

The Church Guardian

— : EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR : —

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CALENDAR FOR APRIL.

APRIL 7—6th Sunday in Lent. Palm Sunday.
[Notice of Holy Week Days.]

" 8—Monday before Easter.

" 9—Tuesday before Easter.

" 10—Wednesday before Easter.

" 11—Thursday before Easter.

" 12—GOOD FRIDAY. Pr. Pss., M. 22, 40,
54; E. 69, 88.

" 13—Easter Even.

" 14—EASTER DAY.—(Pr. Pss., M. 2, 57
111; E. 113, 114, 118. Pr. Anthem
instead of *Venite*. Atha. Cr. Pr.
Pref. in Com. office till 21st April.
[Notice of Monday and Tuesday.]

" 15—Monday in Easter Week.

" 16—Tuesday in Easter Week.

" 21—1st Sunday after Easter. [Notice of
St. Mark]

" 25—ST. MARK (*Evangelist and Martyr*).

" 29—2nd Sunday after Easter. [Notice of
St. Philip and St. James.]

OUR ELDER SCHOLARS.

A. PAPER READ BY THE REV. T. E. TEIGNMOUTH
SHORE, at a Meeting of the Lewisham
Rural Deanery Church Sunday Schools
Association (Lewisham and Cat-
ford District).

A subject for discussion which constantly appears upon the agenda paper at meetings of Churchmen and Church women is "Why men do not go to church." It is a question of great and pressing importance. But I cannot help thinking that there would be no need to ask it all if we could only find a solution for that other problem which is to be the subject of our present discussion, viz., How best to keep steadfast in the faith the elder scholars in our Sunday-schools. I mean boys and girls who have reached that difficult and dangerous transition period which lies between childhood and manhood or womanhood. In dealing with this subject I propose to divide it as follows:—I. To state the Difficulty; II. To endeavour to ascertain its cause or causes; III. To suggest the directions in which it seems to me that the remedy is to be sought; IV. To draw your attention to a particular organisation designed to meet and overcome this difficulty.

I. The difficulty scarcely, perhaps, requires to be stated at all. It is only too well known to every Sunday-school teacher, and not only to Sunday-school teachers but to every one who is in any way interested in the training of our children. It certainly cannot be said that the Church is not alive to her mission to the children. Sunday-schools, bands of hope, children's clubs and guilds of all sorts and kinds abound in every parish, and no one will question that they are fruitful in good results. At the same time we are confronted with the indisputable fact that a vast number of these children do not grow up devout Christians, faithful sons

and daughters of the Church. They are never seen within the House of God; it is to be feared that for the most part they are equally neglectful of the practices of private devotion; many of them openly as well as tacitly repudiate religion altogether. The fact is admitted. There is probably no one here to night to whom it is not a subject of anxious thought, of earnest prayer, often of bitter grief. Surely it points to some defect in our system, some flaw in our methods, some weakness in our armour. Before, however, we can attempt to apply a remedy we must ascertain, if we can, the cause of the disease.

II.—(i) First and foremost we must, I think, put the natural effect upon a boy or girl of the removal, or at least the relaxing, of many of the restraints to which in their earlier days they were necessarily subject. At the age of about thirteen the majority of children leave our elementary schools. What is the result? Most of them immediately consider themselves "grown-up." They are filled with ideas of their own importance. They are eager to assert their so-called independence, and independence is almost invariably confounded with contempt for all constituted authority. I know more than one boy who recognises my salutation with a condescending nod, while his father touches his hat to me, and this I presume is not an unique experience. This tendency is one which is unfortunately encouraged and developed by what is vaguely termed "the spirit of the ages," and it is only to be expected that this will affect the children in our Sunday-schools. "If I am too old to go to day-school, I am too old to go to Sunday-school." The logic is obvious. Fortunately, in some cases it is to some extent counter balanced by a feeling of patronising commiseration toward the good teacher who has expended so much time, so much trouble, and so much affection upon his or her pupil.

