

THE Union Seminary Magazine.

Vol. XIII

FEBRUARY—MARCH, 1902.

No. 3.

I. Literary.

ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

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I SUPPOSE most of us would say the Sabbath-school had its origin in the work of Robert Raikes in 1781, in Gloucester, England. Moved by the need of the poor and ignorant children, he employed "four decent, well-disposed women" to gather and teach these boys and girls; for this labor each received a "shilling a week." He is called, therefore, "the founder of Sabbath schools."

But this is true only of the modern work. Raikes was unwittingly restoring the "old paths." He was undoubtedly led of the Spirit of God to bring the church back to God's statutes, in which he had commanded Israel to teach his laws to their children. Dr. Trumbull, in his lectures on the Sabbath-school at Yale, shows conclusively that in each synagogue there was a school for the young. Philo states that "the Jews were by parents and teachers instructed in the law from their earliest youth." Josephus corroborates this by showing it was not new in his day. About 80-70 B. C. Simon ben Shetach reestablished the system of schools in every synagogue in all Palestine. Edersheim states that "there is no reasonable doubt that such schools existed in all the synagogues, and that up to ten years of age the Bible was the only text-book." There was also such a school in the temple. In this Jesus was found asking and answering questions when twelve years of age.

So marked was this feature of the synagogue that this saying was current, "If you would destroy the Jews, you must destroy their schools."

It is well known that the synagogue worship became the model for Christian churches. We can well conclude that Christian churches would not be careless about the church training of their children.

We find proof of the continuance of this custom by the apostolic church in the charge Celsus brought against the Christians, that they sought to instruct and pervert all the children. This charge was answered, not by denying that they sought to instruct the children, but by denying that such instruction perverted them. It was then, and must ever be, the glory of Christ's church that she feeds his lambs, and suffers the little children to come unto him.

Julian the apostate showed what the church was doing when he issued the edict to take all schools from the church and put them under state control, forbidding the Bible to be read in them. He is the father of the modern idea, which would divorce religion and education, and banish even the reading of God's word in our schools.

The growth of the church in numbers, influence, knowledge and piety was the reward of her fidelity in discipling as the Lord had commanded.

When at the Reformation Luther's clarion voice awakened the church from spiritual death, he, with all the wise leaders, pressed the importance of instructing the young. "Young children and scholars are the seed and source of the church." Catechisms were formulated and taught along with the precious truths of God's word then open to all. The children were made wise unto salvation, and many witnessed with their blood, writing thus some of the noblest pages in the sad but heroic history of the martyrs.

The spiritual decadence of the eighteenth century showed itself nowhere else more than in the neglect of the young. Sad pictures are given of this fact in the land of Luther; and such as Bishop Ryle tells the same pitiful story of England. It was at this time God moved in the heart of Robert Raikes. He thought he was doing very little. So did the poor widow when she gave her two mites. So did Mary when she broke her

alabaster vase. So did Brainerd feel, perhaps, when his brief life ended; yet there started the fountain from which the modern stream of missions flows. So it seemed when a poor young Scotchman turned his face to Africa; yet when he died on his knees before his open Bible, Westminster Abbey claimed him as one of England's great dead. Whatsoever we do in love for Christ must be like the sweet odor from the broken vase.

From this small beginning was the church led back to the ancient law and custom, till in England and all Protestant lands she once more heard God say, "Take these children and nurse them for me."

The historian Green says, "This marked the beginning of new life." No less an orator and patriot than John Bright could say, "I believe no field of labor has yielded a greater harvest to our national interests and national character than the great institution of the Sabbath-school."

Its beneficent work has nowhere shown better results than in America. The extent of territory and the scattered population made it impossible for the people to have preaching often. They could, however, come together to study God's word, and many are the churches which grew out of such assembling.

One little girl, in Illinois, who found the Saviour in one of these little schools, impelled by the new love in her heart, brought her father, an illiterate and godless man. He, too, was won by the Great Teacher, and filled with love and zeal, he went forth to work for his Master. Twelve thousand schools and sixty thousand scholars were the results of his consecrated labors. Hundreds of churches grew out of these schools. Was it not in this very section that the power and influence of Sabbath-school work was strikingly shown? When Mr. Robert G. Ingersoll was nominated for Governor of the State, one delegate declared that if nominated "the Sabbath-schools would overwhelmingly defeat him." It is estimated that nearly one-fifth of the population of the United States is now in this work as students and teachers.

