

THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY SUNDAY SCHOOL—ITS ORGANIZATION.

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LET us consider the organization of the Sunday-school. The subject has been greatly emphasized in these late years. Given the Book and the man, and organization naturally follows. And yet organization, at its best, is dependent upon the spirit which generates and moves it. When God created man from the dust—a marvel of possibilities—there was neither word, nor look, nor movement, until he breathed into his new creature the “breath of life.”

Some of you will face the problem of the small church and Sunday-school where much organization is impossible and unnecessary. A mere handful must do the work. On such fields success depends, humanly speaking, almost entirely upon the pastor. Often he must be superintendent, teacher and solicitor, being in himself largely the center of intelligence, inspiration and power. Yet such work has its advantages not to be undervalued. The choicest fruit in the market is hand picked. The time and conditions favor close, personal acquaintance, helpful attentions impossible to the pastor of a large church. The intelligence, earnestness, piety and tact of the pastor will, little by little, attract sympathizers and helpers. The beginnings may be small; but good sense, hard work and spiritual courage will win out. Some of the best churches I have known sprang from such beginnings. “Despise not the day of small things.” To make a desert place bud and blossom is to have

worked with God. I love the small churches. It was in one of them that I was reconciled to God and later was called unto the ministry of our Lord. To that brave, loving pastor I owe more than to any other minister I have known. There was little organization: he was the center of it all, under God. I beg of you not to undervalue the importance and dignity of such work, for in fields like these many of the stalwart laymen of our larger churches were converted and trained, and from such churches many of our foremost pastors have come. They have been, like the unrecognized but unfailing springs far up on the mountain side, sending their waters to enrich the plains below. Honored is the man who thus, in close touch with Nature and his fellows, ministers the word of life, gathering the little ones of the kingdom and shepherding them until they are good soldiers of the cross. In these days of fever and haste, when beginnings are often lost in endings, it is well to recall the words of the great Teacher carefully and reverently, when he said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field;" for after all, the lines of life have not been changed, and history is repeating itself in you and me with slight alterations in face, date and locality. Life and character are made or unmade much as they were two thousand years ago. It is the simple work of sowing the "mustard seed." I pray you to remember that he who cares for the day of small things has pre-empted all the days that follow. No great life or achievement comes by chance. Back of it somewhere will be found the mustard sower. I quite envy you who are to spend the opening years of your ministry in the blessed, quiet fields of the country, with time for meditation and prayer, large opportunities for study, ample place for cultivating your few parishoners in a reasonable way, and so helping to shape the thought and life of the future in great fields far beyond. Accept the trust as no mean gift of God.

It is in the larger churches and Sunday-schools that the matter of organization becomes of vital importance. How can the workers be best combined and utilized? Experience has demonstrated that it is possible to bring them into such common purpose and endeavor as to generate both inspiration and strength. That is a remarkable transformation in which the awkward, unpromising squads of recruits become the disciplined and effective regiment of the army.

Greater by far are the possibilities of Christian organization and training. After considerable observation, I am persuaded that we are yet in the beginnings of this work. The latent forces in our churches and Sunday-schools are simply tremendous. To bring these forth in harmony, activity and power is the pastor's work and duty.

THE SUPERINTENDENT.

The man next to the pastor in efficiency ought to be the Sunday-school superintendent. He is not easy to find. The ideal man would combine quick, spiritual sympathy with the work; intellectual capacity to grasp its great importance; executive ability, with abounding love, tact and enthusiasm. He should be chosen because of his present and prospective capacity for service. He should be the close friend of the pastor and in sympathy with his administration. Take time to conduct the school yourself, if necessary, until you have found the best man within your possible reach. Search for him as for a priceless treasure. Once found he will be to you a tower of strength. It is desirable that he should be "apt to teach," so that he may conduct your teachers' meeting; but I have known some efficient superintendents whose gifts were largely along other lines. Many a superintendent has found and won helpers who were his superiors in the mere matter of teaching. Get the man who has power "to bring things to pass." The finding and

winning of such a man is the first and greatest step in the organization of the school. The same careful attention should be given to the selection of all officers, and especially the heads of departments. Success in this work guarantees the life and growth of the organization. Spirituality, intelligence, enthusiasm, tact, work, under God, will win in any community. I shall carry throughout my life a deep sense of obligation to the noble, efficient Christian men and women who have contributed so largely to any success attending our own school work.

