to be trained, not as we would train a minister, or a lawyer, or a physician, or a tradesman, but as we might train an elder in the Presbyterian Church or a class leader in the Methodist Church, or as we might train a local magistrate, in so far as they could be made willing to accept the training. As all church members may be supposed to have a capacity to rule or take a lead in the church—of course a *very latent* capacity in most cases, and as all citizens may be presumed to have a capacity to administer law—a capacity also *very latent* in most cases; so, but much more so, all Christians are to be supposed capable of being or becoming religious

teachers, and Christians whose capacity to teach *continues permanently latent* are under the apostle's reproof (at least a part of it), "When, for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." And as the elder or the class leader is supposed to be chosen to his office in the church, and the local magistrate is supposed to be appointed, because their respective capacities for their work are thought to have emerged from the region of latency, so the Sabbath school teacher is presumed to be called to his work because he is thought to be something more than a religious teacher in *embryo*. And, further, just as it might be very serviceable to the church if elders could have some training in connection with their work as overseers, and very serviceable to the community if our local magistrates could have some training in the administration of law, so it cannot be doubted that much may be done by proper training to increase the efficiency of our Sabbath school teachers. But as, on the other hand, it would be impracticable to establish any system of training for elders or magistrates, on the principle of making their attendance on a course of instruction imperative, so we must, I apprehend, discountenance any idea that looks in the direction of making a course of training imperative in the case of the Sabbath school teacher.

I would not have dwelt so long upon this point were it not that the assertion is being repeated, without qualification, that there is the *same* reason why our Sabbath school teachers should have a regular course of training as there is for the regular training of other teachers. It is forgotten that the place of the Sabbath school teacher, in relation to the religious instruction of the young, is not identical with the place of the *secular* teacher in relation to instruction in those branches of knowledge which it is his vocation to teach. Without considering the essential difference in the two cases, arising out of the universal importance and necessity of religious knowledge in relation to men's highest interests, and the corresponding obligation resting on Christians in general to possess such a competency to give religious instruction as they are not under obligation to possess in relation to other branches of knowledge, I shall only say, and I think it is not saying more than is warrantable, that while it would be impracticable to establish a regular system of training for Sabbath school teachers such as we have for our secular teachers, it would, even if not impracticable, be highly undesirable, as certain to be productive of very serious evils. If the idea should become generally prevalent that Sabbath school teachers and other teachers are under equal need of a systematic training, and the idea come to be generally acted on, *two* evils will inevitably follow: The services of many who have the most important of all the qualifications requisite in a Sabbath school teacher, but who may not be in circumstances to take the required course of training, will be lost to the Church; and parents' sense of responsibility will be diminished, and their neglect of the religious instruction of their children, which is one of the most crying evils of our time, will be indefinitely increased.

Assuming the above to be a correct view of the state of the case, the question arises, what training is practicable as well as desirable for our Sabbath school teachers? If a *professional* training is not to be thought of, what can be done, apart from such a training, to make them more efficient instructors? To this, before coming to particulars, it must be answered, in a general way, that much will depend on circumstances. Not a little may be done for our teachers in all circumstances, if there is a real desire on their part for improvement; though, of course, a great deal more may be done in some cases than in others. Teachers may do a great deal for themselves; much may be done for them by others; they may be very helpful to each other. Care being taken that our Sabbath school teachers are selected for their work, as possessing a measure of intelligent piety and good sense, let all available means be employed for their improvement and the increase of their efficiency, as circumstances may warrant or permit.

To be more particular, I would say,

1. That every Sabbath school teacher can do a very great deal for himself, by being conscientiously diligent in his preparation to instruct his pupils in the lessons of the day. Having, at a former conference, read a paper on this subject, urging its importance, and giving hints in relation to the teacher's study of the lessons, preparatory to his appearing before his

class, I shall not enlarge upon it here. I shall only say, quoting from that paper, that, "as a general rule, a teacher who is uniformly quite at home in the lessons of the day, by due preparatory application of mind to them, will have far more success in awakening interest and securing attention than one who, with greatly superior gifts, comes to his work with little or no preparation;" and that one who has any aptitude at all for teaching, will, "by persevering in the practice of thorough preparation, become able to conduct his class with only such occasional and momentary reference to his book as shall not interfere with his constant attention to his scholars, without hesitating, or losing time, or making mistakes, and with such freedom and liveliness as cannot fail to secure a good measure of attention and interest on the part of the pupils."

2. If our teachers, besides being *conscientious in their own private preparation*, meet regularly for mutual improvement, they can hardly fail to promote their own efficiency as teachers, and to improve in many ways the condition of the schools under their care. Having considered this subject, also, on the occasion referred to, I shall not now dwell upon it.

3. Our annual conference and other similar meetings should be of great service in promoting interest in Sabbath school work and in the improvement of teachers. It is to be regretted that, after all that is done to accommodate delegates, so few attend these meetings. Whatever may yet be done in the way of rendering them more generally attractive, I believe that, such as they are, there are many teachers who, if they only could see their need of improvement, might derive great benefit by attending them. At the same time the benefit to be derived from them is necessarily partial, owing to the fact that only a delegation from each school can in general be expected to attend them. Their utility would, I believe, be greatly increased, if we sent down to our Sabbath schools a more or less full printed summary of our proceedings, with the view of its suggesting matter for conference at the teachers' meetings of the several schools.

4. All the means of improvement that have been adverted to are generally available; and where advantage is taken of them, which we are warranted to think will be done by all teachers of the right stamp, they will prove, I am persuaded, amply sufficient for all practical purposes. I am not, however, in saying this, to be understood as objecting to *more*, when more can be done *in the same line* as already indicated. I mean I do not object to anything that is not of the nature of an attempt to introduce a system of *professional* training. I object to nothing that may be further helpful to teachers who may be in a position to take advantage of it. Nor have I any doubt that much may be done to improve our teachers in the way to which a good deal of attention has of late been directed. Where arrangements can be made, by which those who have had larger experience and been more successful than others in Sabbath school work may be brought into contact with our teachers in the way of illustrating and exemplifying the means of their success, no small amount of good might follow. But, of course, it is *practical* men that are wanted—not mere theorists or fluent speakers, who will suggest novelties and speculate upon the possible or likely results of their introduction, but men who have had good success as hard workers, and who can tell others how they obtained their success. Such men are to be found—men at whose feet it would be no small privilege to sit, listening to their counsels and witnessing their exemplification of their methods of instruction. By all means, therefore, let our teachers have the benefit of their experience. Some expenditure of money would, no doubt, be required, probably not very much; but any such expenditure would be far more than repaid. In cities and larger towns it should be a comparatively easy matter to induce a considerable number of teachers to place themselves for a time under a man of well accredited capabilities, or under two or three who might unite their efforts to make us more efficient and successful in our endeavours to interest our young people about the Saviour. But even in smaller towns and villages, such as Fergus and Elora, it is surely not impracticable to arrange for a course which, if not too long, might be generally attended by the teachers. Let us have the right men for the work, and their labour will not be without good results. We may be sure, however, that it will be in relation to this means of improvement, as