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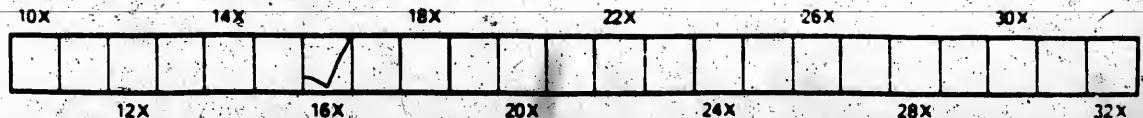
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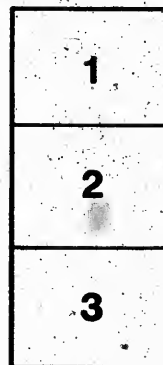
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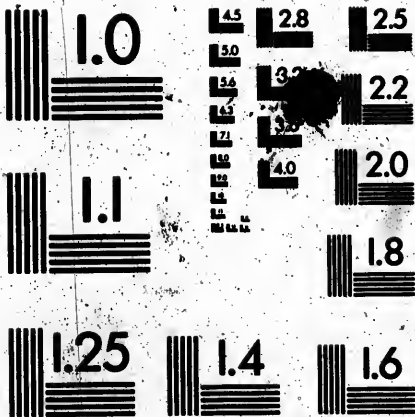
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A PAPER