THE SELECTION OF TEACHERS.

The selection of proper teachers for the Sunday-school is a matter of the greatest importance. Here as elsewhere the spiritual life is the first consideration; then knowledge of the fundamental truths of the Bible, some aptness to teach, and love of children. A proper teacher is always the assurance of a prosperous class. The selection cannot be too carefully made. The spiritual, intellectual and social enthusiasm of the school depends largely on the teacher. Better a few large classes well taught than many poorly taught. The crying need of our schools today is for better teachers. The grade of work must be improved if we are to command the intellectual respect of the communities in which we do our work. I urge you, therefore, to a kindly, persistent endeavor to enlist for the service the best men and women of the church. It will greatly dignify the entire undertaking if such are connected actively with the school. It will be a wise investment of your time to cultivate the lawyer, the judge, the banker, the physician, the business man, until he is brought to recognize the dignity and promise of the Sunday-school and puts himself heartily into it. Ask God to give you these men. Watch your opportunities. Win them one by one. We *must* have our most efficient people in this work if we are to realize our possibilities.

GRADING.

The proper separation of the Sunday-school classes into grades is a division necessary for the best work. In the main, the same general principles that apply to grading in our public schools will apply with equal force to the Sunday-school. Whenever it is possible, separate rooms should be provided for each grade, with a large part of their own opening and closing exercises. In our own school the method of grading is as follows:

Home Department—Those who cannot attend Sunday-school.

Kindergarten—Children under day-school age.

Primary—First to third grade in day school.

Intermediate—Fourth to sixth grade in day school.

Junior—Seventh grade in day school to eighteen years of age.

Adult—Eighteen years of age and upward.

GRADUATION.

In the ideal school graduation from a department would be on examination indicating attainment. Toward this ideal I think we should strive, but remembering that there are other considerations entering in. The class ties are often so strong that to separate the membership purely on such a basis would be to alienate and lose some. Age enters somewhat into the matter. In the lower departments of many schools great difficulty has arisen because of attachment to the superintendent, teacher and location. This may be obviated by the introduction and commendation of the new superintendent and the cultivation of the scholars' acquaintance some time before the date of graduation, placing all possible emphasis on the unity of the school. The wisdom of transferring the teacher with the class must be taken into consideration, first, as to the ability to teach equally well in the higher department, and, secondly, the hold the teacher has on the class. It must be remembered that

some teachers have special fitness for certain grades. There should be a cordial recognition and welcome of the graduating classes to the departments into which they come on the part of the new superintendent. First impressions are strong, and the entrance should be made bright and cordial. A little careful thought and tact will make the transfer pleasant and helpful.

CLASS ORGANIZATION.

In the larger and older classes an organization often proves helpful. A president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, committee on strangers, and committee on the sick are desirable. A large class of young men, numbering more than two hundred, in our own school thus states its objects: "First, to advance the interests of the class; second, to increase the mutual acquaintance of its members; third, to promote among them a higher Christian life; fourth, to afford them material assistance when necessary." This class holds regular monthly meetings for the transaction of all business affairs and the cultivation of acquaintance; has an annual banquet, an annual concert; and disburses several hundred dollars yearly. In a word, it is a center of spiritual inspiration and power among our young men. Under a skillful teacher and leader, much enthusiasm and efficiency may be generated. The vigorous work of the Young Men's Christian Association illustrates to us the possibilities of a more efficient service to the young men, and we must not be blind to our responsibilities. No organization ought to care for its young men better than the Christian church. You can afford to give much time, labor and sacrifice to their care. Ask God to give you the young men, and then labor as though you expect an answer to that prayer.

OFFICERS' COUNCIL.

