

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

ECONOMY OF TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL WORK.

In an address delivered at the International Sunday School Convention, at Atlanta, John H. Vincent, D.D., while advocating the use of "Supplemental Lessons" in conjunction with the lessons of the International Series, draws a sharp contrast between two imaginary but representative Sabbath Schools, with reference to the waste or utilization of time. From the address, as reported in the "Sunday School Times," we take the following:

Another objection is, we have not the time in our Sunday school session. I will give my answer to that. As an old lady once said, "We have all the time there is;" and a little economy of time will enable us to do a great many things in a Sunday school that we don't do now. To emphasize this, let me draw two pictures of two Sunday schools. One of them is located in New Jersey. The school hour, we will say, is half-past two o'clock in the afternoon. The superintendent is always there about seven to ten minutes after the time of opening, instead of being there seven to ten minutes before. Taking his place on the platform, he fumbles around for the hymn book, and says to the chorister, "What shall we sing?" and the chorister gives out a hymn with sixteen verses. He likes to sing, and he likes to lead, and to sing all the verses there are. So he gives out sixteen verses, and the organist is delighted with the opportunity it gives him for preludes and interludes. I suppose my musical taste is not fully developed, but oh, what a horror I have of interludes when the organist breaks off the current of song to go into a caper of some sort! When they have gone through the sixteen verses, with the preludes, and interludes, and afterludes, why, of course, all this has taken time. Then the superintendent has a responsive reading, and then he prays—and prays a very long prayer; one of those general prayers—a "protracted" prayer. That superintendent once invited a stranger to offer prayer in his Sunday school. The brother prayed a long time; and after he had finished the superintendent said, with the greatest simplicity, "Children, as so much time has run to waste, we will omit the singing." The superintendent then says to his chorister, "Could not we have another song?" Of course we could! Fourteen verses more are sung, and played, interludes and all. Then, running his eye over the room, the superintendent remarks, "I think I see Brother So-and-so over there, editor of the Sunday School So-and-so from Chicago, or New York. We would be very glad to have a few remarks from him." Or he says, "There is Brother So-and-so, a live Sunday school worker—an insurance agent! He loves to talk to little children. Please come forward, brother, and give us a few remarks." Perhaps the speech may be omitted, but what with the delay at the beginning in opening the school, the long hymn, and the long responsive reading, and the longer prayer, followed by another long hymn and another prayer, and the calling to order, by the time the lesson study commences it is just thirty-seven minutes after the time when the school should have been called to order. And when the air of the basement in which the Sunday school meets has been breathed over and over again—for the ventilation is poor—(one of the board of stewards told a member to whisper to the sexton to "shut them windows" for it costs too much to let in fresh air, and they must save the heat,) and they have got in that room several layers of atmosphere that were left over from two or three revival meetings, there is little teaching power left. Do you wonder that when that good woman has been five and a half hours, by actual count, engaged upon the preparation of her lesson last week (for she has been in the convention and heard that the Sunday school teacher should always study the lesson thoroughly, and with prayer, and has conscientiously and prayerfully prepared that lesson,) that she is discouraged in her work? But now she opens her book at the lesson and begins to teach. Just then, along comes the superintendent, and without any preliminary says to her, "I wonder if I couldn't get Miss A from your class, to teach, this afternoon? Six teachers are absent, and I must have their classes supplied. Let me have one or two of your girls." And when she has prepared that lesson with special reference to those particular members of her class, what wonder again

that she is thoroughly disheartened. She begins again. Along comes the secretary, bowing and smiling,—and he always stays longer on one side of the room than the other,—and, poor woman; she has little heart left. But she tries again, when along comes the minister, who has neglected some part of his pastoral work during the week, and he wants now to make up for it by being specially sociable with her class, and, shaking hands with each of her girls, wants to know how mother and sister and all at home are; whether Johnnie has got over his scarlet fever. This interruption over, almost despairing, the teacher tries again, but alas! the librarian! (They haven't yet abandoned the barbarous custom of spilling the books down into the classes during the lesson hour.) Says he: "Miss Mary Jane, did you mean to put down on your card 279 or 277? I could not make it out." When that seven-by-nine fellow is gone, along comes the missionary collector, or some other "heathen," to see how much money they have for the "objects." Poor teacher! What wonder that she says to herself, "It is so discouraging! I cannot do much work here. If I only could have my class alone! But they all interrupt me. The minister interrupts me, and the visitor interrupts me, and the superintendent interrupts me, and the secretary and the treasurer interrupt me. Oh, I wish they would let me alone with my scholars!" So after a while the thirty minutes have passed by, and the superintendent rings the bell or raps on the desk. It is six or seven minutes from the time when the school ought to have closed. The minister then rises, and addressing the superintendent, says, "I should like to catechise the school to-day." But the superintendent in a whisper says, "My dear brother, we have not got time to-day; besides, the teachers are tired; and then Mr. So-and-so is here, and I did want him to make a few remarks!" But I think teachers and scholars prefer that he should not, and very soon they dismiss the school. Now you know there are some very intelligent scholars, and some very cultivated laymen among the teachers, who ask, notwithstanding all the advancement and all the beauties and benefits of our Sunday school system, "What is the use of that institution?" And I echo their question; and I frankly confess to you, I do not see the use of that institution!

