

## The Ideal Sabbath School.

BY S. J. KELSEY.

The Sabbath-school is often called the nursery of the Church. It is, therefore, thought by old folks to be no place for them, while young men and women, in youthful pride that they are no longer children, feel that they have outgrown the nursery. As a consequence, the school is relegated to the little ones only and made to perform only nursery work. A line is thus drawn which greatly limits the usefulness of the church in one of its most important branches of service. It hampers the pastor and his corps of workers down through all ranks, and not only prevents the enjoyment of greater knowledge and use of the Bible, but diminishes even the circulation of the precious volume among the people, endangering the pathway and salvation of many souls sacredly committed to the care of the church.

The Sabbath-school is a nursery where care and instruction are tenderly adapted to the very young. But it is more. And because it is more the church should insist upon its larger meaning by urging a better and more correct definition. What, then, is the Sabbath-school? To this inquiry what answer shall be given sufficiently comprehensive to sweep the entire circle of its purpose and work? If it be said that the Sabbath-school is the church at study, perhaps it would be somewhere near the mark. The whole church, the aged, ripe for heaven, full of counsel as of hope and peace; the middle-aged full of vigor as of desire for activity and usefulness; the young men and maidens abounding with vital energy and thronged with the subtlest perils of life; the children, alert in memory, receptive in mind and in that formative period which decides character for futurity; all classes alike graciously blessed with opportunity to receive and impart more and still more light from the Divine Word. The ideal is high, true, but what ideals are not for the Christian? Sure it is that were a church to resolve itself into such a body of teachers and learners that would be an ideal Sabbath-school. Every hand would hold not a lesson leaf but a Bible. Every book in the Bible would be known in its proper order. Every passage called for would be readily found. Effort would be directed toward thorough familiarity with use of the sacred volume. Type would go with antitype, prophecy with its fulfilment and shadow with its substance; or, in other words, the unity of the Old Testament with the New would be more prominent than is the case with the International series. No blank leaves rising like partition walls between the two great divisions would be found. This is our one criticism upon the present method in the respects mentioned. Six months' alternate study in each part reads the golden fabric of heavenly truth as it is in Jesus. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What a treasure house are the prophecies, for example, in connection with the Saviour's birth, not at all to be adequately brought out in the half hour spent with Matthew's narrative. The same is true of His person, character, beneficent deeds and sacrificial death, as well as the reign of the Holy Spirit under which we are now living, all of which are contemplated in the Old Testament and not to be clearly grasped without its aid. In short, the ideal school would exhibit certain modifications of the present system whose tendency would be to promote the study of God's Word in greater consonance with its design.

But even under present limitations is it practicable to have every member bring, use and become familiar with the Bible in the school? The experience of many years enables me to say it is perfectly practicable. And those brethren in the work everywhere who can testify in like manner will join in the assurance that the results achieved are even more valuable than by our present valued method of narrative teaching. But they can be accomplished only by disciplinary instruction in the school; by incorporation into the regime of its hour of study when the coils of mind and heart are fanned into fervor and interest by the reactions of assembled intercourse, and when upon the appointed ground of the visible kingdom the co-operation of the Holy Spirit may be especially relied upon. Home readings are suggested in the current series. They are good. Would that every soul in the church might faithfully follow them. Yet it remains obvious, for reasons familiar to every worker, that the school must call to this duty and carefully and prayerfully meet such exigencies as arise from neglect elsewhere. Reverence for the Holy Book itself is important and fundamental. To be inculcated, the volume must be present and subject to use.

Its presence can be secured. A certain school never fails to greet the superintendent's call with a wilderness of clean and well kept Bibles. Many have been purchased, some given, but the school seems to attract them all. Promptness and facility in its use are required proportionately, of course, to the degree of pedagogical skill exercised. It has however, long been a conviction that beyond and above the good, old, time-honored plan of instruction there is "a more excellent way" in which the church could transmit the glory of the revealed page more clearly and profitably to those who sit at her feet. The difficulties now encountered in honoring God's Word in the school, it is believed, are neither necessary nor insuperable, and could be measurably, if not entirely, obviated. Our aim, at least, should be even higher.

If the tone of what is said be thought too conservative, let us haste to say that the process of advance in spiritual knowledge and life and power is essentially so as to the means employed. The prayer—sometimes unconscious, true, for all need knows not whence blessings flow for its relief, yet still the prayer—of every soul with or without hope in the Saviour; of every home circle solemn with divinest responsibilities; of the nation reproached with sin, languishing for God and only to be exalted by His righteousness; of the church wrestling with principalities and powers, yet never losing sight of Jacob's Star, is "sanctify us by Thy truth, Thy Word is truth."

Reference is made only to the school use of the Bible because it certainly is the right wing of an advance movement toward a higher ideal in the service and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## The First Grey Hair.

BY JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.

You know what it is to find the first grey hair in your head? It quite startles you: in fact, it amuses you so much that you hand it around the family circle, that each member may laugh at the circumstance that a grey hair has been found where a grey hair was not so much as suspected! Young people look at you with a new feeling, hardly knowing, indeed, whether to address you as a stripling or a patriarch. You have put one foot into that sombre and unbeautiful borderland which lies between summer and autumn, and there is no going back again! All the gates are locked, and God has taken the keys away! A grey hair? It is the signature of time! It is the beginning of the end! It is a hint that you have lost something—it is a flake which tells of the hastening snow!

Such changes remind us in the gentlest possible manner that this is not our rest. The night does not close in suddenly. The common end is not violence and terrible-ness. We go gradually down the steep, and as a general rule time is given for reflection. Your first grey hair says, Think! You have come to a turn in your life, Think! This grey hair is a notice to quit, Think! It is not a keen weapon which cruelly cuts us down, 'tis but a grey hair, and it says mournfully, Think! The grey hair tells us that the hours are getting on, and presently the night cometh! There was your first grey hair, there was your first day's sickness; there was your first consciousness that your power of endurance was failing! What, indeed, is all life, from the sunny laughter of childhood to the mellow solemnity of old age, but a succession of reminders that our days are few and our strength a bruised reed!

There is in our members a law of decay. The outward man perisheth. Do what we may, Time will conquer! None can stand before that silent Victor. He corrodes the storied brass: he moulders away the consecrated marble: he drinks the juice of the great tree: he digs graves for giants, and causes the haughty to show their weakness to hirelings. Time goes on conquering and to conquer. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might! The opportunity will soon be gone! The evening bell will call thee home "The night cometh when no man can work."

Time is earnest, passing by,  
Death is earnest, drawing nigh.

You will never be so young on earth as you are this day! Now is the accepted time. Give God your best strength, the bloom of your power, the pride of your life, and when you are old and grey-headed He will not forsake you. Blessed are they who have lived in the way of godliness even unto old age. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."