In our own school the by-laws provide for an officers' council. "The general officers of the school and the

associate superintendents shall constitute an officers' council and shall meet once a month." The wisdom of this council has been repeatedly demonstrated in our work. The superintendent presides, but the pastor is the senior officer. We are often invited to dine at the home of one of the officers. Meetings are monthly and occupy the entire evening. Formal reports are rendered by the secretary, treasurer and associate superintendents of the six departments on the work of the past month. Each superintendent gives the department membership at the beginning and close of the month, reasons for gain or loss, change of teachers, nominations of new teachers, any changes of work or general administration. At the close of each report the superintendent asks for any criticisms on the work of this department for the past month. "Can this work be improved in any particular? Have any suggestions been found in the current literature of the past month helpful to this department?" The discussion is frank and full, with a desire to bring the work, in the light of the latest and best methods, up to date. Thus each department is brought up for thorough consideration to the attention of the entire council every month. The best Sunday-school literature of the world is read, and new suggestions are brought forward for discussion. Delicate matters of administration are here confidentially considered and advice is given. In case an officer intends resigning, the fact is here known weeks before it is made public, and the entire situation is discussed, so that the officers go before the school with a united judgment as to the wisest course to follow. The council is *advisory only* in these matters, but the officers represent in character and ability an influence which naturally molds considerably the judgment of the school at large. It gives to the pastor an up-to-date knowledge concerning the entire Sunday-school situation once a month and affords a practical touch and influence which renders alienation almost impossible. It affords

a fine opportunity to express himself through these officers of the school. I regard this council as the highest step yet reached in our Sunday-school organization. In emergencies it may be a great source of strength and safety.

QUARTERLY MEETINGS.

There should be a board of management, consisting of the pastor, officers, teachers, and visitors in the Home Department—all members of the church—which shall have direction of the entire school, meeting quarterly. *This is the legislative body of the school.* Emphasis should be laid on these meetings, giving them dignity, enthusiasm, and significance. This is especially the place where new departures are to be finally discussed by the entire working force. Under tactful leadership the quarterly meeting may be a place of light and power. Here the general elections are held and the business of the school is transacted.

DEPARTMENT CONFERENCES.

An occasional department conference of officers and teachers on topics of departmental interest is of real value. It offers an opportunity for better acquaintance, the discussion of matters suggested by the department superintendent and the teachers, reports from teachers on encouragements and discouragements found in their individual classes. It gives the opportunity to impress the best methods of teaching in the department and the setting forth of methods of the more successful teachers. The pastor and the general superintendent will find it profitable to be present. Sometimes an informal lunch may be used with advantage. In the experience of our school, this has been found both delightful and helpful.

THE ADULT DEPARTMENT.

So far as I know, the first Adult Department of the Sunday-school was organized in Calvary Baptist Church,

Washington, D. C., in the year 1889. For some years the membership of the Sunday-school was composed largely of scholars under eighteen years of age, a Bible class of about thirty men and women, two small classes of young men, and two more classes of young women. The absence of the adult members of the church and congregation was a serious matter of consideration. The number of younger classes increased until three older classes were taught in the church auditorium. The crowded condition of the Sunday-school rooms suggested the permanent occupancy of the auditorium, but the classes seemed lost in the large room and lacked the enthusiasm of numbers and organization. This led to the endeavor to increase the number of adult classes, and several of our excellent people united in a canvass for new scholars. The result was a gratifying success. Then came the organization, with superintendent, assistant superintendent, secretary, chorister, etc. The movement commended itself and the increased number of classes and membership awakened enthusiasm. The novel sight of a large number of men and women studying the word of God together, the presence of the fathers and mothers of the children in the rooms below, contributed to the dignity and enthusiasm of the entire work of the school. So rapid and steady was the growth that in 1893 it became necessary to build a large and commodious Sunday-school house adjoining the church, and the Adult Department was given the large upper room, with its twenty-eight separate class rooms and floor space for twenty additional classes. The fervor awakened by the erection of the new building was made an occasion for further endeavor to increase the membership, until now we have in the Adult Department—officers, teachers, and scholars—more than one thousand members. The opening and closing exercises are dignified and impressive. Occasionally special music or a brief talk from some distinguished worker varies the programme. Mr. Wana-

maker, when Postmaster General, once said to me: "I like the enterprise of this school. The surprising thing is that so many people cannot understand that it is easier to do a big thing than a little thing." To us this new departure has been a source of satisfaction and helpfulness from the very beginning. It has contributed many teachers to the school in its various departments and has in training many substitute teachers at present. I commend the Adult Department to your careful thought. It has great possibilities in it. While unquestionably the more vital work of the school is done in the lower departments, we ought not to ignore what may be done for the men and women in our congregation.

