

THE S. S. TEACHER A DEVOUT AND FREQUENT COMMUNICANT.

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The Sunday School Teacher occupies a most important and responsible position. It is almost impossible to over estimate either for weal or woe the influence which a teacher may exercise over the pliable natures of those young children with whom, Sunday after Sunday, he is brought into contact. To him is committed, under of course the direction and superintendence of the priest in charge, the spiritual guidance of the younger members of the flock of Christ at the most critical time of their lives,—the inculcating of heavenly truths which, if sown in earnest love and watered with incessant prayer, will undoubtedly grow and expand, and depending upon the blessing of Him who alone can give the increase, will eventually be the means of saving a soul alive. We cannot hide from ourselves the fact, humiliating and deplorable as the admission must be, that in far too many cases the only religious training the young ever get is that which is afforded them in the Sunday school. How important, therefore, that the one to whom this teaching falls should be well equipped for his work, and thoroughly imbued with a sense of the responsibility that rests upon him. Any mistake on his part, any negligence or lukewarmness, any perfunctory performance of his duties, may result in the temporal and eternal ruin of a soul, precious, indeed, in its immortality, and so beyond all price that the outpouring of the Blood of the Incarnate God was not deemed too great a sacrifice to purchase its redemption! As the responsibility, therefore, is great—and I do not think that responsibility can be overstated—great also should be the zeal and self-denying devotion of the Sunday School teacher. Surely, he should be one who in his own soul has drunk deeply out of the wells of salvation—one who has felt in his innermost being the attraction of the Saviour's Cross—one to whom, as a vital reality, and not merely as a figure of speech, Christ is precious. One who is imbued with a hearty desire to bring others to the Saviour he has found himself, and to do some little work for him while the working day of life shall last. A Sunday school teacher devoid of spirituality, who has no personal apprehension of the Blessed Saviour, is sure to be a failure—a failure with respect to the mere externals of his work, and, let me emphasize, worse than a failure considered from a religious point of view. A teacher who takes a class simply because a class is vacant and some one must take it, or else because over persuaded by the pastor and so to relieve him of anxiety, or worse still, solely out of love of being busied about parochial work, is, believe me, in a wrong, a false position, and such a one, depend upon it, is not likely to gain any moral influence over the young, nor to lead back a strayed lamb to the fold of the Good Shepherd. A successful teacher must, of necessity, be one who is thoroughly devoted to the work of Sunday school teaching. It is a work he undertakes out of pure love's sake, and from an earnest desire to make the lives of others better than they are! Yes! out of love to the Master—this first, this before all else,—and then, as a natural, an inevitable sequence, out of love to the dear children—those noisy, troublesome, refractory children, if you will,—because they are what they are,—the tender objects of the Good Shepherd's care, whose angels do always behold the face of the

Father of us all; such, dear fellow-workers, should be the all constraining principle of every teacher who would not work in vain in that particular portion of the Lord's vineyard of which we are speaking. The successful Sunday school teacher must be one full of deep and burning devotion to the Saviour's cause, one on whom the Gospel light has shone, and therefore one to whom comes in all its force the exhortation of the Messianic Prophet, 'Arise shine, for thy light is come.'

These remarks, it is true, are of a merely introductory nature, but they will not, I trust, be considered out of harmony either with the special subject upon which I have been requested to speak to you to-day, or with the cognate subjects upon which others are to speak when I have done. For, if my premises are right—and I do not think you will dispute them with me—if the Sunday school teacher should be one who is full of the spirit of God, one who has stood near the shadow of the Cross, and has caught if only a faint glimpse of that agonized yet all-loving face—one who undertakes the work of a Sunday school for the work's sake—then, surely, such an one will, by the very nature of the case, be ever forward in the refreshing and sustaining of his own spiritual life by those many means of grace which God, in his love, bestows upon us through the ministrations of His Church on earth. A teacher who is devoted to the ministering to the spiritual wants of others will not in his own person be neglectful of the means of grace. Chief among these is, of course, the Holy Communion, and thus this naturally claims our attention first as we speak to-day of Devotion as being the *sine qua non* of the successful Sunday school teacher.

