

Pastor and People.

A SONG FOR EVERY DAY.

The weary world's a cheery place
For those with hearts to win it;
Thank God there's not a human face
But has some laughter in it!
The soul that comes with honest mirth,
Though health and fortune vary,
Bring back the childhood of the earth,
And keeps it sound and merry.

The plodding world's an eager place
For those with wit to use it;
Where all are bidden to the race
Let him who dares refuse it!
The simplest task the hand can try,
The dullest round of duty,
Knowledge can amply glorify,
And art can crown with beauty.

A busy, bonny, kindly place
Is this rough world of ours,
For those who love and work apace,
And fill their hands with flowers.
To kind and just and grateful hearts
The present grace is given
To find a heaven in themselves,
And find themselves in heaven!
Dora Read Goodale, in the Congregationalist.

THE CHURCH AND THE YOUNG.*

BY JAMES GIBSON.

The importance of the religious training of the young cannot be over-estimated. "Learn young, learn fair" is an old proverb, and is as applicable to matters of religion as to any other. Religious training should begin when the child begins to speak, if not earlier; and continue forever, in this world and the next.

For our present purpose we shall presume that the infant feet have been led into the first steps of the way of life in the home; and shall take up the subject of the training of the young from the time they begin to attend the public services of religion. Christian parents very properly bring their children to church at an early age. For although they do not understand these things, yet do they thus early form impressions and habits which are of permanent value. But it is when the child enters the Sunday-school that definite religious instruction by the Church begins. From that point the Home and the Sunday-school must go hand in hand in the religious instruction of the young. There exists in some minds an idea that there is antagonism between the home and the Sunday-school. They speak as if there was a danger of the Sunday-school usurping the place of the home. This is a very great mistake. Parents are either conscientious and painstaking in giving their children religious instruction at home, or they are careless and neglectful. If the former, what better ally can they have than the Sunday-school, which gives direction, continuity and stimulus to the instruction of the home; if the latter, the hour's instruction once a week is surely a little better than nothing. The fact is that even in Christian homes, the instruction of the young is in danger of becoming intermittent, or falling into disuse, unless there is the stimulus of preparing with a definite object in view, namely, the meeting of scholar and teacher on the following Sunday. The ideal of religious instruction is for the whole family to read and discuss and study together, say at family worship, or other suitable times throughout the week, the scripture lesson for the following Sunday. Then all the members of the family between the ages of five and seventy-five, or as many as can make it convenient, proceed to Sunday-school, and there come into contact with other minds, with teacher and fellow pupils, and so get fresh thoughts, new light, deeper insight, firmer grasp of the truths they have been studying all the week. Children lose much by not belonging to the Sunday-school, even if conscientiously and systematically taught at home. There is a power in numbers; it is helpful and stimulating for a child to meet other children, and join with them in singing God's praise, and taking part in the various

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exercises of the school, and there is something inspiring in the thought of belonging to the great Sunday-school army of eleven millions of scholars and teachers on this continent alone, all studying each Sunday the selfsame passage of the Word of God.

Many parents may be willing to teach their children at home, but have little faculty and no training for it. Such may be thankful to secure the help of a faithful and devoted man or woman, who, by training and experience, has special qualifications for the work of teaching the young. But, we repeat, let the parents do their part first in the home preparation, otherwise the work of the best of teachers is almost thrown away. Why is it that our teachers so often find their work discouraging? Chiefly because the scholars come wholly unprepared; the teacher finds no ground-work of knowledge to begin upon, and consequently little or no interest on the part of the pupil. The thirty minutes of lesson study are vainly occupied in getting the scholar to the point he ought to have reached before coming to school. Home preparation would change all that. The scholars would be interested in telling what they knew of the facts, and the teacher would be able to enforce the practical teachings of the lesson; and both would feel that the time had been pleasantly and profitably spent.

