

## EASTER VESTRIES.

*The Church Year*, of Jacksonville Fla., says that having no parish or diocesan relations it can say for the clergy, and the best interests of their flocks what, otherwise, it could not say. Anyway, it is thoroughly independent of individual considerations, speaks its mind and it proceeds thus: As Lent draws to its close, and the blessed festival of Easter approaches, there is a heavy burden on the heart of most of our clergy. Unfortunately, the election of vestries is fixed for Easter-Monday. So, on that day, all the *aggrieved and disgruntled* parishioners whatever their grievance be, count for an opportunity to make a bed of thorns for their rector, who in his contest with the world, the flesh, and the devil, has hurt the feelings of some sensitive soul, bent on subservience to one or two, or all of these. Though all the blessed Lenten season, the rector has been striving for the spiritual advancement of his people. The draught upon his nervous system, from increased services, and pastoral duty, is more intense and exhausting, than any layman can either know, or appreciate. He comes to the close of the Lenten season, spiritually improved, it may be, but mentally and physically depressed, wearied and exhausted. A sort of nightmare has been upon him, for weeks, as he thinks of the possible, and sometimes probable, trouble which has been brewing, looking towards the annual election of Easter as its sure opportunity for an outlet. He feels that there is always the possibility of a minor revolution, at this time, which may turn the whole gentle Lenten current into gall, or, at best, change the entire working system of the parish, so as to hamper progress for the Church, and increase the, already sufficient, burden of his own cares and toils. To many a rector, ardent and true, the vestry system is a hindrance. But rarely are its members inclined to take hold of active and progressive work for the extension of the Church; generally very much disposed to criticize their rector, and use their position rather to depress than to elevate his energies, in the work to which they have called him. There are many such rectors, who would thank God, for a speedy return to the ancient and true position of the Church, making the appointment of the clergy by the Bishop, and fixing *their responsibility for their work to him, and not to a corporation of laymen*, most ignorant of doctrine and usage, absorbed in secular business, and, when intent on Church duties, more disposed to dwell upon what might have been, or ought to be, than on their solemn duty to follow their rector as their chosen leader, strengthen his hands, and invigorate him for work. Let brethren of the laity seriously consider these thoughts, try to keep that Easter-Monday skeleton out of their rectory, and study to add the power of their loving inspiration to the endorsement of their rector's faithful service. As it is, the parish meeting after Easter, is a heavy wet blanket, upon the promise of Lent's devotional services, and the men who have taken little part in these devotions, come to the front, to ventilate some fancied grievance, and strive for prominence, not so much as devout earnest minded servants of God, but as the critics of their pastor, and for the gratification of their own sweet wills.

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There are many vestrymen who are seen at church at only one service in a week, and who, in defiance of the Church's authority, attend, with their families, theatres, balls and other places of amusement even in the season of Lent. In an officer of the Church this is destructive of the Church's character, influence and power, among the people. It strips the Bishop of his jurisdiction over the diocese, in a large degree; it reduces the Church's order to pure congregationalism, and assumes controlling power

over priestly character, and the priestly office, while its members, delinquent or deficient in duty, often exist as stumbling blocks, who, nevertheless, have to be considered and consulted, before any onward movement for Christ's Kingdom in the community can be attempted.

## WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH OUR SUNDAY-SCHOOLS?

(Bishop Gillespie in the American Church S. S. Magazine).

What is the matter with our Sunday-schools? From two classes of persons we may expect a very ready response, that there is nothing the matter with our Sunday-schools—those who have never given much thought to Sunday-school work, and those who know the Sunday-school only in its best estate. The one class will say, "The children of our parish meet every Sunday; they are taught the Catechism and the Bible, and they have their Christmas and Easter festivals, and we do not see how you could improve on this." The other will give us the figures of their parochial and mission schools—the scholars in attendance, the teachers, the contributions, and wish we could hear their singing, and ask, "Is anything the matter here?"

And yet the question remains, What is the matter with our Sunday-schools? Let the conversation in the formal or informal clerical gathering turn on Church work with the children, and the tone will be of anxiety and discouragement; and the able reports that are constantly coming from conventions, and even the language in Episcopal addresses, warrant our question. As we proceed we may vindicate what may seem an unkind, or even unjust complaint.

