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THE TASK OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Religious Education

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THE TASK OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

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Publishing Society.*

In its most comprehensive sense religious education stands related to every agency through which personality is influenced. It is for this reason that the Religious Education Association has sought to ally itself not only with the Sunday-schools of the country, but with colleges and seminaries and public schools, with libraries and the public press, with art and with music.

To the church and the Sunday-school, however, the work of religious education presents itself in somewhat narrower aspects. Here a definite task has been committed to certain distinct agencies. Yet even here a rapid development is taking place with the consequent necessity of determining afresh the alignment of responsibilities.

With a view to a clearer understanding of the educational problem of the church it is pertinent to consider separately the main factors which enter into that problem. Just what is involved in the successful discharge by the church of its educational responsibility?

The first requisite, perhaps, is for approximate material to place in the hands of teachers and pupils. It is a rare teacher indeed who can take a child or group of children day by day or week by week and, absolutely unaided by the printed page, draw out by purely oral means the life that lies potentially there. Miss Sullivan in her teaching of Helen Keller is almost the solitary instance of such a teaching method, and this only temporarily and for obvious reasons.

There must be text-books of some sort, together with maps, charts, blackboards, pictures and illustrative objects, if one is to teach successfully.

Such material of religious education has existed in abundance for a long time, in the familiar "lesson helps." More recently there has been a very wide-spread and earnest effort to secure better adaptation of this material to the varying needs of the successive ages of childhood. As a result of this effort, in which many experienced educators have joined, graded courses of instruction have multiplied and the idea of the graded curriculum of religious instruction has gained firm hold. At present there is every disposition to prepare, issue and perfect such material as rapidly as possible. A wonderful advance has been made in this respect within the past seven or eight years, when practically nothing was available. Now, in addition to several more or less complete series of graded lessons published by independent houses, there is the graded series which is being prepared under the auspices of the International Sunday School Association. Out of these various experimental courses, there will gradually be developed the graded Sunday-school system of the future. Doubtless this process cannot be hastened unduly, but the dawn of the better day may already be proclaimed.

Along with this work of preparing the material, must go, hand in hand, the companion task of preparing the churches for the intelligent use of the material. A deal of patient cultivation of the field must be undertaken. Hosts of churches feel more or less keenly that something is wrong with the educational situation, but they do not know what the matter is. Graded lessons will not solve this problem. The present teachers cannot know at once what the graded lessons are for nor how to use them. Some of them possibly have no clear idea of just what they are trying to accomplish. The situation is still further confused by the multiplicity of educational agencies, covering the same field in the churches—or trying to—oftentimes entering into a sort of petty and lamentable competition with each other; such agencies as the young people's societies, missionary societies, children's clubs and choirs, which sometimes do not even realize that they are educational agencies at all. There is nothing more needed at this moment than that all these various enterprises within the church should be geared together into one strong system, guided by some one who knows just what educational purpose each is best adapted to achieve.

This will require a long and vigorous campaign in which the

churches, and especially the teachers, must avail themselves of every opportunity for discussion of the various aspects of the problem, in institutes, associations and summer assemblies. But in addition to these there is the need of a fully developed plan for the training of teachers. For this expert educators are essential to set proper standards and conduct normal and correspondence courses for which there should be secured the cooperation of the best Biblical scholarship which the country, and even the world, affords.

A third factor in the problem concerns the question of training for leadership. At present there is no well-defined policy in this respect. Yet there are two agencies whose cooperation, if secured, would go far toward meeting the need.

The first of these is the Christian college, which was founded in most instances with this end distinctly in view, the training of religious leaders. Singularly enough, such training in most of our colleges is supplied to-day through volunteer agencies, such as the Y. M. or Y. W. C. A., with such further assistance as the professors in other departments can render. There should be in every college a chair in Biblical history, literature and comparative religion, upon the same academic basis as the other recognized departments. It would be well also, if the departments of psychology and philosophy could be brought into relation with this department of religion so that such subjects as ethics and pedagogy might receive sympathetic treatment.

