

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR JANUARY.

JAN. 1st—Circumcision of our Lord. Proper Coll. Ep. and Gospel to serve till Epiphany.

" 5th—2nd Sunday after Christmas.

" 6th—EPIPHANY of our Lord.

" 12th—1st Sunday after the Epiphany.

" 19th—2nd Sunday after the Epiphany.

(Notice of the Conversion of St. Paul.)

" 25th—Conversion of St. Paul.

" 26th—3rd Sunday after the Epiphany.

(Notice of the Purification)

CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

BY THE HON. EDWARD PIERSON THEIGER, C.B.
IN THE ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE
FOR DECEMBER.

Rather more than a hundred years ago a pious layman of the city of Gloucester sowed a seed of which it may with truth be said, that when it had grown it became "greater than all herbs and shooteth out great branches." When we know that in Great Britain alone there are more than six million children in attendance at the Sunday-schools, that is to say one million in excess of the number of children attending in our day-schools, notwithstanding the fact that attendance at the former is voluntary while at the latter it is, or is supposed to be, compulsory; when we consider that Sunday after Sunday there are more than 600,000 men and women who without fee or reward cheerfully give their services as teachers of this vast body of children we may fairly say that no modern institution has made so rapid a progress in a few years as that of Sunday-schools. And the Sunday-school system has not been confined to Great Britain: in America, in Australia, in Canada, whenever indeed the English language is spoken, Sunday-schools have been established and flourished, so that it has been computed that throughout the world there cannot be less than one million five hundred thousand teachers and twelve million scholars; the seed has become a great tree and has shot out great branches which have filled the whole earth. I doubt whether Robert

Raikes, when he opened his first Sunday-school in St. Catherine street, Gloucester, with a staff of four teachers, realized what a tremendous work he was commencing. It is true no doubt that he did not intend to be satisfied, as others had been before him, with a mere isolated effort in his own city, and it is for this reason that we regard him, and rightly regard him, I think, as the founder of the Sunday-school system. Long before the time of Raikes, holy and earnest persons had been in the habit of gathering children together on the Lord's Day and giving them religious instruction. Individual efforts had been made from time to time by Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, Church of England clergymen and laymen to encourage a more devout observance of Sunday by collecting together the children in their districts to teach them the truths of the Gospel. Mr. Townshend Meyer who has carefully studied the early history of Sunday-schools gives the following striking description of some of the early pioneers of the movement:—

"A striking and dramatically contrasted group is made by these early founders of Sunday-schools. The Cardinal Archbishop of Milan (Cardinal Borromeo) a prince of the Roman Church, yet all his life 'the bold opponent of her enormous abuses' as severe in self-denial as munificent in charity; Alleine, the ascetic, tender-hearted Nonconformist the fire of whose zeal stimulated a weak body to fatal overwork; the beautiful, witty, accomplished, yet 'perverse' young widow, Mrs. Boevey, glittering in her white and silver raiment; the learned Unitarian enthusiast, Lindsey, long struggling between ties of family and associations which bound him to the Establishment as Vicar of Catterick, and chaplain to his godfather the Earl of Huntingdon, and stings of conscience which told him he was no longer her consistent servant; the quiet, gentle young Methodist, Hannah Ball, with her peaceful home and orderly ways; and lastly, old weaver Jemmy, toilbattered, shrewd and kindly, clattering his brazen pestle and mortar to call his troupe of ragged urchins about him—all in their several modes and districts paving the way for the good work to be done by the prosperous, practical, Gloucester printer, with the aid of his modest clerical colleague, the late Berkshire curate, and some time master of King's School in the cathedral city."

It would be easy to multiply the names of men and women who, before the time of Raikes, had been moved to gather together the children in their parish or neighborhood into what might very fairly be called a Sunday-school class in order to train them in religious knowledge; but the essential difference between these efforts and that of Robert Raikes consists in this, that all those who preceded him in the work were content with establishing schools in their own neighborhood and took no steps to induce others to adopt the system, while Raikes, not content with his own individual work in the city of Gloucester, took every opportunity of urging the adoption of the practice far and wide, and never ceased his advocacy till the scheme was generally adopted throughout the land. As has been well said by Mr. Alfred Gregory in his biography of Robert Raikes: "He raised Sunday teaching from a fortuitous rarity into a universal system. He found the practice local: he made it national." To effect this object he possessed singular advantages. His father was the proprietor of the *Gloucester Journal*, one of the oldest newspapers extant, and being a philanthropist as well as a journalist delighted to make his journal the organ of every good cause. The son, who became editor of the newspaper at the early age of twenty-two, made full use of these advantages. He used its pages to recommend his new scheme throughout the length and breadth of the land, and the movement, which had before only been heard of in a few remote villages or provincial towns, soon began to spread and establish itself

as an essential part of the parochial system. In attributing however to Mr. Raikes the credit of having created the Sunday-school system it would be unfair not to remark that he was greatly assisted in his work by a Church of England clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Stock, who was at that time head-master of the Gloucester Cathedral-school.

We should however be quite wrong if we were to regard the Sunday-schools which were established a century ago as analogous in all respects to those of the present day. Those were days when the blessings of compulsory education were unthought of, and when in many districts no provision whatever was made for any secular education at all; so that in estimating the work which Sunday-schools have achieved, we ought not to lose sight of the influence which they have exercised on the spread of primary education throughout England. It is no doubt true that the chief motive which influenced Raikes in establishing Sunday-schools in the city of Gloucester was pity for the degraded moral condition of the children of the poorer classes, and an earnest desire to bring religious influence to bear upon them to elevate them to a higher moral standard, but in doing this he must have found the secular knowledge of these children at so low a point that he was compelled to do something to strengthen their minds and intelligence if he were to have any hope of appealing successfully to their consciences. In addition therefore to the religious teaching which was given to the children as its main purpose, the imparting of a knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic, subjects now relegated to the Day-school, were regarded as a scarcely less important work of the Sunday-school. Another point in which the early Sunday school differed from those of the present day was that the services of the teachers were not given, as is almost, if not quite, without exception the case at the present time, gratuitously, but were rewarded by a small payment; and it will give some idea of the vastness of the organization of the Sunday-school system in these days to learn that it would require an income of £1,300,000 each year to pay the whole of the teachers engaged in the work, if they only received each of them the moderate remuneration of one shilling each Sunday for their services, as in the earliest days of the establishment of the system.

I feel that I shall not carry with me the concurrence of the most earnest advocates of the Sunday-school system when I say that it is, has always been, and still continues to be, my opinion, that in an ideal state of Church life, Sunday schools ought not to be a necessary part of parochial organization. If all parents, guardians, and god-parents did their duty, religious instruction would be imparted to the children in their own homes, and there would be no idea of delegating this responsibility to others.

Sunday-schools are, then, in my opinion, only a substitute for home teaching. The question is perhaps only of academic interest, for it must be admitted that these responsibilities are even among what are called the upper classes, very generally neglected, and among the poorer classes, possibly to a great extent owing to the existence of Sunday-schools, almost wholly ignored. The main purpose then of Sunday-schools is to take the place of the parent, and in the words of the Baptismal Service to see that the children "be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life," and "be taught what a solemn vow promise and profession," they made through their god-parents at their baptism. It will be seen, that from my point of view, though the Sunday-school fulfils duties which might and should be performed by the parent, it does not in any way usurp the functions of the parish clergyman. He has a responsibility in regard to the children of his congregation as well as towards its adult mem-