—READ BY—

EDMUND L. WATSON,

AT THE

*Seventh Convention of the Sun-
day School Institute*

OF THE

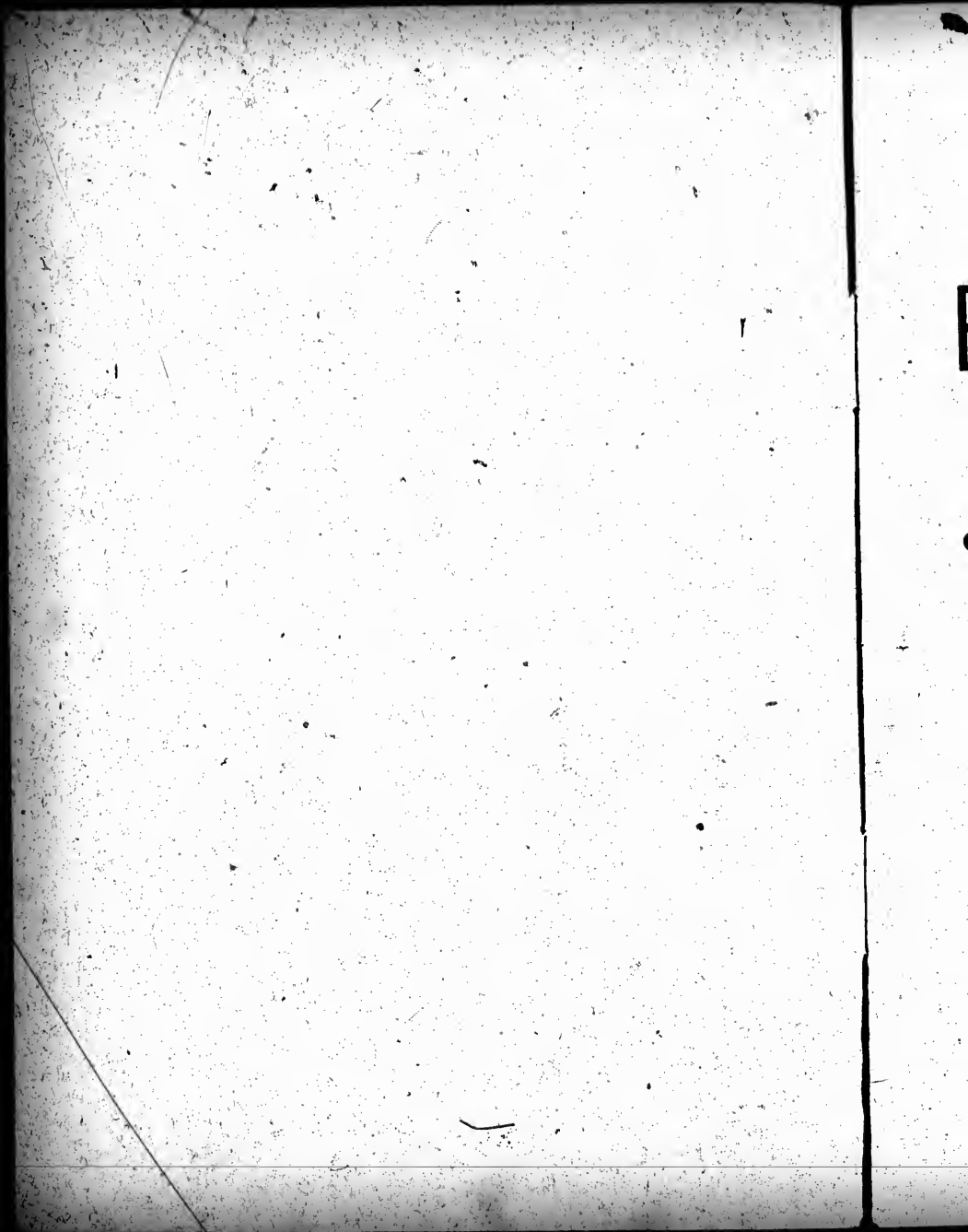
Archdeaconary of Bedford,

HELD AT

Cowansville, Que., August 5th,
1896.

The News Print, St. Johns.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
GENERAL SYNOD, ARCHIVES



MME 24

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A PAPER BY
EDMUND L. WATSON

In appearing before you to take up a part of your time, do not, please, regard me as an intrusive volunteer. If those we had hoped to have been here to have addressed you, had not disappointed us, there would have been no occasion for me to have been asked to draw your attention to the chosen subject, which is—*The Main Aim, Object or Purpose, which has called forth the Modern Sunday School.*

You, who by your presence may be presumed to be interested in the subject, can not but have noticed a remarkable letter of the Rev. Robert Ker, of St. Catharine's, since followed by another, which appeared in the *Toronto Mail and Empire*, and was transcribed by the *Montreal Gazette*.

The reverend gentleman takes the ground that the Sunday School, as now administered, by providing a plausible excuse for parental neglect in the Christian home training of children, and by pandering to frivolous and exciting amusements, has proved a decided hindrance to future spiritual life and faith, and had far better be dropped.

Whilst much of this charge is too sadly true with regard to Sunday Schools, yet upon consideration we can hardly come to this conclusion. The scrambling haste of the present age to snatch at every chance for what is called advancement

in the social scale, by all classes in life, has indeed encroached, to a lamentable and unseemly extent, upon that interest parents formerly took in their children's Christian training. Consequently there is very little time for gatherings round the mother's knee, and even less of what the poet Burns describes as the "father's admonition due."

I have not to go back farther than to my own childhood, to the time when a very different state of things prevailed.

Then, those classes who were in what are called comfortable circumstances, spent much time with their children, and even those who were not so well off, were less ambitious to appear so, and were more satisfied with their children remaining in a recognized inferior, but then more honourable status than now. This afforded much more time for aiding weekly school instruction in religious subjects. There was more faith in another existence when mere worldly distinctions would be entirely effaced and poverty in this life would have its recompense.

But *now*, it is the attainment of the tangible possibilities of this life which is the main object of all classes, and there is but little value for what is regarded as, at least, uncertain, undefined, and, if the saddest truth be told, little desired, or, at the best, capable of being deferred for that "more convenient season" which seldom comes.

But I do not say that now a consciousness of duty towards their children's spiritual welfare is entirely effaced, but that parents are too willing to depute that duty to the Sunday School. There-

fore is it not better to make the best of things as we find them and retain it? Have you never noticed in nature that an uprooted plant makes the most of what poor remnant of soil still clings to its roots, by which it often retains life, until after a while it is able to send down roots into one that is better and more nourishing? Is not the remedy rather to use it, but more after the plan of our own church, for the religious instruction of youth? If we can not bring back the public catechising, which was the only Sunday School I had the opportunity to attend in my childhood, let us no longer be content to spend its curtailed hour or so, in a feeble shuffling attempt to give instruction in scripture history, geography, ancient genealogies, and critical dissertations upon a past theocracy.

Let the week day school again teach that, and let the Sunday School time be applied to what should be *its main aim and object*. Let us consider what that aim should be. It is not what those outside our communion, and some within it, would call—conversion of the young heart to Christ, but what may be more appropriately defined as awakening and nourishing up of a trustful Faith in God, the Hope of a better life hereafter, and a present Charity or love of their fellow-beings, and all that that means. The Church of England plan for which was and, thank God, yet is, as the prayer book tells us, the teaching and expounding of The Lord's Prayer, The Creed and the Ten Commandments? First in the easiest and simplest remarks, and when the child's intelligence is more unfolded, in the not to be sur-

passed words of the catechism. Now this, you may remark, may not be so interesting, certainly not so amusing, either to teachers or scholars, as looking up texts and repeating them by heart, or reciting verses of hymns, or studying scripture, which are all excellent things, most desirable, if there were sufficient time. But we must get on at once to the main object if we have it not. And how can we make the best of the limited time?