HOME DEPARTMENT.

Another modern and important advance in Sunday-school organization is found in the Home Department. In every congregation there are some who from age, illness, or home conditions are shut in. To seek them out; to assure them of loving remembrance and desire to have them counted in our work; to be, with us, students of the Word of Life; and to share in our endeavor to save the world, is practical, Christlike work. A word of cheer and helpfulness is here possible. When the idea of the Home Department was mentioned to Bishop Vincent by Dr. W. A. Duncan, in 1881, the Bishop said: "There has been no thought or plan so important and far reaching in its possibilities since the first Sunday-school was organized." This department may be made especially valuable in assisting the pastor to shepherd those of his flock in out-of-the-way places. The practical difficulty is in finding a superintendent and visitors who have a high conception of the tender significance and duty of thus shepherding these dear members of the Father's family. It is a beautiful, inspiring, far-reaching work, and well cared for, adds much to the moral and spiritual force of the school. Occasional conferences of the offi-

cers and visitors, sometimes with the pastor, will be helpful; and the recognition of the work at proper times from the pulpit is desirable. In all general gatherings of the school, endeavor should be made to bring in all members who can reasonably attend. Properly developed, this department will be continually transferring some from its own membership to the more active departments of the school.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SUBSTITUTES.

In the larger schools there may profitably be a superintendent of substitute teachers—one who, recognizing the necessity of the best possible work, will represent the school in a continued search in the school and the community for those especially qualified to teach. The opportunity for a very important service to the school in such an officer is obvious.

DEPARTMENT OF VISITORS.

In the larger schools there should be a superintendent of strangers, with the necessary number of assistants, whose duty it shall be to greet and welcome visitors, conducting to the superintendent of departments those desiring to unite with the school, guiding visitors through the school, and imparting such information as may be desired concerning it. This work, in wise hands, is very valuable. A small folder—with the names of officers, departments, basis of grading, outlines of study, financial report, teachers, membership of departments, names of the pastor, clerk, and treasurer of the church, with its membership; names and locations of mission schools and officers—will be of special use to the strangers and prove an answer to many questions.

THE CRADLE ROLL.

The cradle roll of membership in the Sunday-school has much to commend it. The coming of a new child to the family is recognized by a friendly visitor. The name,

date of birth and residence are recorded; the parents are congratulated; and the child is pre-empted for the Kindergarten Department later on. It is natural that the parents should be pleased with such attention and come to regard the child as somewhat under the care of the school and a candidate for future membership. Frequently it proves the entering wedge in winning the parents to the school and the church. It is much more important than would be supposed by the thoughtless. It is a natural line of Kindergarten Department work.

TEAS AND BANQUETS.

In the early fall, after the end of vacation season, an autumnal tea for the purpose of rallying the entire working force of the school—officers, teachers, and substitute teachers—is excellent. After a social hour, an informal tea is served. Then follow some bright talks on vacation reminiscences, interspersed with music, closing with the addresses of the superintendent and the pastor on the importance of the fall work and any special new departures.

In the spring there may be a more dignified banquet of the school composed of the same workers. A few more formal addresses may be made by some of the brightest workers; and it may add to the interest if some distinguished Sunday-school worker from outside is invited, with closing words from the superintendent and the pastor. The aim should be to make the banquet the event of the year in the intellectual, social and spiritual life of the school. Such gatherings have proven very helpful, commanding generous notice from the press and comment in the community. They aid in emphasizing the unity of the school, cultivate acquaintance, afford excellent opportunity to familiarize the entire body of workers with existing conditions, and offer an opportunity to introduce and commend any new departures in the work.

CHILDREN'S DAY AND RALLY DAY.

A proper observance of these days by the united departments of the school is very desirable. It breaks in a little on the monotony of the general work, gives the individual scholar an idea of the membership of the school, and offers an opportunity for the participation of the little folks, which is always pleasing. The children always win. On Rally Day the number of each class should be called; and the response in figures may be, first, the entire class membership, and second, the number present. It puts the teacher and the class on their mettle and helps to hold them up to their work. Proper preparation for such occasions summons the entire constituency of the school, awakens enthusiasm, and illustrates in concrete form the forces already gathered in the Sunday-school.