To compare small things with great, each home should be, as it were, a little school or college, let us say, and the Sunday school the university, the examining body which tests what has been learned, tabulates and records; and (carrying the analogy still further) confers honors and degrees in the shape of diplomas and prizes upon its successful students. The Sunday-school age begins at five or six years, and it need never cease, except from circumstances quite independent of age. No one is too old to derive benefit from united systematic study of the scriptures. Adult classes are much more numerous in the United States than with us; and in Canada, they are more numerous in some other denominations than amongst us Presbyterians. There is no good reason why this should be the case, and it is not to our credit as Presbyterians that we are not in the front rank in combined adult Bible study. Sunday-school methods admit of greater freedom than is possible at the regular preaching services—a catechetical and conversational style of teaching can be employed together with the use of maps and blackboard, drills and reviews and written examinations; and there is no reason why more of our adult membership should not avail themselves of these aids and incentives to the study of the Bible. Nearly all of our church members are graduates of the Sunday School. If they desire to keep up, and add to, their stock of Biblical knowledge, let them come back to their Sunday School Alma Mater and take a post graduate course. Adult Bible classes are all the more needed now that the expository sermon or the lecture, as it was called in Scotland, has gone out of fashion.

In the religious training of the young we have to face the fact that the Bible as a text book is prohibited in our public schools. It would open up far too large a subject for discussion here and now to go into the merits of this vexed question. But we cannot ignore the fact. We must deal with it as having an important bearing on the subject before us. As things are at present, and we see no reason to expect a change, and even Christian people are by no means unanimous in thinking a change desirable, the State does nothing for the religious education of youth. It will not even use any portion of the Scriptures as literature in the course of instruction. All religious instruction then, must be given by and through the Church. There are three agencies which may be employed by the Church in doing this work: 1st—The Christian homes of the people. 2nd—Sunday-schools and Bible-classes. 3rd—The preaching of the Word.

Now, as to the first of these three, the homes of the people, we must admit that far too many of them are not Christian, even nominally; and many are Christian in name and nothing more. Large numbers of children, then, are getting no religious training in their homes and none in the day-schools. What is to become of them, and what is to become of our country, if we do not get these children into our Sunday-schools and into our churches? Looked at in this light, who can fail to see the vast importance of the Sunday-school as an institution in our land.

The second agency referred to, the Sunday school, is doing a great, important and ever increasing work, but it has some weak points which greatly impair its usefulness. The first of these to which we would call attention, is that it has hold of the pupil for only one hour or less per week, whereas all other subjects of study which are considered important are studied many hours per week. What can be acquired in an hour a week, or half an hour it is rather, of actual teaching? The second is that its teachers are not trained teachers. Faithful, earnest, zealous, patient, godly men and women they are, but only one here and there has any idea of teaching as an art. In our public schools we do not allow a teacher to teach that twice two are four without producing a certificate from a Normal school. But in our Sunday schools we are constrained to take what material we can get; oftenest a young girl out of the Bible class, without training or experience, fully conscious of her deficiencies, but willing to consecrate what talent she has to this service for Christ; while too often others, better endowed and equipped, hold aloof.

The third weak point in our Sunday schools is the leakage which takes place in the senior boys' classes. Go into the infant class of any of our Sunday schools, and you will find it composed of an equal number of boys and girls. In the intermediate classes you still find the sexes evenly balanced. But when you come to the senior classes, from 15 years of age and upward, you will observe a serious disproportion between the sexes. The girls will still be in evidence, but you will find yourself "short" on boys. When a boy arrives at the age that he is particular about the cut of his collar and the shade of his tie, he sometimes makes the startling discovery that he is too big for Sunday school. He will tell you the Sunday school is for "kids," such as his little brother of ten, but not for him any more. It is grievous that just at the age when most in need of instruction and guidance, he breaks away from that which might be the strongest factor in his spiritual development, the influence of a wise, earnest, godly Sunday school teacher. Now these weak places in the Sunday school can all be made strong.

