

THE PLACE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THE CHURCH.

BY THE REV. J. D. HERRON IN "THE LIVING CHURCH."

About two years ago I wrote a letter to *The Living Church*, in answer to an objection to the Sunday school as a part of the machinery of the Church. The correspondent, whose objection called forth my letter, claimed that the Sunday school, as generally conducted, was an impediment rather than a help in the extension of Christ's kingdom, in that, instead of encouraging Church attendance on the part of the children, it made them indifferent to the regular services of the Church.

This conclusion was reached, through inductive reasoning, by asserting that in very many instances this was the condition, and then by generalizing from this premise that the Sunday school is an impediment and a failure. My letter in reply aroused such a widespread interest, and I received so many notes of inquiry from all parts of the country, both from rectors of large parishes and from women in struggling missions, that I resolved in due time to write more fully of the Sunday school system to which I then referred, and which has clearly proved that the Sunday school, as an auxiliary to the Church, need not be a failure.

To substantiate my position I was obliged to refer to my own work; and to explain the system and prove its success, I shall be under the same necessity now. This, I trust, will be a sufficient apology for any apparent self-assertion.

I will lay down three propositions: The Church does not recognize the Sunday school as an institution. Both by rubric and by canon the children of a parish are placed under the direct supervision and tutelage of the minister.

The instruction which the minister is in duty bound to give to them is simply and solely the catechism, and the doctrine, constitution, and liturgy of the Church. (Title I, Canon 21.)

The duty of Church attendance is laid upon the children in the office of Baptism, in the words: "Ye shall call upon him to hear sermons."

A Sunday school which is founded upon these principles and which fulfills these duties will, of necessity, be successful in accomplishing the purpose which the Church demands, the extension and the building up of Christ's kingdom upon earth. A Sunday school which is not so founded, and which does not so work, will be a failure, and very likely an impediment to the work of the rector of the parish. The problem to be solved is, how to bring the Sunday school, as at present constituted, upon this basis and within these lines of operation. There are two plans. The first is for the rector boldly to assert his prerogative, to disband his Sunday school, to reorganize it as a Church-instruction class, and to teach it himself. The second is to keep the Sunday school organization intact, and by the application of "machinery," to move it gradually upon this basis and within these lines.

It is simply a question of tearing down your house and building it over again; or of applying hydraulic jacks and rollers and moving it wherever you want it. I take it that if the problem is to be solved at all, the latter is the only practical plan. What machinery can accomplish this end? In the first place, a few impediments must be cleared away.

I have before me a book entitled "The Sunday School Prayer Book." It was published thirty years ago, with the recommendations of seventeen Bishops of the Church. The learned editor in his preface used these words: "The children practically form a congregation by

themselves, with a worship and teaching of their own. They need, therefore, a Prayer Book of their own—not by any means, a substitute for the great manual (any more than attendance at Sunday school is a substitute for attendance at church), but rather as an introduction to it—a sort of primer prayer book, so closely resembling it in form and arrangement as to engage their interest and affection, and yet so childlike in character as to be out-grown with childhood."

With all due deference to the superior learning of the editor, I submit that the principle which these latter words embody is false and pernicious. While the Sunday School Prayer Book did not fulfill the happy anticipation of its sponsors, the false principle upon which its use was founded has become more or less rooted in the Sunday school, and is one element of its failure to accomplish its true end.

If the children "form a congregation by themselves, with a worship and teaching of their own," it is neither by the authority of the Church nor by the demand of the children. It comes to pass only by the selfishness, or the thoughtlessness, or the carelessness, or the ignorance, or the stupidity of parents, governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters.

If they need a worship of their own, the Church is wrong in demanding that they shall be taught the worship of the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments. If they need a teaching of their own, the Church is wrong in ordering that they shall be brought to "hear sermons," since the only sermon of which the Prayer Book takes note is the sermon at Holy Communion; and also wrong in her canonical provision for their instruction.