Let us note the wisdom of the Church of England By three processes only, of which the first is.

1st. Reverence for God and all power above us.

The Lord's Prayer teaches us that reverence, without reverence we cannot make the first step.

2nd. Obedience to God and all power above us.

The first four of the Ten Commandments will do that.

3rd. Truthfulness, our duty to our fellow being, resulting in holiness in ourselves, combined with justice to others is learned from the last six.

Then perhaps you will say "for what and why does the Creed appear with them?" Is it not for a confession of faith, without which the soul, either young or mature has no anchor of Hope to hold it up from being drifted by the storms on life, and then beaten and destroyed upon the rocks of infidelity, indifference or selfishness. And here is authority, St. Paul to the Romans. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

The necessity for open profession of faith, *first* is here clearly stated, and the declaration of what is professed contains a good foundation substance of the Apostles' Creed, and we have in another case the injunction of Philip, the Deacon, an ordained officer of the church to the *man* he was instructing in the elements of the Christian faith, an additional testimony of great weight, though he and the retainers only were present.

As an illustration of the need of a Creed, let me relate a proof that has just come under my own notice. A very bright young man, living an unblemished moral life, well acquainted with Holy Scripture, acquired in a typical Sunday School of the prevailing Christian body in the State of Massachusetts, where he resides, where they gave considerable prizes for the number of verses recited and for texts correctly hunted up or located, but who had never been taught any Creed, but rather made to believe that to believe as little as you like, was the grand charter and privilege of a free Protestantism, lately wrote to me that Col. Ingersoll had arrived in his town, and that he had lectured there with such effect that he was perfectly enraptured with his eloquence, and his admiration for his arguments was such that he could scarcely refrain from rushing on to the platform to clasp his hand and thank him then and there for what he had heard from him. I could also say the most stubborn, God reviling and defying atheist up to his death, that ever I knew, was a man most thoroughly grounded and trained in scriptural knowledge obtained by him in a Sunday School of Massa-

chusetts. He would read the bible for hours together.

And this is why the Church of England makes these three, The Lord's prayer, signifying what ought to be prayed for, the Creed, what ought to be believed and openly declared, and the Ten Commandments, what ought to be done, its principia, in the instruction of its youth. In almost every church edifice erected not later than sixty years ago, these appeared in the place of honour, either by the Altar, or on the sides of the Chancel Arch, and are yet to be seen, sometimes worked in with much adornment, as in Sir Christopher Wren's beautiful altar pieces, or in the humble lettering of the village artizan.

Until lately the Lord's prayer, Creed, and Ten Commandments might have been stiled the very insignia of the Church of England. And I am glad to see that in the one modern church lately built near us, Frelighsburg, they have their ancient place, and with regret I heard that in another, Milton, the painter's brush had only just effaced them. Perhaps the present members think that the church is now past its childhood, and that amongst other childish things, they that is the Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments may now be put away. Is not this a mistake also?

Let us retain our Sunday Schools. The work may not be pleasantly attractive, but it can be made a loving duty. St. Peter, when he was ordered to leave his fishing outfit, was told that henceforth he should catch men as an encouragement, but later on, Our Lord addressed him

by name asking him if he loved him, then having received the affirmative answer, and then that a reply was unnecessary for the Lord knew well whether he did or not, Our Lord twice and first, had ordered his lambs to be fed, then last his sheep. The lambs first and most emphatically by repetition as the easiest and most practical way of feeding, which of course means instructing the sheep. But he wished to impress upon us through St. Peter that though the occasional feeding of a child lamb may be a pleasant amusement, its systematic continuation as a practice is most monotonous and requires all our love towards the Master to carry it out. Far less exciting or stimulating to emotion than St. Peter's old calling. I think this is a good authority for Sunday Schools. Every one who has lived in a sheep country as I did in my youth knows full well how many young lambs are orphans, and how many more are deserted by the natural parent and would certainly perish without the shepherds continual care. Then let us consider as a solemn thought what would be now our case if such had happened to us. Let me read you what the present Archbishop of Canterbury has said not ten years ago on this subject at a clerical meeting at Sutton, (the place that our Sutton is named after), more worthy of your attention than anything I can tell you.

