

## PROCRUSTES IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

By REV. A. R. TAYLOR.

IF we may credit ancient tradition, Procrustes was a strong-armed person inhabiting a locality in Greece, where he made himself disagreeable to passing travellers by the exercise of a very peculiar sort of hospitality. His principal piece of furniture appears to have been an iron bedstead, about large enough to accommodate a man of average size. To this he would consign those whom he could induce to lodge with him, probably with much of the elegant imperiousness of manner that characterises the first-class hotel clerk of modern days. Procrustes was more thorough in his attentions than the hotel clerks are, for he would not only send his lodgers to bed, but would put them away for the night. Anxious that each lodger should fit the bed with exactness, he had a fashion of chopping off the feet of the guests who were too long for it, and, by an ingenious process, which he may have patented, but which has not been handed down to these times, he stretched out the short ones, so as to make them long enough for a comfortable fit. We do not read whether or not anybody ever lodged with him a second time.

Strange as it may seem, there are excellent men of these latter days, who, in a certain branch of Christian effort, follow to some extent the example set them by this crusty old heathen. True, there is no actual bedstead introduced into the Sunday-school, but there is too frequently an iron regulation rigidly enforced by that tinkling piece of hardware which is the standing abomination of every speaker who has nearly done his speech, but who fears that if he runs two minutes over the allotted time he will be chopped off, and compelled to cause his hearers to wonder what he would have said in conclusion.

Procrustes is superintendent of a Sunday-school. Bell in hand, he mangles the opening hymn by chopping off two of the best of its five verses. Does it spoil the sense of a beautiful hymn? No matter; it makes the singing fit the little iron bed appointed for it. He utters his opening prayer in such a way that the desire to be through with it in two minutes and a-half by the clock seems to be uppermost in his mind, rather than anything he is asking God for. When the hour for the teaching of the lesson expires, without a moment's warning, or a gentle premonitory tap of the bell, *bang!* goes the cruel instrument of torture, as much as to say, "There now, quit your teaching! time's up!" Promptness and punctuality are invaluable in every department of the school, but Procrustes errs in overdoing the matter.

Sometimes we find Procrustes officiating as chairman of a convention. Taking the hint from some excellent chairmen who have a way of stopping the discourse of long-winded men, he overdoes the business by putting finger on the bell almost as soon as the speaker begins his remarks; and, looking by turns at his bell, his watch, and the speaker, intimates that the conclusion of the speech is the most important part of it, and that he hopes that the speaker will on no account transgress, by the fraction of a minute, the appointed limit. Such chairmanship is enough to embarrass almost any speaker, and render almost valueless a discussion which is carried on under such stiff regulations. But it is worse, when the speech is nearly finished that is made by appointment. The invited speaker, who has come from a distance—let us say a thousand miles—and who has prepared himself expressly for the subject in hand, finds, on looking at the programme, that he is expected to condense his wisdom into twenty minutes by the clock and bell. It will go, we will suppose, into half-an-hour. He boils it down, as well as the limited time for additional preparation will permit, leaving out here a little, and there a great deal, till he thinks he has brought it within the prescribed measure. He is introduced to his hearers in connection with the announcement that his speech will continue for twenty minutes. He proceeds. At the expiration of nineteen minutes and a-half he is in the midst of a splendid peroration, which will take about three minutes to finish. The audience listen in breathless attention. The inexorable chairman puts his finger on the bell, and looks at his watch. The speaker looks at him, as much as to say, "Hold on; I will be done in a minute or two." No use. The half minute rapidly goes. Twenty minutes up. Chop! goes the Pro-

crustean axe, and the speaker and his speech have their feet taken off. The speaker does wish that some man of reasonably good sense had been put in charge of the meeting, and resolves not to come again where *that* man presides.

At an institute where certain exercises are appointed to come on succession, Procrustes is sometimes put in charge of the work of getting up the programme. The institute then seems to be gotten up for the benefit of the programme, rather than the programme for the institute. Five or six speeches are appointed, to occupy the time which should have been occupied by three; the hour and minute at which each will begin and conclude, are printed, as the railroad companies print their time tables; and the remark is also printed, "This programme will be *strictly adhered to.*" Each speaker has a chopped-off feeling during every moment of his speech, and the result is the absence of that large liberty which is so profitable to all who know how to enjoy it.

As to the error in the other direction, just a word. When the original Procrustes got hold of a man too short for his bed, he stretched him. I do not often happen that a chairman has to stretch a speaker's speech, so as to make it fill the allotted time. But it sometimes happens that a man who is short of material to fill the time, fills it out, either by a heavy apology at the beginning, or by saying several times over what might have been profitably said only once; or by saying nothing for a while during the concluding part of his talk. This kind of stretching is uncomfortable to all concerned. When a man has said all he has to say he should stop, whether his allotted time is three minutes or sixty.

Let us be prompt and punctual, but not ferocious in our promptness or punctuality.

While we must allot certain time to certain speakers, let us try to arrange our time-tables for the mutual comfort of the speakers and those who are spoken to.

A speaker who is known to be a bore, need not be invited to speak at all. If a man of whom better things are expected proves to be wearisome and unprofitable, and must be chopped off, it is better to chop him as soon as he makes full proof of his tediousness, than to wait for the fulfilment of any allotted time, long or short.

## WHAT TEACHERS HAVE DONE.

**A SOLDIER'S TEACHER.**—At the annual meeting of the Sunday School Union, in 1822, the Rev. George Marsden stated, that as a gentleman, who by the providence of God had become reduced in his circumstances, was walking along the street, he was met by an old soldier, who immediately recognised him and mentioned the pleasure he felt in having been one of his Sabbath scholars. The soldier had heard of the circumstances which had reduced his former teacher to distress, and thus addressed him: "You were my teacher; I have a pension from Government; I can work a little, and will willingly give my pension for your relief."

**GAOL TESTIMONY.**—An American writer states, that out of 500 convicts, it was found, on examination, that only three had ever been in a Sunday-school. In a work recently published, entitled "England's Exiles," written by a pious surgeon of the Royal Navy, it is stated that out of 900 convicts exiled from their native land for breaking its laws, only seven had been admitted into a Sabbath-school; probably not one of the seven had attended it regularly. During five voyages to the penal colonies, A. Browning, R.N., states that he has conducted 1,065 prisoners, of whom only fourteen had been in a Sunday-school. The Rev. John Clay, chaplain to the House of Correction at Preston, in Lancashire, states that out of 1,129 persons committed to that prison only one was familiar with the Holy Scriptures and conversant with the first principles of religion as any child in the Bible class of a well-conducted Sunday-school would be; and that not above twenty of the whole 1,129 had been in the habit of attending any place of public worship. Again, the Rev. David Ruell, chaplain of the New Prison, Clerkenwell, states that upwards of 100,000 persons have passed under his care, the great majority of whom regretted that they had been brought up in utter disregard of the Lord's-day, and affirmed that neglecting the Sabbath in youth had led to grosser crimes in after years. We need not ask how many of these 100,000 had been trained from infancy in a Sunday-school.