The college also might render a valuable service, and one which would redound greatly to its own glory, if it should undertake to do a sort of extension work in religious education through the summer school, midwinter institutes, by extension lectures and by correspondence.

Such courses as these in our colleges will do more than any other one thing to keep before our young people the dignity of religion in its intellectual aspect and to suggest the opportunities of Christian service and the Christian ministry.

A similar service may be rendered at the larger universities, especially the state institutions, through departments of religion established and maintained by the churches.

As a result of such work by the colleges and universities, a group of strong young men and women may be expected to return home, their interest in religion already keen and their minds well trained for taking up the burdens and grappling with the problems of the local church.

The second agency to which we must look for the training of leaders in religious education is the theological seminary. Coming from colleges equipped as has just been outlined, the seminary student will have been able to acquire beforehand much of the elementary training needed for his profession. Relieved of much of this burden, the seminary will be able to turn its attention more definitely to those more specialized departments which are so urgently demanded by the needs of to-day.

And first among these is the department of religious pedagogy. Such a department would seem to-day indispensable to every theological seminary. It ought to furnish not only instruction in the history and principles of the art of teaching; it should also have its laboratory school where the student is taught to meet and study the problem of religious teaching at first-hand, and where investigations may be carried on which will constantly add to our fund of scientific information.

Every man who is admitted to the Christian ministry should be required to master the fundamental principles of religious pedagogy, that he may be able intelligently to guide the forces of religious education in his own church. But there should also be kept in mind the needs of the special student, who has the gifts of the teacher and who may expect never to enter the preaching ministry. Many churches will come to see the wisdom and great economy of the plural ministry, each one specially fitted for his peculiar task.

More and more also it will be seen that religious education, like all other education, presents not one problem simply, but a large number of special problems to the solution of which only specialists can bring the requisite training and insight. The different ages of childhood are each distinct problems, and we already have a group of specialists in elementary education. A similar group is needed for the study of adolescence, the boy problem, the question of discipline, worship, social service, curriculum, conversion, and many others.

This then is the task of religious education, from the standpoint of the Christian Church:—1. To provide appropriate and adequate material. 2. To prepare the churches to use this material intelligently and efficiently, to coordinate the agencies of religious education into one harmonious system, to furnish the teachers with the latest and best aids to the mastery of the art of teaching. 3. To bring into closer cooperation the resources of college, university and theological seminary, for the training of lay leadership and the

development of specialists in religious education. These three factors must all be considered and adequately faced before the work of religious education can become really effective. That each of these factors is now receiving the serious attention of some of the most vigorous and trusted educators of the country, is one of the most encouraging features of this situation.—*From The Pilgrim Teacher.*

COLLEGE AND STUDENT.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COLLEGE FOR THE STUDENT AS AN INDIVIDUAL

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This responsibility is both general and special. It is general because of the relation of the college to its students. Since in some true sense it stands "in loco parentis" the college must sustain an individual relation to its students. What would be thought of a father who attempted to deal with his children in the mass and never as individual personalities? But this obligation is special because of the peculiar conditions under which the modern college exists. To this latter consideration I wish to call particular attention.

We live in a socialistic age. Our fathers believed that the individual human soul is God's unit of value, and that the primal purpose of education is to develop that soul to its highest and its best. We are coming to believe that the social order is the essential unit of value, and that all education should seek primarily the good of the social order. Our fathers' watchword was "The best possible individual character." Our watchword is "The largest possible social efficiency." They sought to make men better. We seek to make humanity better. They said the man is immortal. We say the race is immortal. Now these extreme contrasts are not as yet distinctly drawn, but the tendency is unmistakable. It may be seen both in our dominant theories and in our prevailing practice. For an illustrative theory, turn to the realm of education. What, for example, is our modern idea of a college? The fathers regarded it as essentially and intensely an individual affair. They seriously