

paper inimical to Bishop Gilmour. Naturally the authenticity of such a letter would be disbelieved and denied by the bishop's friends; but the bishop himself, in a card to his own official organ, *The Catholic Universe*, in one breath acknowledges the authorship and withdraws the sentiments of his letter. He says:—"To prevent as much as possible the evil intended by the publication of this letter, through the malice of Joseph J. Greeves and his clique of counsellors and backers, I hereby and by these presents withdraw every word in said letter of apparent disrespect to Rome, and every word that could be construed as a doubt of Rome."

HOW CAN WE RETAIN THE ELDER SCHOLARS IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOLS?

This question is asked in every Sunday school in the land. Every clergyman who takes an interest in the children of his parish, every superintendent who really strives for the success of his school, every teacher who loves his or her pupils, and desires that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is constantly perplexed and distressed to find that the elder scholars slip out of the class and away from the Sunday school just when it becomes interesting to teach them, and when there seems some chance of intelligent and abiding work being done. There is a constantly dissolving view of the long line of little ones as it goes upward. This tendency is manifestly increasing, and the question, How can we retain the elder scholars? is being asked with growing intensity. Now we may as well tell you at the outset that the answer we intend to give to that question is that you cannot retain them at all: and that in most cases it is unwise to attempt to retain them beyond a certain age. It is an accepted axiom of science that every effect has its producing cause; and so, as wise Sunday-school scientists, our first duty is to try to get at the cause.

We find, then, that pupils leave the Sunday school in this country at a much earlier age than is customary in England. 2. That they are leaving at an earlier age now than was the custom even a few years ago. 3. That boys leave at an earlier age than girls. What is the explanation of this? Is there any tendency of the times in which we live, any characteristic of this age, which will account for this result?

We are at once aware when we come to think about the matter, that owing to the conditions of society, the traditional habits of mind, and the character of the education they are receiving, the young people of this country are much more independent, self-reliant and impatient of restraint than they are in the old land. We find, secondly, that these characteristics both there and here are more manifest in this age than they were in any that has preceded it. We find in the third place that these characteristics are far more developed in boys than in girls; and so, if we mistake not, we have reached the root of the evil complained of. The whole phenomenon is traceable to the growing spirit of individualism, and consequent self-assertion and impatience of all subordination, which is the great characteristic of this age. I cannot shake off the conviction that our public school system, with its contemptuous exclusion of God's sanctifying truth from the moulding influences of the daily life, and its practical agnosticism as regards God, the great fountain of all authority and subordination, is largely responsible for fostering this spirit, if it is not the author of it. That,

however, is not the question before us now. We are not even considering whether this temper and tendency of our time is an evil in itself or not. There are some people who are ready to maintain that it is not an evil, but a good thing in itself. But however that question may be determined, it is certain that it makes all government more difficult than it used to be. That, however, proves nothing. The question before us is this: We are face to face with this fact, that our Sunday schools are increasingly made up of very young pupils. That the boys generally slip away between the ages of 12 and 16, and the girls between 14 and 18. The phenomenon is not due mainly to the fact that the elder and more instructed members of the Church take no interest in the children; but leave the office of teacher to be filled by the young and inexperienced. It is not due mainly to want of interest on the part of the clergy, or to the inefficiency of superintendents and teachers. These causes, where they exist, all contribute their share to the result we deplore; but the main cause—the root of the matter—is traceable to the spirit of individual independence and self-assertion that is everywhere abroad. We cannot argue that point further now; but looking at the admitted fact as it exists in our schools to-day, we again ask, How are we to deal with it? The boy thinks himself, and wants to be thought a man almost before he has ceased to be a child. The girl thinks herself a young woman, and claims to be treated as such, while parents and teachers are still thinking of her as a dependent little girl. You may say these motives which you are assigning for the elder scholars leaving the school are base and selfish and unworthy. The spirit out of which they grow is a spirit of insubordination. They ought to be rebuked and restrained and put down. Perhaps you are right; but that won't keep your elder scholars in the Sunday school. We have to deal with human nature as it is, not as we think it ought to be. We have to grapple with the conditions of life as we find them, not as we would like them to be.