PROGRAMME COMMITTEE.

After years of observation, I am persuaded that a permanent programme committee, who arrange all general school exercises through the year—Rally Day, Christmas, Children's Day, teas, and banquets—under direction of the superintendent, thus avoiding unnecessary repetitions and securing a progressive unity in the exercises of the year, is desirable. It is a rare gift needed for such work. Knowledge of the *personnel* of the school, broad vision of the work undertaken, and the power of initiative are essential to the best success.

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL LIBRARY.

There is some difference of opinion as to the practical value of a Sunday-school library in these days. I think it generally desirable, though the large increase of literature in the home and the multiplication of public libraries render the demand less than in other days. There should always be a well-selected reference library, with the best books of special demoninational value, for the use of workers and inquirers. In every well-organized

church and Sunday-school there should be an efficient agency for the circulation of our denominational papers and Sunday-school literature. This may be properly done under the direction of the librarian. The absence of denominational literature in many of our homes is a matter for serious consideration. If we expect quick sympathy from our people in world-wide mission work, Christian education, and the natural activities of applied Christianity, they must have fresh, up-to-date information—knowledge of the widening triumphs of Christ's kingdom in all lands. If every Sunday-school librarian were selected with the special purpose of making his work a center for the dissemination of religious literature in the church, the school and the congregation, it would be well; indeed, I am convinced that such an endeavor is one of the necessities of the present.

CULTURE OF THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT.

No Sunday-school can be true to itself that ignores its obligation to the world. From the very beginning there should be careful instruction in matters pertaining to the command, the duty, the privilege of carrying the gospel to "every creature." In the individual classes and in the public exercises of the school the plain command of our Lord should find loving and frequent emphasis. In its benevolences the school should be efficient in its training of the membership. Therefore, there should be reasonable, regular, generous contributions of funds solicited for missions at home and abroad; indeed the school should be a "training school for missions" in the broadest and holiest sense of the term. The officers and teachers of the school should make it their constant duty to gather the freshest and brightest illustrations of missionary endeavor and success in all the world in order that they may be utilized for the impartation of divine truth. All possible endeavor should be made to pre-

empty the heart and mind of the child for the world-wide work in the Master's kingdom. God give us the children!

MATERIAL EQUIPMENT.

The average church edifice, with its lecture room, primary room and one or two Bible-class rooms, will furnish space for most schools. An organ—or better, a piano—a blackboard, and a large map will do to begin with. Plenty of good light and ample ventilation are necessary. Chairs are the more desirable seats, as they may be lessened, multiplied, or rearranged as occasion demands, or taken entirely from the room if used for social purposes. But with the proper spirit, organization, and work, it is to be hoped the school will demand larger and better accommodations. There are always obstacles in the way of new and large expenditures of money. It will be useless ordinarily to attempt much until the demand is actually apparent. Work the old plant to its utmost; make expansion an absolute necessity by reason of success. There is always an enthusiasm in new and necessary departures and the financial sacrifice which renders them possible. There is a contagion in healthy enterprise and an admiration for that kind of courage and faith that measures itself in dollars and cents. The modern Sunday-school house—with its capacious classrooms; offices for the pastor, superintendent, secretary, and treasurer; lavatories, etc.—is rapidly becoming a necessity in our larger schools. The details of its size and arrangement must be studied in the light of the local need and means at hand. Unquestionably the work of the Sunday-school demands the best possible equipment; and you will be surprised to find how much may be accomplished when the matter is pushed with good judgment and enthusiasm. A large and generous care of the school in the way of material equipment will command the attention of the community and go far toward dignifying it in the eyes of all.

I have spoken thus freely and somewhat informally of the organization of Sunday-school work, with occasional references to our own school, by your request. I beg to remind you, in closing, that organization and equipment are but means to an end. Spiritual life and growth must keep pace with all material advance, or it will profit but little. Behind the equipment must be a heart beating in sympathy with its divine Lord in a never-ending passion for souls.