

THREE YEARS IN A CATECHISM.

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1. *The Catechism used.* It is that prepared by Rev. Philip Schaff, D.D., L.L.D., and now published by the American Sunday School Union. It is unsectarian, containing fifty-two chapters, and about four hundred and fifty questions.

2. *How we came to use it.* The primary reason was the painful contrast in precision of definition, in logical arrangement, in symmetry of development, and in thoroughness of treatment, between religious and secular text-books. That contrast is so great in this scientific age as to become the peril of the church, unless her children can be more logically and thoroughly trained. To put the root of the matter in its true light, we affirm that no secular text-book constructed after the model of the International Lessons could find admission into a single school district in our land. We felt that a bright boy could not pass from the precision, and logic, and system of the day school into the Sunday School, where pious talk takes the place of these, without peril to his soul by losing respect for the gospel. Besides, from no point of view can a lesson talked about be held to be equal to a lesson learned. The children must know what it is, when it is to come, and that it will be heard in the very words of the text.

We believed also in the Socratic method of question and answer, and that the answers should be framed by the wisest and best men, and learned by heart. If our theologians find it so difficult to put into fit words the great answers about God, and salvation, and duty, it is as unsafe as it is absurd to leave the answers to be framed by boys and girls and Sunday school teachers.

But, if the answers are given, our question book becomes a catechism; and that catechism can be as exact in definition, as logical in development, as symmetrical, as comprehensive, as it is possible for men guided by the Holy Ghost to frame out of the Word of God. Believing that the scientific in nature needs to be thus supplemented and balanced by the scientific in grace, I preached these things, and called for a class in Schaff's catechism to meet Saturday afternoons.

This was in January, 1878. The class was so well attended that in a few weeks, by vote of the teachers, the catechism was transferred to the Sunday school as an extra lesson to be heard by the pastor at the close of the regular lesson in the International Series. Strangely the catechism grew in favor until it was unanimously voted to give up the International Lessons, and take nothing but the catechism and the Bible for 1879; and we have used nothing else to the present time. Thus the catechism grew into our school, surpassing our utmost hope.

3. *How we use it.* We assign a fixed lesson for all, and each scholar, except those in one adult class, is expected to get it by heart, and as many proof-texts as he may. Teachers first hear the lesson, then mark against each name the number of perfect answers given by the scholar. A perfect lesson is the ready and full recitation of all the answers in the lesson for the day. In addition the teacher hears and marks back lessons and proofs, if any are given. Then the references are called for, the whole class looking up the same reference. In this way we habituate the scholars in the right use of the Bible as the proof of doctrine and duty, and in the ready finding of books, chapters and verses. We know thus what our teachers teach and what our pupils learn, which was not the case under the old system.

At the close the pastor reviews the

school on the lesson, hearing them say it in concert or class by class. He calls upon each teacher to report aloud the number of scholars present and the number of perfect lessons recited in his class.

4. *The results.* These, in our opinion, warrant the above description.

While the school has held its own in numbers, it has increased greatly in habits of study. The scholars generally get the lesson for the day, and even back lessons, if they have been absent. Under the International Lessons, we think that ten per cent. of perfect lessons was a fair average, confirmed by the fact that no pastor whom we have inquired of has placed the per cent. in his school at a higher figure. But, under the catechism, the per cent. of perfect lessons for the quarter, ending September 30, was, class by class, as follows: 83, 77, 64, 53, 58, 41, 38, 33, 30, 26, 25, 20, 10, 37, 70, 48, 46, 58, 24, 43, 34; average 43 5-7. This was attained in the summer quarter. Let us take two Sundays in October last, for which no special preparation had been made, and see how the record stands. October 17 the perfect lessons for the school stood 77 per cent.; including back lessons, 96 per cent. October 24, on the lesson for the day, 90 per cent.; including back lessons, 103 per cent. The back lessons were recited by those absent the previous Sunday. Since then the average has been nearly or quite as high, and it approaches, at least, the thoroughness of secular schools.

But it may be said that our experiment has been tried under the most favorable circumstances; that in a mixed school it would fail. Well, a deacon of my church, Mr. C. G. Meisel, has a pioneer school, three miles out of the city, into which are gathered children and adults of many denominations, and he has used the same catechism for the same time and with similar success. When, one year ago, the question was put, without a word on his part favoring it, every scholar, teacher, and officer voted to retain the catechism for 1880—during which year they, as we, will complete the book.

These two experiments we think indicate: (1) That catechisms can be restored and used in our Sunday schools. (2) That children will learn the catechism if encouraged to do so. (3) That the thoroughness of the secular schools can be attained. (4) That parents will co-operate in the most thorough study of God's truth, if they get a chance. (5) That the precision, system, and science admired in secular knowledge can be introduced into the study of spiritual things. Doctrine and duty are above science and art, and demand the best possible methods. (6) That pastors, by pointing out the striking contrast between the training acquired in secular schools and the want of it in Sunday schools, can preface the way for such religious education of the young as will fortify them in head and heart against the materialism which distresses Church and State alike.

We add, in conclusion, that Christianity can prove itself to be divine only by showing itself to be a scheme of life and thought and act more logical, complete, consistent with facts, and harmonious with all truth than any other; and the greatest peril it encounters to-day is the sad failure of the churches to teach it, in its divine breadth and beauty, as a system, to the children of the faithful.—*Congregationalist.*

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS ON A DYING BED.

BY WOLCOTT CALKINS.