The great difficulty, as it seems to us, with our Sunday schools is that the Church has never heartily accepted the Sunday-school system. Historically, in England and in this country, we are related to the Institution. But where in Canon, to say nothing of the Prayer Book, shall we find any mention of the Sunday-school?

It is not the Church's system; and hence, although we have had, and have, strong champions of the Sunday-school, and men who have worked their schools into deserved notoriety, and men who are known as great Sunday-school workers and writers, the Sunday-school with us is not the power it is in Christian bodies about us. They generally have no system of Christian culture for their youth, and hence they take hold of the Sunday work, and they develop it not only in numbers but in efficiency. The organization and the work is thorough, Sunday-school conventions, and even county and town organizations, are common, and they gather the best talents, clerical and lay. The same is characteristic of their Sunday-schools. They bring into them the adult as well as the youthful part of the flock, and their prominent people, in the best sense, are the officers and instructors.

Again, there is this the matter with our Sunday-schools—that we have not settled down to any system of instruction. Some Rectors are very pronounced that the instruction should be entirely with the Catechism or Prayer Book. Others would make the study almost entirely Biblical, probably with leaflets. The result is, our apparatus is imperfect. The helps to leaflet study are ample; the pages of the *Church Sunday-school Magazine* witness this; but the aids to Catechism study are scattered, and not at hand for the ordinary teacher. So a teachers' meeting does not elicit interest because the lesson studied is not that of the whole school. Anyone who has examined the International Series, with its annual

volumes for different denominations, and its leaflets for various ages and abilities, will see the force of what we state. There is great power in this uniformity.

One other difficulty with our Sunday-schools is that any provision for Sunday-school comfort and convenience rarely enters into the erection of our ordinary churches. Sunday-school or class-rooms are luxuries of city churches. Our poor teachers have to do the best they can with their children in ordinary pews. How often we have pitied them in their uneasy postures; how impossible to keep the attention of the class under such untoward circumstances.

We have one recommendation that it seems to us would meet a difficulty which is common to all Sunday-schools—the unfitness of teachers. In this we include irregularity, lack of dignity, of tact, of intelligence, and especially of teaching ability.

A Sunday-school is a beautiful sight at a distance; but let one who appreciates the work that should be done here pass slowly down the aisles, and he will find—here a class unsupplied; here a class, teacher and scholars, with book or leaflet in hand, one reading the questions and one the answers, and so the lesson being gone over; here a teacher reading some book or paper to her class; her instructions suspended, the scholars in lively conversation among themselves, and perhaps teachers availing of their proximity of seats for their converse. Again, a teacher hearing a class of ten or more one by one, the rest meanwhile as far from any instruction as though they were sitting on the Church steps. This is Sunday school work almost everywhere.

Now for the remedy. We propose, instead of the ordinary Sunday-school class of from six to twelve, sections or groups, according to the capacities of the scholars, and each of them under the charge of some earnest, intelligent man or woman who meets the requirements of a Christian teacher. Our usual Sunday-school arrangement proceeds on a false assumption that almost anyone can teach. If "where there's a will there's a way," it is often a very poor way, as the graduates of the Sunday-school when they come for confirmation examination show.

We are aware of difficulties and read objections to what we have alluded to. The want of Sunday-school rooms may seem insuperable; yet even in a small church groups may be so disposed that there will be sufficient space between them.

Again, it may be said: but this will turn out a number of teachers. Then let them be formed into a class where they may be fitted for the work, so that there shall always be a resource in vacancy. Or some of those persons who have a mind to work may be employed as officers, or monitors, or visitors.

The Rev. A. F. Washburne, in the *Churchman* of January 19th, 1889, has set forth the present difficulties in the Sunday-schools far better than is done in this paper. His solution is—paid teachers. We hope not. Is the Church so poor in interest, in zeal, in godliness, in all that makes the very life of the Church, that she can tend her lambs only with hirelings? At least let us first dare to start aside from old ways, and put the Sunday-school in position, and lay down a law of instruction, and give the school a proper abiding place, and gather the truest and the best from our communion bands, and then say to them, "Feed my lambs."

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