The question is, shall we fight this tendency, and the condition of things it has produced, and take the consequences? Or shall we recognize it as an existing fact, a characteristic of the age, a possible good, and so seek to turn it to account for God, sanctify and elevate, if we can, this aspiring independence in the service of God and of his Church? There can be but one answer. And so we would ask, is it not a fact that we have got into the way of making idols of big Sunday schools?

Mr. L. boasts that he has over five hundred scholars in his Sunday school. And Mr. B. feels somewhat ashamed that he cannot honestly claim to have half that number, though his congregation is quite as large as L.'s. He feels that there is something wrong. He makes frantic efforts to gather into the Sunday school all teachable people in his parish; but he finds that in spite of every effort and every remonstrance on his own part and that of his teachers, the elder ones whom he has gathered in soon disappear, and that others who have been growing up have disappeared with them. And to his sorrow he finds that his Sunday school, in spite of his continued efforts, has not increased in numbers or grown in influence, while there are great numbers of young people growing up in his parish who are not receiving any religious instruction at all. What is the remedy? We answer—First, abandon the idea of a big Sunday school as the one test of efficient work and progress in the parish. Provide for the diligent, compact, progressive teaching of the young

scholars who come to you—see that they are all gathered in. But meet the needs of your young people; use their aspiring independence. Reorganize the teaching machinery of your parish. Aim at getting in the young men and young women. Organize Bible classes, instruction classes, guilds, and societies for various purposes. Hold the meetings of these organizations in a different room, if possible, and at a different hour from the Sunday school; and provide for them a different kind of teaching from that which they have been accustomed to in the Sunday school. Treat them as they want to be treated, with respect and consideration, as people who are now grown up and quite capable of thinking and choosing for themselves, and who are able to profit by wider and more advanced teaching. If the clergy have time and strength, and ability as teachers, the principal part of this work ought to be done by them. For it is all-important that they should be in constant friendly, fatherly—or rather, perhaps—brotherly relationship with all the young people of the parish. The young people have naturally more respect for their office, their learning and experience, than for their teachers, however worthy. And besides, they feel that they are being treated with more respect themselves when the clergyman takes pains and shows that he regards their instruction as the most important work that he has to do. And so they learn not only to respect their teacher, but to respect themselves, and what is more, to respect the work in which they are engaged.

This order, then, in our judgment, is best, where it can be carried out. But, alas! it cannot be carried out in a majority of our parishes. The clergy, who have four or five services on the Sunday for a good part of the year, have neither the time nor the strength, mental or physical, for this work. Even much fewer services than I have mentioned as falling to the lot of some, tax to the utmost the clergyman's power, and utterly incapacitate him for teaching efficiently. Then for a large part of the year he must be occupied in preparing the candidates for confirmation. And so a large part of the work must be entrusted to others. Who shall they be? Not the very young, for they have neither the knowledge, experience, nor authority that is needed for the work. What then is to be done, if the more mature and better instructed members of our congregations cannot be aroused to take more interest in this work than is usual amongst us at the present time? Our answer is, first, that in most of our congregations they can be aroused if the right method is employed. If necessary, public instruction and remonstrance on their duty and responsibility may be followed by individual application to those members of the congregations whom we think best qualified for the work we want done. The best informed and ablest of our people are generally the most modest and the least likely to think of themselves as fit for the work, or to offer themselves for it in answer to any ordinary public appeal.

Then, we answer, secondly, if no considerable number of suitable teachers can be aroused to sufficient interest to prepare themselves for this work, there will almost invariably be found one or two who can do it well. And to them larger classes of young people will have to be entrusted. Our theory for some time has been that confirmation ought to be recognized as the fitting occasion for passing from the Sunday school to the Bible class or the guild instruction, and this should be well understood on the Sundays. We are persuaded that if we could get two well instructed,