There was an old man who came every day to the reading-room of a city in the south of France where I was spending the winter. His form

was bent, his manner was timid, and he never entered into conversation with the gentlemen around him. I took him for an Englishman, as I always found the *Times* in his hands if he arrived in advance of me, as he usually did. It was impossible not to notice the gray-haired man, with looks averted from others, and an expression upon his face of settled melancholy. But, as month after month passed without so much as the recognition of our casual meetings, I despaired of ever knowing anything about the strange, silent man.

On Christmas Eve, however, I received a note from my friend the Waldensian minister of the city, asking me to call upon a countryman of mine who was dangerously sick in the same hotel where I was living. The family had sent for him, and as he was himself too ill to go out, he asked me to take his place. I found the strange, silent man! We had lived under the same roof, and had only met in the distant library. He recognized me at once, and seemed glad to have an American with him at this solemn time. At his own request I told him very frankly that the physician had no hope of his recovery, and that he probably had but few days to live. Then came the great question:

"Do you believe in the immortality of the soul?"

He answered without a moment's hesitation, "I do, most firmly."

"And what is your own hope for the future?"

"I hope to be happy forever in Heaven."

"Will you tell me the ground of your hope?"

"Yes, willingly. I have never done anything very bad in this world. My little faults, such as are common to all men, I am sure God will overlook. But in all serious matters my account is clear. I depend upon the exact awards of justice, and I expect to receive for the deeds done in the body a welcome to everlasting life beyond the grave."

I was speechless. I had often heard such protestations in health, but never before from the lips of a dying man. A great terror took hold upon me, and I felt my blood chill to my extremities. It seemed to me that I never could break that awful silence, and he had to appeal to me, and ask me if I did not think this a good ground of hope, before I could open my lips. Then with an earnest appeal to that explicit promise which I believe was intended for just such emergencies: "It shall be given you in that same hour, what ye shall speak," I began to preach to him Jesus.

I need not, in fact, I could not, after all these years, repeat what I said. I tried, as I well remember, to be very simple and tender. His Roman Catholic wife and daughter were sitting by, and educated as they had been to a religion of good works, they were very soon convinced that his hope was a rope of sand. They joined their entreaties to mine, that he would renounce his self-righteousness, and commit his soul to the Saviour of sinners, but it was all in vain. At last I rose to go.

"But are you not going to pray with me?" he asked, with surprise.

"Why should I pray with you?" I replied, "I cannot offer your prayer: 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men.' 'You cannot offer my prayer, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' How then can we pray together, my dear friend?"

This seemed to startle him a little. But he evidently thought it was a sort of puzzle which he was too weak to guess, and so he begged me to pray just as my own feelings prompted. So I did commit him to the Saviour of sinners, and entreated the Holy

Spirit to reveal to him his own heart, and his need of forgiveness.

But he never modified in the least his confession of faith. He lingered many days. He repeated often his little creed. It was faith in *himself*. He was satisfied with his own life. He asked only for a strict and just account. But he kept sending for me. Often I would be called in the night to go and pray with him. He would have no one else to give him any spiritual advice. He died without a word of repentance, and our only consolation was that he loved to hear one talk and pray who knew nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

On my return to America, I was commissioned by his wife and child to find his brothers and family friends and deliver to them some articles which might be associated with his memory. They were very courteous to me, but they did not care to talk about him. At last I appealed to one of them, a distant relative by marriage only, to tell me what it all meant.

"You are entitled to know," he replied. "I cannot understand how the man could have died without telling you. He was a forger. He lived and died in France to escape arrest for his crime. His family are suffering yet for the disgrace of forgery and embezzlement in a public office!"

I commend this true story to all of my readers who are "trusting in themselves, that they are righteous." Does it not seem to be, after all, a very easy thing to believe a lie? The things which are against the self-righteous man, are "little faults, common to all men, not serious." And it is just as easy to place forgery and embezzlement among them as idle words, loss of temper, selfish desires. Worst of all, the approach of death does not always shatter the delusion.

LITERARY NOTES.

SCRIBNER for June is to hand, and is full of excellent reading and fine illustrations, that merely to name them would take a column. We just mention two or three of the articles and refer to the magazine itself for a full feast. There is the second part of Col. Waring's "Sanitary Condition of New York," entitled "The Remedy," and recommending a complete system of house and street drainage, applicable to any house or locality. The opening article is a description, by R. W. Gilder, of "The Farragut Monument," about to be erected in Union Square, New York, this paper includes a brief biographical sketch of the artist, and is accompanied by a full-page engraving, by Cole, of the figure, and by illustrations of other parts of the monument, a general view, etc. In connection with this subject is "An August Morning with Farragut"—a vivid account of the great admiral's famous victory at Mobile, by Lieutenant J. C. Kinney, who was on board the *Hartford* throughout the fight. Other papers which come under the head of "seasonable," are: a brief sketch of the late Earl of Beaconsfield, accompanied by a full-page portrait, engraved by Cole, together with an unpublished sonnet written by Disraeli in 1839: "Some New Berries," including late news from the fruit world, by E. P. Roe, with three illustrations of natural size; also, a paper on "Practical Floriculture," by Peter Henderson, the well-known floriculturist, with numerous illustrations by Brennan and others.

Lovers of light reading will find plenty to interest them in this number. There is the opening installment of several pages of "A Fearful Responsibility," by W. D. Howells (the "fearful responsibility" being an American girl), with other stories and light sketches.

These contributions, together with the six departments, make this a number of great variety and timely interest.

—After the passage of the Land Bill it is thought that Mr. Gladstone will accept a peerage and take his seat in the House of Lords. The London *Cuckoo* announces his probable title as the Earl of Oyford, while other society journals think he will be created Earl of Hawarden.