

Sabbath-School Conventions ;

THEIR IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTS, AND THE BEST MODE OF CONDUCTING THEM.

BY REV. JOHN WOOD.

Being the Essay to which was awarded the Second Prize, at the Provincial Sabbath-School Convention of 1867.

It must be obvious to the most casual observer, that the capabilities of the Sabbath-School, as an institution for the moral and religious training of the young are as yet far from being fully developed. Taking even the best specimens that can be found, we shall probably discover, upon a close inspection of them, many things lacking, and some things perhaps positively bad and prejudicial in their management and modes of instruction. Some of these must undoubtedly be set down as inseparable from our fallen humanity,—evils to be endured, since they cannot be cured—but others of them are curable, and are perpetuated only because of the inexperience, inaptitude, or indifference of those who conduct them.

These evils need neither surprise nor discourage us. Looked at as a whole, there is no department of Christian effort that is better or more vigorously conducted than this. The work is a purely voluntary one,—a labour of faith and love. Unlike that of secular education, it is not a profession, commanding all the time and energies of those adopting it, and remunerating them with an honorable livelihood. It is performed chiefly by those who all the week long are engaged in other avocations, and often have neither the time nor the helps necessary to fit them as thoroughly as is desirable for so important a work. To a very large extent it devolves upon the younger portion of the Church, for the reason that they are generally both more at liberty and more willing to engage in it than those more advanced in years. But youth, while usually noted for zeal, and that lively sympathy for the young which is so valuable a qualification in a teacher, is also characterized by inexperience, and sometimes by instability—defects which exhibit themselves in a variety of ways—in irregularity, or unpunctuality of attendance, in a lack of acquaintance with Scripture truth, or with the best methods of teaching it, in the absence of proper self-control, or control of the class, &c., all of which tend to mar the work, and diminish the prospect of success.

These, however, are not insuperable evils, and it should be the earnest endeavour of every friend of the Sabbath-School to remove them, and in no way is this more likely to be done than by bringing to bear upon our work the combined experience, wisdom and piety of those who have been longest and most successfully engaged in it,—in other words, by an occasional conference of the leading spirits of the enterprise. Our Provincial Conventions, and the County Associations which have sprung out of them, (as yet, we are sorry to say, comparatively few), have already proved of great service in awakening a new interest in its behalf, and it is the writer's earnest desire to see as it is mainly the purpose of this essay to promote, the organization of such Associations all over this New Dominion.

Keeping this design in view, we shall endeavour to show :

I.—THEIR IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTS.

It is characteristic of the age in which we live, that almost every moral and