

haps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of. Who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?"

How true have these surmises proved. In a letter to a friend in Chester, England, dated June 17, 1787, he says, "I am glad you have taken in hand that blessed work of setting up Sunday schools in Chester. It seems these will be one great means of reviving religion throughout the nation. I wonder Satan has not yet sent out some able champion against them."

How unmolestedly and with what efficiency can Christians at the present day labor in these nurseries for the Church! This field seems to be yielded to the saints. O! let not their quiet render them supine, but because there is one spot where they may put forth all their might without opposition, let them cultivate it to the greatest perfection.

One very interesting fact connected with the history of sabbath schools is, that their operation gave rise to the British and Foreign Bible Society—one of the noblest of Christian associations. Owing to the demand for Testaments to supply the Welsh schools, Rev. Joseph Hughes proposed the establishment of a fund for printing and distributing the holy Scriptures. This was the germ of that blessed association.

It seems that sabbath schools were formed in our country as early as the year 1790. The American Encyclopædia indeed states that, "in this country the first sabbath schools were opened in New York in 1816." This was probably the time of their introduction into New York; but from the following evidence we shall be led to assign a much earlier period for their introduction into some parts of our country.

The Union Annual for 1837, and a pamphlet called the Charter, &c. both published by the American Sunday School Union, state that, in the year 1790, measures were taken to establish Sunday schools in Philadelphia. The Annual states that it was in December, 1790, that their establishment was decided upon. As a consequence of this decision, the First Day or Sunday School Society, which was finally superseded by the American Sunday School Unions, was formed in the city of Philadelphia in 1791, and the first school was opened in the month of March in the same year.

We learn from the Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, late bishop of the M. E. Church, that a decisive step in the establishment of sabbath schools in our country was made still earlier than the date just mentioned. From his journal for February 17, 1790, it appears that the South Carolina Conference of the M. E. Church, during its session in the city of Charleston, "resolved on establishing Sunday schools for poor children, white and black." And from the incidental manner in which these schools are spoken of in this place, it would seem that they had existed in this country some time before.

Robert May, who had been a scholar in one of the London sabbath schools, is said to have introduced the plan of gratuitous instruction into this country, by establishing a school on this system in the Northern Liberties of Philadelphia, in 1811. It is stated, however, that a free school existed in Pittsburgh in the year 1809.

It is probable that regular sabbath schools were introduced into New England some time about the year 1816. But the earliest effort of sabbath school instruction in New England, within my knowledge, was made by a now aged Christian woman in Dedham, Massachusetts, about thirty-two years ago. She formed a small school of her own accord, not influenced by examples around her, for there were none, but by her own intense interest in the welfare of the young. She pursued her own method of instruction, and found her labor not altogether fruitless.

The exact number of persons connected with sabbath schools I have no means of ascertaining; but I shall be safe in saying that more than two millions of

children and youth are members of these schools; a million of whom are found in the sabbath schools of our own land.

PRIMITIVE SERMONS.

THE public addresses delivered by the pastors of the early churches were usually called Sermons or Orations; but they differed considerably, both in form and in structure, from the greater portion of modern pulpit discourses. Nearly all public Christian instruction consisted simply in the reading and the expounding of the scriptures. Before the pastor stood up to teach, a section of the divine Word embracing as much as two, three, or four of our modern caputular divisions, was read to the assembly. This was termed 'the lesson'; it was emphatically the instruction of the hour, and was regarded by pastor and people as 'the portion of meat,' to receive which the latter had assembled. The minister's duty, as a man appointed to 'feed' souls, consisted simply in apportioning and distributing this divine-prepared fare—in removing the exterior crusts which encased it, in separating its gentler from its more powerful parts, its 'milk for babes' from its 'strong meat for those who are of full age,' and in 'dividing,' accordingly with the respective conditions of the various classes and individuals of his flock, 'to every man his portion of it in due season.' A pastor's discourse was, consequently, a simple exposition of the section of scripture which had been read, interspersed or followed by suitable appeals to the characters and the hearts of his hearers. Origen, who wrote early in the third century, calls the sermons of ministers, 'Explanations of the Lessons;' and Justin Martyr, who wrote about the year 155, says, "The reader of the scriptures having ceased, the president (or pastor) made a sermon by way of giving instruction as to the excellent things which had been read, and of holding them up to imitation." Origen's own sermons, or homilies, which have come down to modern times, are all—as appears both from the excursiveness of their topics, and from several incidental intimations—discourses originally spoken in exposition of the routine or ordinary 'lessons.'

If Origen's may be regarded as a specimen, the primitive Sermons resembled very much, as to structure and method, the modern Expository Lecture. The preacher commenced with an exordium; he then verse by verse, or sentence by sentence, explained 'the lesson,' or text, first as to the import of its language, and next as its mystical meaning and its moral lessons; and he concluded by a formal application of the truths which he had discussed to the consciences of his hearers. When his text was too long or too replete with matter to be all advantageously expounded, he noticed only such portions throughout it as were of chief importance, or made selection of one small consecutive part. Origen has, for one text, Jer. xv. 10—xvii. 5, and for another, he has 1 Sam. xxv. 1—xxviii. 25; and in discussing the latter, he says, "It contains too many matters to be treated at once, so that a few things may be advanced on each, and he will discourse on those only which relate to the witch of Endor." From what he adds in this connexion, we might, probably, without rashness, infer this curious and not uninteresting fact, that the primitive discourses usually extended in delivery to about an hour: he says, "If he should treat every part of the subject, he must occupy not only the one hour of their assembly, but several."

Great care seems to have been used by the primitive preachers to render their discourses practical, and to adapt them to the capacities, attainments, and spiritual condition of their audience. A judicious modern who reads such specimens of their pious oratory as have been preserved, may frequently lament their paucity of doctrinal statement, or their

confuse
seldom
appeal,
knowle
may
Martyr
says, "t
tion a
read, an
says, "t
they di
gospel
ledge
with the
myster
The
Lectur
ought
in dist
the ta
Expos
dation
the w
listen
could
from
trine,
could
'sear
with
Lord
God's
way
excel
havin
emph
and
with
ly fu
thod
and
appe
'feed
succ
expr
pulp
truly
quot
the
by c
prim
ediff
'part