(ii.) To this growing freedom from restraints must be added another cause, which I shall describe as prejudice. There is a something in the air—I don't know exactly what to call it—a feeling very much akin to contempt for Sunday-schools and all that is connected with them. There is about the word—in the minds, I mean of the average boy—a certain flavour of goody-goodness and milk and water. It seems somehow to be incompatible with the "manliness" to which every boy aspires. Hence the acquisition of the first pair of trousers is not infrequently coincident with a marked irregularity in attending Sunday-school.

(iii.) Thirdly, there is parental example. Sometimes we have the influence of home to fight against instead of its being our most powerful ally, and that is indeed a hard battle. If children see their fathers and mothers entirely neglectful of duties which they have been taught to regard as of the highest importance, if they see them manifestly indifferent to those truths by which, rather than by bread alone, they have been taught man must live, is it any wonder that when they begin to think for themselves they follow the example which is so constantly before them, rather than the ideal to which we strive to point them? "If father and mother don't trouble about these things, why should we?" And we cannot, of course, forget that there are homes where the force of parental example not only does not tell for good but tells strongly and positively for evil.

(iv.) Lastly, I would refer to a minor cause which operates against the Sunday-school, and that is the scandalous length of the hours of work of many boys fresh from the elementary school. On Saturdays especially many a lad does not reach his home till after midnight. To this must be added the employment of boy-labour on Sunday.

So much for the causes, now for the remedies.

III.—(i.) To begin in the middle with my

third cause—the force of parental example. We must of necessity set that on one side; it is one which is beyond our control. We can do no more than we are already striving to do—bring the Gospel to bear on old and young alike; try to put before parents the greatness of the responsibility which God has put upon them, and the dreadful consequences of neglecting so solemn a trust.

(ii.) Then as to the last cause to which I referred: a great deal of good might be done by putting the Factory Acts in motion, drawing the inspector's attention to one or two cases where they are most flagrantly violated, and so influencing other employers of labour in the neighbourhood. And I think we ought to do everything we can to stir up public opinion on the question of early closing on Saturdays—reasonably early closing that is—and the question of Sunday trading. If Londoners can go without their letters on Sunday, surely they can also go without Sunday papers, especially when all the evening papers publish "extra specials" on Saturday night.

(iii.) It remains, then, to be considered whether and how we can counteract the effects of freedom from accustomed restraints and of prejudice. For that prejudice we must be prepared to admit that we are in some degree ourselves responsible. There has been, perhaps, a tendency to make the teaching given in the school of a somewhat sentimental and mawkish character. Almost unconsciously one finds oneself misrepresenting the facts of life in the way one puts them to children; side by side with this we are tempted to make our Sunday-schools attractive by means that are not always quite wise. The law compels the parent to send his child to a day-school, while their attendance at Sunday-school is necessarily purely voluntary. Therefore persuasion must take the place of coercion. The result is very often seen in the adoption of what I may call the "bun and orange" system, a system which is most demoralising. A Sunday-school that can only exist by dint of frequent and lavish treats is doing very little good. Of course an annual treat is a necessary part of Sunday-school organisation; but it is very easy to overdo it, and its chief merit is that it brings the children and their teachers together "out of school," and still more that it brings the teachers and parents together. So the first remedy which I shall propose is—

(a.) Better Discipline. It may sound somewhat paradoxical, but I am sure that the better they are kept in order the better children like it. Don't let us be afraid that it will frighten them away; on the contrary, it will attract them. There can be no doubt that the day-schools where discipline must be strict are very attractive to children, more attractive perhaps than most Sunday-schools. It is far oftener the parents who keep their children away from the day-school than the children who play truant. The fact is that the more seriously you take the children the more seriously they will take themselves. Therefore discipline must be strict; but it must also be impartial and intelligent. We want to teach them that the restraints imposed in childhood are not arbitrary, but that they are to teach them self-control. We want to make them understand that there is no such thing as independence, and that he only is truly free who has learnt to control himself.

(To be continued.)

THE WAY OUT.

The World, the Flesh and the Devil have been abolished from the modern scheme of things, and "environment" and "tendency" have taken their place to account for the aberrations of human kind. After all, perhaps