We have received the Church of England from our fathers; we trust, by God's blessing, to hand it down unimpaired to our successors, and it is our hearts desire to make it in every way sub serve the great purpose of advancing the cause of Christ. Therefore as a sacred duty you may regard it as part of your daily task to visit

the schools and see that religious instruction is properly conducted. And if unfortunately, (as has happened here). The common schools have passed from under your direct control, I trust that this will but make you redouble your efforts to give life and reality to some well regulated system, at fixed hours, when by Sunday Schools, or otherwise, you can gather the young together for directly religious instruction, that what they are taught shall not be merely accepted, but *understood*. And, I think, you will act wisely if each of you, in your schools, will satisfy yourselves by individual questioning, as to the prayers which the children offer up morning and evening in their homes. A child trained in habits of prayer may, by a quiet example, become a missionary to a whole family, who would otherwise live without God."

This is exactly what Bishop Hall told us should take the place of so much historical teaching, and was heard as something new and striking.

If a trust in Jesus Christ a light to your otherwise dark pathway? Strive then to kindle such a light in at least one young heart, and earn the promised reward, with God's grace of covering a multitude of sins. If you cannot convert to Christ a young heart which is more Christ-like, as yet being free from envy and malice, though with plenty of other faults, you have but small likelihood of prevailing with an old and hardened one, though amongst the young lads the spirit of Absalom may soon be developed to your discouragement (or the disdainful contempt of a Michal, the daughter of Saul, amongst the young girls) if you have striven to do your best by them when they were young and tender, they will not *all* turn out so. There will be young Josephs and young Marys who will prefer the better part, and be unmoved by the spirit of the present age.

If you feel that you are not a valuable piece of machinery in your parish organization, if you are nothing but a plain mental crank pin in your Sunday School, do not drop out of it, for by so doing you may delay the working power of the whole engine, until a better is found.

You may say in objection to what has been put forth, that without attractive amusement your Sunday School would soon dwindle away, or that you would soon have the scholars deserting to that of other Christian bodies. Many no doubt would, but the example of Our Lord and Saviour in his ministry teaches us that the following of a great crowd is not the most important object to be desired, but rather the preparing of as many as possible, *if but a few*, well grounded, well tried, earnest ones that may hereafter influence and elevate others.

Our Lord in the early part of his ministry had many followers, we are told, for, no doubt to be a disciple of the great miracle worker, and mover of what they hoped would be a national reform, and a change which would perhaps bring material advantage or at least notoriety to themselves, was a great attraction. When they went back and ceased from following after him, Our Lord and Saviour made no compromising movement towards propitiating them; but went on instructing and preparing the few faithful ones who remained, and you know what final result.

The remarks of the Archbishop of Canterbury which I read, imply that it is, he thinks, only by reaching and training the *consciences* of the young

that, what some contend is the chief aim of the Sunday School, but which is rather the result of that aim, the perpetuation and sustentation of the congregation is secured. We are told by many that, as the tendency of the present age is to contribute less in proportion to its means for the support of the sacred ministry, we must therefore have more exciting and attractive amusements, and more broad and less defined teaching, so as to draw *numbers* to make up for want of liberality for this important necessity, for of course the clergy and their families must live. I think that there is some delusion in this. For while it is no doubt true that the undecided and indifferent, being less influenced by public sentiment than formerly, do give less, on the other hand it will be found that *real earnest and pronounced church men from conviction*, actually contribute *much more*, not measuring their duty by any other's standard but their own good will. Let the clergy be more decided, earnest and pronounced, and it will be found an extending contagion with the flock, and the place to commence with is the Sunday School.

I understand the difficulties. No! teaching doctrine, or dagma, is not what will drive away your Sunday School scholars, though I have heard it averred, and been cautioned against it — but rather this. Let your scholars get the conviction or even the *suspicion* from your apathy or careless indifference, which is surprisingly *transparent* to them at a very early age (remember your own childish experiences in reading character) that it is not *their* good you are seeking,

but that there is a desire on your part to retain their presence with as little effort as possible for adding to your own importance, or that there is a combined agreement between yourself and their parents, to detain them, simply to restrain them from mischief, and that, to that end, you wish to amuse them in *your* way, instead of letting them amuse themselves in *theirs*; and just so soon as they are old enough to defy their parents, you will lose your scholars. But, if you have gained their *hearts* and consciences, and made them feel what *Christian duty is*, then the conviction of your sincerity and good will to them can hardly be erased. The memory of it will last to the ends of their lives, "for their good."