First: Too little time devoted to Bible study. Parents must be enjoined to devote a few minutes daily to the home study of the lesson with their children. The short hour or less per week for Scripture study will thus be enlarged to an extent in some measure proportionate to its importance. Scholars should be encouraged by parents and teachers to take part in the written examinations of the Higher Religious Instruction Scheme. We sometimes hear the objection, "Our children have too much home work and too many written examinations already without the Sunday school adding to them." Do parents realize what they are saying, when they make this objection? Are they willing that mathematics, history, geography, French, music, and what not, are to have the whole of their children's time to the exclusion of the study of the Book of books? Christian parents are bound to see that religious instruction gets fair play in competition with all other kinds of instruction. The children get everything else in the day-schools; then give the Sunday school a chance to teach them what is most important of all.

The second weakness mentioned, the lack of trained teachers, must be remedied by attaching greater value and importance to the office of teachers. The best men and

women in our churches should be engaged in this work. Sunday school teachers are perhaps too modest. They should magnify their office; and they should be esteemed very highly in love for their work's sake. Instead of the choice of teachers being left to haphazard, they should be selected and appointed by the session, and formally recognized and set apart in some distinctive way as holding an important office in the Church. This would raise the whole tone of Sunday school work; and teachers would be encouraged to rise to the dignity of their office, and equip themselves more thoroughly for the work by making a special study of teaching as an art and profession.

The third weak point, the leakage above referred to, would be stopped, wholly or in great measure, if teachers of ability and tact, and perseverance took hold of these lads at that critical age, and held on to them,—never relaxing their vigilance, their earnestness, their wise and loving grip of the boys. In our experience we have seen class after class of big lads wrecked and scattered through teachers losing heart, or losing hold,—giving up for some cause or other at a critical time, when, if they had held on, the boys would have been saved to the school, to the Bible class, and to the membership of the Church. We have said above that the third great instrument in the hands of the Church for the religious instruction of youth is the preaching of the Word. In some respects it is the most potent of all. "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners." Let it be noted however that there is a distinction between preaching and teaching. Let no one think that if young people attend the preaching services of the Church, it matters little whether they attend a Bible class or not. All good preaching is teaching in a certain sense but not in the strict educational sense. There may be the pouring in of ideas, but there is no drawing out; and after all, you have really taught only that which you can draw out again from your pupil. Especially for young minds, preaching requires to be supplemented by teaching in Bible classes. There is abundant evidence to prove that preaching alone does not accomplish all that is needed for the religious instruction of the young. The ignorance of the Bible shown by young people even of the educated and church-going classes is deplorable. Charles Dudley Warner in the March number of *Harper's Magazine* writes that "ignorance of the Bible among college students exists to an extent that is inconceivable by any person a generation ago." Another writer in a recent issue of the *Sunday School Times* states that an experiment was made lately in one of the United States colleges. The professor wrote on the blackboard twenty-two quotations from Tennyson each one of which contained a Scriptural allusion. In a class of 34 students, 11 did not know what was referred to by the manna in the wilderness,—16 knew nothing about Jacob's wrestling with the angel,—20 were ignorant of "Joshua's moon," and 28 of "Jonah's gourd." In view of facts like these, surely it is high time for the Church to throw herself with redoubled energy into the religious training of the young and rising generation, so that we Presbyterians shall maintain the traditions of "Bible-loving Scotland." May our children be like Timothy who from a child knew the holy Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation; our young men and women like the Bereans, searching the Scriptures daily; our teachers like Apollos, "mighty in the Scriptures" who "spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord."

In our homes let it be as in that of the devout Israelite of old, who obeyed this divine command: "These words thou shalt teach diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates." In our Sunday schools let us take for our model the great Bible school held in Jerusalem twenty three centuries ago for "men and women and all that could hear [with understanding] (that is, men women and children); when Ezra and his staff of assistant teachers "read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading."

In our churches let "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" be the great theme of our preachers, their preaching "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power."

"Then all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."