

### THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

A paper read before the Minnesota Church Sunday School Association, held in St. Paul's Church, Minneapolis, Wednesday and Thursday, February 27th and 28th 1889, by the Rev. James Dobbin, D. D., Rector of Shattuck School, Faribault.

My theme is in two parts: 1st. The object of the Sunday school. 2nd. Its necessity.

It seems to me that for a Christian to ask the object of the Sunday school, is much the same as to question the object of the Church of Christ. At least it suggests the fact that one very important principle in the reformation of human nature is lost sight of. To win souls to Christ, and to cultivate the spiritual life involve instruction and training no less than worship. Much of this instruction can be given to the young better in the familiar question and answer, and by personal teaching, than is possible by the lecture or the sermon. It makes the information more personal; it brings the teacher and the taught more closely together; whatever is taught can be more easily and minutely explained; it is committed to memory; and it prepares one for a better understanding of the instruction given afterwards in service and sermon. Hence the Sunday school should be considered not as a substitute but an adjunct of the Church.

For we must not think for one moment that the Church and the Sunday school are of the same authority, or that the latter should ever in any case usurp the place of the former. Objection is some time made to the Sunday school with some show of truth, from the fact that the school is made, or is allowed to assume importance and place, as if it were the "Children's Church." The school that takes its place in the people's minds as such, or that thinks to build up the Christian character in children by instruction apart from the worship and sacrament, is not the agency we are pleading for. The one is that organism divinely appointed which has been the keeper of the truth in all these ages, which administers the Word and the sacraments for the salvation of men, and which brings men visibly into the invisible communion with the Divine Head; the other is a human agency for educating and training children for this membership of Christ, and the soul of all its methods and the letter and spirit of its work must be this one purpose of bringing children out of the world, by the aid of personal influence and religious instruction into the Church.

Yet the Sunday school, while only a human means of a divine end, is none the less one of the most effective of bringing children into the fold. In one sense it is preparation which goes hand and hand with the spiritual training which a true ritual of worship always gives in and of itself. For we must always keep in mind that the true idea of the school is not only intelligence but devotion; that intelligence in religious matters is a necessity to children, but a necessity that is met only when it ripens into religious and a devotional life.

The work of the Sunday school teacher must not be thought of simply in connection with some lesson to be learned, whether that lesson is a study of the Bible, or of Church history, or of the Catechism. Any one of these can be taught so that it shall be little more than an intellectual exercise. It may be merely fixing facts, or principles of conduct or belief in the memory, without giving them the life or the light that quickens and enlightens the spirit, and finds its end in holier living. It may be mere committing to memory. How many lessons are that and nothing more.

So no true work can be done in any sacred lesson unless the mind of the teacher is con-

stantly looking out for some way in which to make personal application to the actual needs of the learner's life. It must not be a general, vague explanation of truth, but it must be shown it has a personal fitness to the life we are appointed to lead among men; it must be made to waken the spiritual consciousness, and to lead the learner to see that all revelations of divine truth are given us to show how we must live our earthly life, that we may be prepared for the heavenly. It must kindle faith in the verities of religion, and be made a power under God to form the character.

And while this is true, it is just as needful we should remember that we have to be patient, and learn to bide our time in the development of the spiritual idea in the minds of the young. We shall not often find, if we look for it, very much conscious growth of the moral sense in the earlier years. The lesson taught seems very often not to bear fruit; there is a heedlessness in most children that is appalling to a novice; a want of understanding of the relation of conduct to the character, that is apt to discourage the teacher who lacks experience, or who has not learned that moral and spiritual sense need time for development no less than the mental and the physical powers. But we may be sure that no right training altogether fails to make its impression. The seed well sown in youth may lie dormant, and many years after be seen to bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. We can not be impressed too deeply with the fact that the spiritual perceptions of childhood, as a rule, are not keen, but they can be cultivated. The moral and religious life in children, is very largely a matter of habit, and you will build a bridge that will carry the soul over many an inclination to do wrong. You will make it a powerful aid to the performance of duty, a fact that should be made the most of until a deeper sentiment takes possession of the soul.