Therefore, since the Church has provided no "primer prayer book," and since she has ordered that the Prayer Book shall be the manual of instruction for the children, two impediments must be cleared away:

First, all lengthened forms of service adapted from the Prayer Book. The Sunday school does not assemble for worship but for instruction; and the only authorized worship is that of the Prayer Book, rubrically rendered. Anything which would make the Sunday school seem like a "children's church" must operate against an attendance upon the divine ordinances.

Second, all instruction which is not based upon, and which does not illustrate, the doctrine, constitution, and liturgy of the Church, of which the Prayer Book is the compendium. To make Sunday school instruction effective for the end in view, it must create a hunger for the service of the Church which precedes or follows. As the keynote of this instruction, the children must be impressed with the fact that they are members of the Sunday School only as they are members of the Church, and that they have the same right to own a Prayer Book and to take their place in the Church service, from the opening Sentences to the Benediction, as any adult member.

With these impediments swept away, the machinery can be applied. There are two ends in view: First, to secure a regular and prompt attendance at the school instruction. Second, to secure the attendance of the scholars at the service of the Church. For the accomplishment of this, the first machinery is a system of awards. Here an objection is made, that children ought not to be paid for doing their duty. But one who has learned the difference between the burnt-offering and the peace-offering, and who knows that Christ was both, that He did the Father's will simply because it was the Father's will, and at the same time had a motive for so doing—even "the joy that was set before Him"—would not make such an objection. Objections have been made to the Gospel morality, that it is not perfect, since at every step rewards are offered; and of no dif-

ferent kind is the objection to Sunday school awards. But an award differs from a prize. It is not something given to the best scholar, but to every scholar who reaches a certain standard.

This system requires a careful record of attendance, behavior, and lessons, for the Sunday school, and a record of attendance for the Church service. Then at the Christmas festival the awards are given; first for Church attendance, and second for meritorious work in the Sunday school.

A powerful incentive to the children is an honor roll, published either monthly or quarterly, with the names of those who have been regular and prompt at church and Sunday school. Published quarterly it can come within the means of any Sunday school, as the increased attendance will increase the contributions. Then, with a scholar's record card of attendance, to be punched with early and late punch marks, the machinery is complete.

I would not speak so confidently of these principles and methods of Sunday school work if they were not all in successful operation in the parish under my charge. And the "proof of the pudding" is, after all, what the people want. I will be pardoned, then, if I give a short account of the work as it is in actual progress:

The school assembles at 9.30 a.m., and each scholar brings a card of attendance. Each scholar has a number, and this number is kept by the registrar, by the librarian, and by the teachers, on their class-books or class-cards. The school is opened with the Creed, the Ten Commandments or the Duties, or some other portion of the Catechism, set to music and sung by the children, and then the Lord's Prayer and the Collect. All these form a part of the instruction. Then the classes are formed and forty minutes are given to instruction. Then all three departments re-assemble together, and the superintendent gives the report of attendance and contributions. Then the school closes with a short service.

The close of the school is timed so that the teachers and scholars can be in their seats for the Church services when the processional begins. Two records are kept of church attendance; one by the scholar on his record card, and one by the registrar. The registrar's record is made from little tickets which the teachers give out to their classes, and which the scholars give up as they go out of the church.

What is the result? From the roll of honor for this year's first quarter, I quote: Scholars enrolled, 130; average attendance, 86.

It is only right that I should state that the Sunday school methods which I have employed during my eleven years' ministry here are an application of those which I learned in St. Augustine's chapel, Trinity parish, New York, under the Rev. Dr. Kimber.

I do not know what need there is of a children's Church or a Sunday school Prayer Book, when any Sunday I can look down and see the eight-year-old daughter of my senior warden, with her Prayer Book open, taking her place as "the child of God," and a ministering priest in His holy service.

If you know the love of Christ, His is the latest Name you will desire to utter: His is the latest thought you will desire to form; upon Him you will fix your last look upon earth, upon Him your first in Heaven.

You

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