Now let me draw another picture. It is of a school in the state of New Jersey. The superintendent is always there ten minutes before the time of opening, to see that the room is properly ventilated, and to educate the sexton if he needs it; to greet the teachers when they come. He has a secret compact with his teachers, born of the most tender and affectionate regard between them, and of the most earnest purpose on their heart always to do their best in conjunction with him for the promotion of the interests of the school. They always, yielding to his example and wishes, come a little in advance of the time for opening to greet their pupils. The example and influence of the superintendent tell on the teachers, and these in their turn tell on the pupils, and they are always there on time. On the top of the second he calls the school to order; and when he calls his school to order, the order is as perfect and beautiful as those pupils are acquainted with in the finest secular schools that they attend; and, believe me, when a young pupil finds in the Sunday school less discipline and order and propriety than he is familiar with in the secular schools five days of the week, there inevitably grows up a little feeling of contempt in his heart. When perfect stillness reigns, the superintendent says, "Let us pray." And when he prays he has something to ask for, and he asks it. He asks largely in few words. In a minute and a half he offers the opening prayer. A Scotch pastor in Ontario once called my attention to a prayer written on the fly-leaf of Dr. Bethune's Bible, that is so beautiful and expressive that I am tempted to quote it now. This is it: "O God! pardon what I have been; sanctify what I am; order what I shall be; and thine shall be the glory, and mine the eternal salvation, through Jesus Christ my Lord!" Let superintendents remember that a prayer of a minute may be worth more to one hundred or five hundred Sunday school pupils than a five-minute prayer; and by earnestness and condensation they make a very short and effective prayer at the opening of their schools. "Now," says the superintendent, "let us sing the second verse of the hymn on the lesson leaf," or in the book, if they use a book of praise. They sing two verses. "We sing them," he says, "because they bear on the lesson of the day."

Then they have the roll-call of teachers. The teachers stand up at the calling of their names, and show their pupils by their actions that they respect the authority of the desk. On the call of the roll the teachers who are present remain standing. Two teachers are absent. The superintendent says: "Let those classes whose teachers are absent, rise." Class number ten and class number fourteen rise in their places. "We shall want aid to-day, my brethren," he says to the teachers. "Mr. H, Can you give me a teacher for class number ten? Mr. B, can you furnish one for class number fourteen?" Thus this matter is settled before they go to work; and whenever a teacher feels that the *onus* is thus put upon him, you may be sure there will be few teachers absent, and those who are compelled to be away will furnish substitutes. We want more conscience on the part of Sunday school teachers in this matter of punctuality. By wisdom, by firmness, and by kindness, this superintendent succeeds. Now he says, "Let us pray again." He asks God's blessing on the school. In less than seven minutes from the time that school was called to order, all the classes are in their places, engaged in the hardest work of the day,—the study of the lesson. That is the true idea; let us do the heavy work first, while teachers and scholars are fresh and vigorous in mind and body. And now, *let nobody touch the teacher!* neither pastor, nor superintendent, nor visitor, nor secretary, nor librarian, nor treasurer. Each teacher in that well-ordered school says: "My blessed superintendent gives me such a good chance at the lesson!" and, depend upon it, the teacher who knows that he is sure to have thirty minutes' uninterrupted talk with his scholars will be more likely to make preparation than the teacher who is not sure of having any time at all. An old lady travelling in Europe, who had more money than culture, when asked how she got along without understanding the languages replied: "Get along? Why, I didn't have any trouble at all; we had an *interrupter* with us all the time." Sunday school number one has an *interrupter*—or a half a dozen of them—all the time. This Sunday school gives attention to its work, and does its work well. Thirty-seven minutes have passed, and the heavy work of the day is almost over. Now the superintendent, or the pastor, or the most capable man, undertakes the work of review, and the public review under such circumstances is a delight and a profit; and by the time eight or ten minutes have been given to the review, forty-seven minutes are gone by, and all the heavy work of the day is over—three-quarters of an hour spent with the lesson exclusively!

DESIGN IN NATURE.

The most recent attitude of natural science and of many investigators to the question of the origin and sequence of natural phenomena, has been that of denying the existence of any intelligent cause or design in the works of nature. The tendency of evolution at first sight appears to be thoroughly in opposition to the idea that any natural contrivance or structure in animals or plants was formed for the express purpose of serving a particular end. Maintaining that "secondary" causes alone are appreciated by the human understanding, many scientists content themselves with teaching the doctrine that the action of the world upon the living form, and the reaction in turn of the living being upon the world, are together competent to produce all the adaptations of structure necessary for the wants of its existence. According to the idea which was held by Goethe, and which unquestionably involves a great, but not the whole truth, the parts and structures of animals and plants appear as the result of a constant law of adaptation. The living organism is regarded as being moulded and formed by the outward circumstances of its life. Harmonious adjustment to its place or situation in nature forms, it is true, the predominant law and rule in the life of every animal and plant; and could no higher law be shown to operate, the question of design or no design might very well be put out of court altogether, and abandoned as a thing literally "past finding out." Examples of the harmonious relationship of living beings to their surroundings are very readily found. Changes in the habitation and food of animals and plants, for example, are well known to produce very marked and important results on their form and structure. Two plants of the same species grown, the one in a moist locality and the other in a dry and barren situation, will vary in a marked manner in their general development as well as in special parts