

"THE TEACHERS' MEETING."

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THE importance of this feature of Sunday-school work is universally admitted. Upon the need for it there is also no difference of opinion. And yet, comparatively few of the efforts to carry on a teachers' meeting have been, for any great length of time, markedly successful, when confined to the individual school.

Wherein lies the difficulty? Is it to be found in a lack of enthusiasm for their work on the part of the Sunday-school teachers, or, are the methods adopted, rather than the people, at fault? For our part, we prefer to accept the latter alternative, and yet, we sometimes fear that, too often some teachers do not appreciate sufficiently the importance of the work in which they are engaged, to care much for the preparation of the lesson. As a result, they fail to keep clear of other engagements the hour of the teachers' meeting, and, when this condition of affairs prevails to any extent in a school, no matter how good the method of conducting the weekly meeting for lesson-study, it must soon be marked down amongst the things which have failed.

If, however, it be granted that the methods of conducting these meetings are mainly responsible for their failure, the important question is: How shall we revolutionize them so as to obtain more satisfactory results?

At the very outset it must be noted that the conditions under which teachers' meetings are conducted are so varied that it is, we believe, beyond the power of any man to enunciate, in an article such as this, principles which will prove a panacea for all the ills of this phase of Sunday-school work. It will be found necessary for the teachers to modify any methods thus set forth to suit local conditions, and apply them to their own special circumstances.

The time and place of meeting can only be arranged in this way. There is a time, however, which is sometimes selected, and which we would caution teachers against using, that is the half-hour or so just before the regular session of the school begins. This time is objectionable because it takes teachers and officers away from the places they should be in, namely, their respective positions in school, in order to welcome the scholars, greet each one, and maintain proper order and discipline while the school is assembling.

Another point which it is necessary to be alert upon is the danger of the meetings degenerating into merely a lecture by some individual who acts as leader. Do not permit this under any conditions; but use a judicious method of question and answer, so that weaknesses if they exist, may be detected and inaccuracies corrected. By this method a few words on the part of the leader will often accomplish more to bring about unity in the character of the teaching throughout the school than hours of connected lecturing which fail to reach the vital point of difficulty.

We believe that, in general, it will be

advantageous to adopt diversity in leadership and variety in the order of procedure. Study more of how the lesson shall be taught than of its geography, its history, or even of its spiritual application. Above all, learn to take the Sunday-school more seriously and realize that it has a definite place in the educational system of a country which has prohibited Bible-teaching in its public High Schools.

But the problem of more efficient teaching in our Sunday-schools is not to be solved by the holding of teachers' meetings for the study of the lesson for next Sunday. The individual schools must incorporate into their organization some system of teacher-training, which will have a wider outlook than such meetings can entertain. The best plan will be, we believe, to arrange for classes of adults not now teaching, the numbers need not necessarily be large, who will take up Hamill's "Legion of Honor" course of Bible and training lessons, as recommended by the Sabbath-school Association of Ontario, or some similar course of systematic study. The material for such classes ought to be easily obtainable in any live Sunday-school or Young People's Society. Moreover, these classes should meet at the same hour as the rest of the school, and be under the direction of some efficient teacher. In this way no additional demands will be made upon the time of those taking the course, neither will there be any further encroachments upon the home-life of our people; and, though the process may be slow, ultimately our Sunday-schools ought to have a staff of trained teachers who will compare favorably with those of the secular schools, a thing desirable in the extreme.

Toronto, Ont.

SINGING IN SUNDAY-SCHOOLS.

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IT is unnecessary to speak of the utility of singing in the Sunday-school. Its value in adding interest, variety, and inspiration to the services is so apparent as to be universally recognized; nor is the benefit of it confined to the school room, for how many, when surrounded by the stress and temptation of after life, have been strengthened by the sacred songs of their childhood days.

Singing is essential. How can it be made true, uplifting, energetic? A really good orchestra will be helpful, but this cannot be secured without much effort and considerable expense. A poor orchestra, under inferior leadership, (in more than one sense) a source of discord, as several schools have to their sorrow discovered. Some of the best and heartiest singing is heard where the only instrument used is a piano. A piano is more helpful than a reed organ; the notes are more distinct, the melody brighter and more inspiring than that produced by the wheezy, droning tones of the other instrument.

It is unfortunate that so many Sunday-school officials are unable to distinguish between poor music and good, or between

a mechanical player and one of real talent. The singing in some schools is dull, lifeless, and tiresome. The superintendent wonders why it is so, failing to see that the fault lies with the pianist; he plays correctly, and is, perhaps, a graduate of some well-known College of Music, but is no more a musician than the superintendent. Put a true artist in the position, one whose soul is in the work, and the change will be startling; lifelessness will disappear, scholars will be alert, and the gloom caused by a prosy address completely dispelled.

The pianist, to do his work properly, must have fire, enthusiasm, good judgment. To some extent these remarks apply to even that more important official, the leader; whether the singing be good or bad depends very largely on his qualifications. He must have a good voice (it is not absolutely necessary that he should be able to shout louder than any other member of the school, though it is painfully evident that some think so). He must have a fair knowledge of music, ability to entuse the scholars, to command their confidence and respect. To do this he must know what he attempts to teach and what he ought to teach. A good leader always chooses the hymns before going to school, and the hymns chosen always harmonize with and enforce the lessons of the day. Much valuable assistance may be had, and the general singing greatly aided, by stationing members, having good voices, in different parts of the school room, thus encouraging and energizing the scholars. This is a much better plan than having a regular choir; such an organization is liable to be a cause of confusion and trouble. All ordinary school singing should be in unison only. It should be impressed on scholars that in their singing they are addressing God, and that He must be approached with an understanding mind and reverent heart. How much levity is often apparent in this part of the school exercises! It is actually a fact that superintendents have been known to start a hymn simply to quell disorder. What benefit can be expected from singing under such circumstances? A short period of perfect quietness, a word or two of explanation before the hymn is sung, will help to make the service of real value and attraction.

Interest may also be added by introducing at intervals new tunes (to learn these a short practice could be had at the end of the school session). Most of the Sunday-school hymn books should be revised every three years, or often, as much of the music is light, and soon gets monotonous. Occasionally allow a scholar, having an exceptional voice, to sing the verses of the hymn, the school taking up the chorus, or let the boys and girls sing verses alternately, all joining in the chorus. No tunes should be used that are pitched higher than D or E flat. If this rule were strictly observed, much ridiculous and painful screeching would be avoided.

A great deal has been said of trashy tunes in Sunday-school hymn books. Difference of opinion will always exist as to what really is trashy. From a musician's standpoint much of our music is certainly of a low grade, yet it cannot be denied that many have derived an in-