The question, of course, may be asked,—though I trust it arises merely from the thoughtlessness of the moment—whether of necessity a Sunday School teacher should be a communicant? And when I speak of a communicant as bearing upon the subject under treatment I do not mean one who now and then, say two or three times in the course of the whole year, presents himself at the Lord's Table, but one who is a constant, regular, and frequent communicant! Should, therefore, a teacher in our Sunday school be a constant communicant? Those, at least, who know my teaching upon such a point as this will not be surprised to hear my answer in the affirmative. The fact is, I can scarcely understand any one given other than an affirmative answer to such a question who rightly appreciates the work of the Sunday school; and I do not anticipate any contrary opinion from the members of the Association before whom I have the privilege of speaking. One who is devoted to the fostering of the religious life in others can hardly, one would imagine, be otherwise than a diligent and frequent attendant upon that which is the chief means of spiritual life to the soul of man.

I. But, first of all, let me emphasize the position which I, along with others, take with reference to the matter in hand from what, to some at least, may appear to be very low ground indeed. Yet a word or two upon the point to which I am about to refer will, I trust, show that it is far from being an unimportant one. It must be borne in mind that I am dealing not with reference to Sunday school teachers in general, but to Sunday school teachers of the Church of England in particular! My subject refers to those who, in the Church of England, have been entrusted by their Pastor with the spiritual instruction of some of her little ones. The teacher, therefore, is, presumably, thoroughly imbued, and in accord with *The Church's teaching*. If not, he is in a wrong position, and the sooner he resigns the better for the Church, and the Church's little ones. A teacher, devoted to the spiritual instruction of the young in that special branch of Christ's Church in which his lot is cast, will not, one might reasonably conclude, be remiss in the

carrying out of those principles which he is bound to teach. He is an official of a Church which—in spite of her defects and lukewarmness—is nevertheless built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the head corner stone. That Church, coming down to us through the ages unconquered and unconquerable, has always laid the greatest stress of which she is capable upon that which we understand as the Sacramental system! Read her Liturgy, her Catechism, observe the abundant provision she has made for the frequent celebration of the Holy Eucharist—making it the chief act of worship on the Lord's Day and on all the special holydays of the Christian Year, see how she subordinates all her other services to this, the one ordained by Christ Himself—and you can scarcely do otherwise than acknowledge that she does consider essential and of primary importance the constant reception by her members of the Body and Blood of Christ! And, it is to her glory that she bases the spiritual life of her members upon the Sacramental system. In so doing, is not the Church's doctrine Bible truth? A devoted teacher, therefore, under such a system—one who is thoroughly in harmony with the Church of which he is an accredited teacher—will scarcely be other than a consistent and frequent partaker of the Holy Communion; not to be so is, let me again repeat, to be in a false position. A firm belief in the Christian Faith as taught by the whole Catholic Church, and loyalty to that presentation of it which is to be found in the formularies of the Church of England, should be the standpoint of every devoted teacher in her schools. And can this be where there is on the teacher's part a systematic neglect of that particular means of grace which, in no inconsiderable degree, is one of the salient points of demarcation between her and the sects around?

Moreover, it is, I think, an acknowledged fact that children are quick of observation, and they are not slow in detecting any inconsistency between the teacher who instructs, and the instruction given. As the official of a Church which thinks more of the service ordained by Christ Himself than of those services—beautiful and devotional though they be—which are of purely human origin, he must, of necessity, bring prominently forward the Church's teaching with respect to the Holy Communion. He cannot teach even the literal words of the Catechism without reminding his scholars that the Holy Sacrament is universally necessary to salvation; and that it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof. Can a teacher—one devoted to his work—give instruction such as this, and ignore it in his own person? I trow not! And, consider, is it not to the absence of this devotion—this thorough devotion to the Church teaching of which he is an exponent—that so many of our scholars never become communicants in after life? They have discerned the inconsistency of which I have spoken, and it does not lose its effect. They grow up with the pernicious notion that all this teaching is a sham, and it often takes years and years of patient prayerful work to undo the mischief that is done! I cannot do otherwise, therefore, than conclude that a devoted teacher in our Sunday schools will be ever a frequent and devout communicant, inasmuch as any custom to the contrary would place him in a false position, and anything approaching inconsistency is altogether incompatible with the whole soul devotion of which I am speaking.

II. But what I have said is, to a certain extent, merely of an objective nature, and there is another side to the subject under treatment. For, not only as a teacher in a Church which lays such stress upon the reception of the Holy Eucharist will he be a constant communicant,