

The Sabbath-School and Normal Classes.

AN enthusiastic and successful Sabbath-School Superintendent has reminded us of a promise made some time ago that we would return to this subject, which we very willingly do, believing that it is one of vital importance, and in the hope that the few thoughts we have to express may induce others of larger experience and maturer views to give our readers the benefit of their wisdom.

The Sabbath-School is not unduly exalted when it is ranked as one of the great moral forces of the present time. And because it is such a force, it ought to be surrounded with all possible safe-guards, and nothing should be left undone to secure its highest efficiency. There is a tendency in some quarters to put the Sabbath-School on a different plane from other organizations of the Church—to make it a coordinate auxiliary, affiliated to the Church in a certain way, but practically independent of it. This is a mistaken notion as to the relationship which ought to subsist. The moment you establish an *imperium in imperio* in any department of the Church's work, you create a feeling of isolation at variance with the *beau ideal* which St. Paul would have us entertain of the Church, "as the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part." Unless this is guarded against the time may come when a minister will discover that his presence is not wanted in his own Sabbath-School, the Kirk-session, that his supervision is no longer desired, and the Presbytery, that the Sabbath-School has passed entirely from its jurisdiction. The details of management properly belong to the Superintendent of the Sabbath-School, but the Kirk-Session have also responsibilities in connection with it of which they cannot rightly divest themselves. The Sabbath-School is essentially a part and parcel of the Church. The Kirk-Sessions are its natural guardians—bound to give it all the support and encouragement in their power. They are certainly responsible for its efficiency: and that Presbytery is blame-

worthy which takes no thought for the Sabbath-Schools within its bounds. It is not for us to say how or to what extent Presbyteries may and should use their great influence in this direction. Many of them, we are glad to know, are now doing a great deal by Committees, and Conferences, and Conventions, to commend the Sabbath-School and its work to the attention and sympathy of the public.

But the question at issue is not so much the relations of the School to the Church: nor is it how to get a sufficient number of teachers, but rather, how shall we best endeavour to increase the efficiency of the teachers we now have in the Sabbath-Schools, and train young people to be competent teachers in the future? The only satisfactory answer that can be given to that question is, BY INSTRUCTION IN NORMAL CLASSES. Nothing short of thorough systematic training will fully meet the case. It may seem strange, yet there are those who, upon some occult principle, object to the training of Sabbath-School Teachers. They think that piety, and personal consecration, and a certain amount of enthusiasm, and a love for the work, are the only qualifications needed. Without these, no one will make a good teacher, but a great deal more than these is needed. If secular education has been raised to the highest point of excellence in these days, it is the result of Normal School instructions. Even children have sufficient observation to notice the vast difference between the *methods* of teaching in the secular and in the Sabbath-School, and unless the standard of instruction is correspondingly raised in the latter they will soon begin to draw unfavorable comparisons. Why is a teacher in the one case expected to teach thirty, or forty, or fifty scholars in the same class, while half a dozen is considered quite enough for the average Sabbath-School teacher? If Sabbath-School teachers could be found equally competent to teach as the other, it would probably be greatly to the advantage of the Sabbath-School to reduce its staff of teachers and enlarge its classes. It might be possible to find half a dozen men and women in a large congregation who, after being thoroughly trained for the work, would be highly efficient teachers. It were unreasonable to suppose that fifty such should be found. But not