

THE RELATION OF THE SABBATH SCHOOL TO THE CHURCH AND TO THE FAMILY.

A Paper read by D. McDonald, Esq., Pictou, at the "Conference on Sabbath Schools of the Presbytery of Pictou," held at New Glasgow, May 3rd, 1887.

I.—THE RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

"Children born within the pale of the visible church and dedicated to the Lord in baptism are under the inspection and government of the church." Such is substantially the claim of all denominations—a claim which few, if any, will dispute. The Sabbath-school is the chief agency used at the present time in the public religious instruction of children, and consequently is under the government of the church, and specially of the session, as the court controlling the affairs of the congregation, and thus nearest to the Sabbath-school. To argue otherwise is to say that the church has no control of the religious instruction of its own members. The Session, in the very nature of the case, must be responsible for this important branch of Christian work. And on the fulness with which this principle is recognized and carried out will largely depend the permanent success of any church. Roman Catholics understand this thoroughly. "Give us the education of the children," say they in effect, "and we care little who teaches the adults." Pharaoh seems to have understood it too. "Go now ye that are *men*, and serve the Lord." Ex. 10: 11.

Are we not justified in going even a step farther and saying that the Sabbath-school is in reality a part of the church, or rather the church itself operating in a particular direction? Such is the theory; let us glance briefly at the practice.

1.—The Session.

There are two ways in which Sessions may control Sabbath-school work. (1.) Directly, by appointing the superintendent and teachers, and arranging the subjects to be studied, etc. (2.) Indirectly, by taking part individually, as officers and teachers. The latter, we think, is much to be preferred. If members of Session hold aloof from actual Sabbath-school work, their claim of authority over the school might be to some extent resented. But if they are an integral part of the school, their influence is exerted and advice given without any danger of exciting

a feeling of opposition. It appears advisable that Sessions as such should at least sanction the selection of Superintendent made by the teachers; and that they should exert a direct or indirect influence with regard to the subjects taught. Among other things should they not see to it that the Shorter Catechism is not neglected? Do we believe in Presbyterianism? Do we believe that its doctrines are in accordance with Scripture? We do! Well, let us act up to our belief. Let us teach our children, and our children's children, if you will, that admirable compendium of our doctrines which the little ones persist in calling "the Question Book." *Esprit de corps*, tempered by the Golden Rule, is necessary to the existence of any church. A sorry British soldier would he be, who would as willingly fight under the banner of Russia or China, as under the glorious old flag, "which for a thousand years"—no, I wont finish the trite quotation, or I might hear the tinkle of a chestnut bell.

Scotchmen's virtues and successes have been attributed to many causes: to their canniness, their carefulness of the bawbees or even their oatmeal diet. Is not the real cause their thorough drill in the Bible and the Catechism? But some one says that we should not trammel young minds with formula or creed. Let them drink at the fountain of truth itself, the Bible, and thence evolve their own creed. Keep them clear of sectarianism and bigotry. Well, my friend, call this old-fashioned doctrine of ours by any pretty name you please. But be assured of this; that any poison of the kind you mention, which is imbibed in learning the Shorter Catechism will find a more than sufficient antidote in the superficiality and gush and rant, so prevalent at the present day. Verily we need to hold on to something solid; to cling to the old standards, or we are in danger of drifting, drifting—I wont say whither.

Should not Sessions too encourage collections in Sabbath-schools for missionary purposes? Pictou Presbytery stands pretty well compared with others, giving about 25cts. per scholar. But some schools contribute nothing. It is certainly important that children should be early trained to give to the Lord's cause. "Train up a child in the way he should go" (*giving* is one of the best ways of going) "and when he is old he will not depart from it."