Progress. What has been said shows the progress made in numbers and influence. There can be no progress in the original purpose as given in God's command to teach his law to the children. That is the fundamental idea, and any departure from that is a step backward. Any school which aims to provide

entertainment for an hour, which makes singing or drilling for special occasions prominent, which bribes pupils to attend, is not true to its great work. Nor has any parent a right conception of duty or of the true work of the Sabbath-school who does not impress on the child that it is sent to be a learner in the school of Christ.

Along many lines there has been marked progress. In the true conception that its benefits are for all classes; for the children of the rich and more cultured, as well as for the poor and ignorant; for the young men and maidens, and for fathers and mothers, as well as for the little children. Happy that church where all these classes gather and can say, We are all here before God to hear what God has to say to us.

There has been progress, too, in the methods of instruction, and the new life and power in the conduct of the school. No superintendent is fit for the place who does not prayerfully prepare for his labor of love; who can repeat every Sabbath the same cut and dried prayer—so dry that it is dead; who can put no life or variety into his important part of the work.

As a class, we have better-prepared teachers. The teachers' meetings, the summer institutes, the normal classes, the prominence given to Sabbath-school work at meetings of our church courts—such conventions as this, with its admirable programme, its earnest discussions, its illustrations of the best methods, holding up high ideals—all these tend to uplift the work and give us better workers. Our church has, we believe, taken a great step forward in establishing a special department for Sabbath-schools, and placing at its head one whose zeal and intense energy must give new life and interest. May Dr. Phillips be richly blessed and guided by heavenly wisdom. What an improvement in Sabbath-school literature also. Many of the books in the libraries may be justly criticised; but how many inspiring and instructive ones are now open to our children. The lesson helps, in which a high place must be accorded the publications of our own church, leave no place for excuse now for lack of preparation on the part of either teacher or pupil. It is true that the Bible is not used as it should be; that often you will not find a dozen in a large school; but is not that the fault of the teachers and parents rather than of the children? Some years

ago I had the privilege of attending the Sabbath-school superintended by Mr. John Wanamaker. Before the reading of the Scriptures began he asked, "How many have their Bibles?" It was a thrilling sight to see the hundreds of Bibles held up, and to know that in that school God's word was not superseded by human helps. In this way we can have the inspiring fact that thousands are studying the same great truth at the same time, yet not allowing the Book to lose its place as first in the hearts of our children. Let me plead just here for a greater revival of the first law, which our fathers observed better than we—to "learn by heart" the *Hymns and Psalms* and parts of the Scriptures. As we grow older these come back to us with all the tender associations of home, and hold many true to the purpose and innocency of earlier years, that we do not drift away from the things we have heard.

What improvement, also, in Sabbath-school rooms and furniture, with special departments for each grade. We have before us in this room, dedicated to the memory of a noble life, an evidence of loving care and thought for our young. What new church building now goes up without special provision made for the Sabbath-school?

Let me, as I close, remind all who have the privilege of teaching God's law to the young that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. You shall reap in due season. May I speak of my own debt to a beloved teacher? He had in his class eight or ten as restless boys as could well be found. No doubt he was often discouraged, and thought the seed fell on stony ground; yet with love and patience he taught us God's law and sought to lead us to love and serve him. Never can two scenes be forgotten. One was on the Sabbath after the battle of Bull Run. His eldest son had fallen in battle. We did not expect our teacher that day; but though bowed with sorrow, he was with us. The lesson for the day was not taught, but he told us of his son's Christian character; of his manly struggle against youthful sins; of his brave stand for duty and his loving obedience to his parents, which had given them so much comfort and joy. Our hearts were fired with the bravery of our soldiers on the battle-field. He showed us that in our life's battle we needed the same courage and devotion to the right. Our hearts were stirred as never before with earnest purpose when thus our loved teacher could

forget his great sorrow and make that the time to impress upon his pupils the truth for our good.

Another scene comes back to me. He told us of his mother's custom, when he was a little child, of praying with him. He wondered often what it meant, as he felt the hot tears drop on his head. When he was eight years old God took her, and he was left without her protecting love and care. He left his father's house and went into the far country; yet he could not forget. The tones of that loved voice still dwelt in his heart, and he could not forget the dropping of those tears. Our eyes were moist and our hearts tender as he sought thus to bring us to realize the two great factors in every young man's life—God and his mother.

We honor his memory, and his influence and teaching was only second to that of our fathers and mothers in helping to shape our thinking and characters. We are his debtors for time and eternity. Thousands of consecrated teachers are giving like labor of love for Christ and for souls. Such labor and such laborers lift to a high plane this work of the Sabbath-school.

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[This article is an address delivered before the Teachers' Institute of East Hanover Presbytery, in the Second Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Va., last fall. This will explain some allusions that are made.—Ed.]