And it requires much more both of wisdom and tact to influence the adults after a generation or more of laxity and indifference, but the child will be open to explanation and will receive precepts without the resentment of preconceived prejudice. What is called *broad* teaching, really means careless undefined teaching, and is most one sided in its effects. It is simpleness and childish folly itself to suppose that the energetic and earnest pastors outside our church, do not accentuate and *comment* upon the differences between their views, and those of the Church of England, both in their public and family communications with their own people. Let us follow their example which is highly to be commended as carrying out their duty, for which they are engaged and paid, and let us no longer be so apologetically shamefaced. The church has lost, and is continually suffering from this

mistaken timidity. Those who only come and go with the crowd, to hear only pleasant things, are not the ones who will make provision for the clergy their aim. But you may say we cannot wait for the young to be trained up, "Whilst the grass is growing the horse will be starving." Fear not! Without being prepared to make some sacrifices, no one has a right to accept orders, and we know that a self sacrificing parish priest is *sure* to beget the same spirit in *some at least* of his parishoners, as much so now, as when five hundred years ago, Chancer gave us that charming description of the faithful one of his day, which should be read by all. We know what happened to the Apostles. They replied to our Lord's questioning, that they lacked nothing—that is, no *real* necessity. When such *is* the case it may be laid most frequently to a fault of temperament.

Let me read you the opinion of a leading Congregationalist minister, which seemed to me worthy of preserving, on this subject of amusements, as bearing upon religious principles.

"Church" in the 19th Century.

"The absence of devotional atmosphere is attributed to 'over familiarity, want of imagination, want of training in devotion and of faith.' But one great cause is the notion, in itself a terrible irreverence, that 'church' is a matter of show, a social performance, in which there is no harm in staring about and noticing what goes on. The church was never intended to furnish entertainment for old or young. It is not and cannot be the school for entertainment without the saddest and most disastrous results. Its purpose is the same for each and all—to promote piety, cultivate holy inclinations and principles, and train for the heavenly life. The other mistake is a

deem religion in the young a different thing from religion in the old. They are the same, and differ only in degree and not in nature, and the same methods are necessary to develop the one as the other. The same food for the babes as for the elders, only in a more condensed and more easily digested form. The same holy principles must be taught the young. They must be cultivated in piety and all heavenly principles. Feed them on entertainments and they will have no relish for prayer and the solemnities of God's house. These will be insipid and stale, and as they grow older they will debauch the church into the principles of the opera, the theatre, and the dance."

Now this is very well put, but you may notice his last concluding words—his deprecation of the principles of the opera, the theatre and the dance. Now we Church of England people want nothing of this character in our religious church teaching, though we do not regard these amusements in themselves as harmful, or when religion has *first* had her due share of time and place, as dangerous, for their degree and character will be moderated and directed thereby. But it is a grievous mistake to confuse and mystify the minds, especially of the young, by mixing motives, promoting an uncertain feeling that the end justifies the means, or even, that what may be in itself harmless and innocent amusement, when contributing to church funds, or under church auspices, becomes a meritorious or pious act. This is an *impious fraud upon the young or untrained conscience*. Solomon has taught us, and few will venture to dissent from him, that there is a time for recreative amusements, and also a time for serious instruction and solemnities. Mix them and you make the instruction tend to frivolity,

and you only add weariness to the amusement, which, feeling itself suspiciously out of place, reacts into either a simpering hypocrisy or a contemptuous scoffing. These remarks apply to no one party in the church, or to any particular outside Christian community, but are beginning to claim the attention of all thinking religious men on this continent. The practice of the English church clergy at home is wiser. They do not think it in good taste to mix up solemn prayers and serious hymns in literary and musical entertainments to the extent that prevails here, and they do not, nor are they expected to give a ministerial blessing at their termination. They would as soon think of pronouncing the absolution as a befitting dismissal after a comic reading or recitation.

And now hoping that you will excuse the imperfect and disconnected way in which I have treated this subject, for it is only late in life and with little leisure that I have had any opportunity for studying Sunday Schools, either practically or theoretically, I will conclude, hoping that I have not been misconstrued into supposing that I think myself capable of giving instruction to so many now present from whom I trust to share with you in the pleasure of hearing. Not to detain you further. I thank you for your kind attention.

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