The object of the Sunday school may be summed up in one brief statement; it is to win children to Christ. As things are, it seems to be the only means, certainly by far the best means of generally instructing and winning and guiding their footsteps into the Church. It is therefore the most practical way by which we Christians can fulfil the law which we believe Christ laid upon all pastors: "Feed my lambs."—*Minnesota Missionary and Church Record*

#### NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN CHURCH S. S. MAGAZINE, (Phila) FOR JULY.

*The Secularization of Education* in the public schools should meet with resolute opposition. If it goes on to the exclusion of morals along with the exclusion of the Bible, the various churches and denominations will have no refuge but to establish parochial schools, and put in a claim for state help for the children. If parents have a right to withdraw their children because the Bible is read, certainly other parents might have an equal right to withdraw their children from schools where morals are neglected and religion ostracised. Either let the schools teach morals on a Christian basis, or else let the public school fund be divided among the denominations for the support of schools where virtue and religion are recognized as inseparable.

*The Bible as the Rule of Faith* has always been so recognized by the Church of God. The Church is not founded on the Book but on the Person of Christ, and the Church as a living witness existed before the New Testament was completed, but it is to be remembered that the Old Testament Scriptures were used substan-

tially by the Apostles as we use the New Testament. The habit of reference to Scripture and has always been the same so far as Scripture existed. Now if one says the Church was before the Bible, what follows? Only this, that the Bible is the latest, fullest, ripest utterance of the Church, i. e., the voice of the Church and rule of faith. The dictionary is the rule of a language, but language is not founded on the dictionary. The relation is mutual, and invites a process of comparison and verification alike reasonable and wholesome.

*A barrier to unbelief* has been found in the historic Christ. All attacks on the New Testament have failed just because they cannot get rid of the person of Christ; so also attacks on the Old Testament fail because they cannot blot out the strong central figure of the founder of Hebrew institutions. Moses is the stumbling stone of skeptics who attack the validity of the Pentateuch. One school, reading the monuments in Egypt, have tried to prove that the Hebrew institutions were an imitation of Egyptian models. Another school endeavor to prove that Hebrew institutions date properly from the time of the Babylonian exile. These efforts neutralize each other, and between them the claims of Moses remain solid. Unbelief will not win so long as the central personages, Moses and Christ, are recognized as God's agents. It is a large contract when men understand to overthrow such tenacious historic lines as the Hebrew race and the Church of Christ.

*Popular Misconceptions* of religion ought to be overhauled and gotten rid of. How shall this be brought about? If it is undertaken in the pulpit the clergy may seem to be hitting at orthodoxy when they really mean to expose only erroneous impressions of orthodoxy. In our day, when to sit in the seat with scoffers may get a man a reputation for brilliance and scientific acumen, there is no doubt a decided temptation to adopt a tone which, although not intended as a sneer, sounds very much like it. No man can sneer well, and the habit of contemptuous satire only costs the loss of a hearing. Some other way of getting rid of popular misconceptions must be found. A very ample and honest method is for the work to be done by every one but himself—yet not by himself. If one sits down by himself to pick to pieces his inherited Creed he will end by getting into confusion of thought, but he can examine his faith for himself without getting by himself and setting up a new departure. Let the inquiring mind associate itself with a Bible-class under a candid but experienced leader, a clergyman if possible; if not, then under one known to represent conservative but earnest views of the Bible and the Church. The two questions are, first, what are the doctrines of revealed religion found in the Bible and taught in the Church of all ages? Second, what are the real facts about the Visible Church of Christ? The private individual has generally taken his faith as it is handed down without examining it, satisfied with its temper and spirit of receiving it as indorsed. There is just as little nourishment in swallowing the creed whole as there is in bolting one's common food. It is not irreverent to digest the bread which God gives us. Try to get an accurate idea of the doctrines of religion as contained in the Apostles Creed. A definite faith has greater power than a mystical reverence, though reverence is by no means ever done away in dealing with infinite truth. Try to know as much as is revealed, and there will still be left enough mystery for reverence.

There are many ways of rebuking sin. One effective way, that of Christ, is to cast one's influence immediately on the right side. Inveective against evil is seldom as efficient as a silent but firm stand upon the platform.