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The Teacher Training Work of the International Sunday School Association

REV. E. MORRIS FERGUSON

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In the North American field, the Sunday-school officers and teachers number about a million and a half. Nearly all of these are in the fellowship of the International Sunday School Association and its constituent state, territorial, and provincial auxiliaries. They are therefore potential subjects of teacher-training influence along interdenominational lines.

The first and fundamental work of these associations is to ascertain, through a systematic annual canvass, the number and location of these officers and teachers, with their pupils, the statistics needed to reveal the educational progress of their Sunday schools, and the names and addresses of their superintendents. This is regularly accomplished as respects a large proportion, probably at least two-thirds, of the whole number. In considering the vast array of American and Canadian Sunday-school teachers, therefore, we are dealing, not with an unknown and unreached mass, but with an army, divided into companies by states, counties and townships or other local units, marshaled under its officers, standing at attention, and for the most part earnestly waiting for some wise and appropriate words of instruction and command.

Many lines of helpful effort have in the past suggested themselves to friends of these waiting hosts, corresponding in some degree to the many needs which sympathetic acquaintance is continually revealing. Denominational leaders have published, planned and pushed; summer assembly managers have held classes and offered diplomas; institutions like the University of Chicago have offered correspondence instruction and extension work; and for the graded and specialized primary teachers there has been a generation of co-operative and wondrously fruitful effort. All this must be classed as teacher-training. Into all these labors the International Sunday-school Association has entered, gathering up the traditions and results of early effort, correlating and unifying divergent practices and purposes, simplifying and standardizing the resultant statements of method and plan, and, by the sweep and momentum of its flexible and comprehensive organization, bringing to the many, the remote, and the inert those impulses and activities which ordinarily are characteristic of the progressive few. In other words, the general policy of the International Sunday-school work has been applied to the special problem of teacher-training.

The preparing of manuals for Sunday-school teachers was a task not neglected by the earliest friends of the cause in

America; and since those formative days the industry has flourished. Most of these undertake to cover but a part of what the average teacher or teacher-candidate is supposed to need. The excellence of some consists in the scholarly and authoritative nature of the matter, and of others in the clarity and simplicity of the form. The ideal manual, however, is still hopefully awaited, as the two excellences mentioned are seldom even approximately combined.

Much of the weakness of the typical normal manual seems to be due to the assumption so frequently made, that the reason why a teacher is inefficient is that he is ignorant. Such an assumption naturally arises from the fact that the ignorance of the inefficient teacher is at once the characteristic most easily observed and the want most easily supplied. But when we have supplied the lacking information, we have not necessarily added to the efficiency of our teacher; for his inefficiency may be due, not primarily to his ignorance, but to a fundamental misconception of the teacher's task, or a lack of sympathy for childhood, or an unwillingness to pull in the school harness, or a temperamental self-distrust, or an unawakened and undedicated soul.

Added knowledge, obviously, will not reach these needs by any intrinsic worth it may possess of itself. Only when the presented information finds waiting some appetite of the soul can it enter the life and become the creator of power. And only as the teaching plan for the training-class provides prompt and fit outlets of expression, either in research or in service, for the new life thus awakened, may we expect that the teacher-training project will really train our teachers. Otherwise, we are but filling them.

Appreciating this need, the International Sunday-school Association has through some of its leaders and departments sought to reach the teachers in other ways than through formal class instruction; notably in the free, organized interchange of thought, stimulus, and experience secured at the summer school, the institute and the graded teachers' union. Pressure has also been brought to secure from the theological seminaries a ministry "able to teach others also." But in the usual specific and limited sense of that awkward word, "teacher-training," the International Sunday-school Association has done a work which is worth our study and which asks for our co-operation.

While a few of the state and provincial associations, notably Illinois, New York and Nova Scotia, have for many years prosecuted the work of organizing and leading what was formerly called normal Sunday-school teaching, no unification and expansion of the movement was attempted under International auspices until the time of the Ninth International Sunday-school Convention, held at Atlanta in 1899. At this time the International

Primary Union became more truly than before a department of the work; and under the lead of the chairman of its central committee, Mrs. J. Woodbridge Barnes, it projected a training course especially for primary teachers, selecting the materials from various books, and providing for individual enrolments, examinations and recognitions at the office of the International Primary Department. The co-operation of all the state primary superintendents, local unions and other friends of the work was enlisted; and in hundreds of weekly union meetings the sections of the training course were pursued and candidates prepared for examination.

Following this pioneer International movement, the few states and provinces previously making teacher-training an organized branch of their work rapidly increased in number. The call for International direction and unification of the teacher-training forces of the country was heard by the International Executive Committee. Much was done informally by Dr. H. M. Hamill, at the time the Field Superintendent of the International work, who had for many years directed this department in the Illinois Sunday-school Association. More was done when the work was formally committed to the hands of an International Teacher-training Superintendent, also an Illinois worker, Mr. W. C. Pearce, who still holds the office. In the summer of 1903 a Committee on Education was formed, for the special purpose of fostering all forms of teacher-training. Of this Committee Dr. Hamill was made chairman, and Mr. Pearce acted as executive secretary.

The latest report issued by Mr. Pearce is to the effect that fifty-six state, territorial and provincial Sunday-school associations now have teacher-training departments, and that the number of reported enrolments, which was nine thousand at Denver, 1902, and increased to 34,000 at Toronto, 1905, is now far beyond the latter figure. We may estimate it at fifty thousand, or five per cent of the million teachers whom we saw at the outset to be connected by available channels of communication with the International Sunday-school work.

Since the advent of the Committee on Education, the Primary Department—now the Department of Elementary Grades—has endeavored to withdraw from its former direct leadership of teacher-training for elementary teachers, and seeks to turn over all candidates to the care of their respective state and provincial teacher-training departments. Its work on this behalf relates now simply to the furnishing of material for elementary grades specialization, in connection with the regular first and advanced standard courses. A series of leaflets, defining the work of the cradle roll, and of the beginners, the primary, and the junior departments, has lately been issued from the International office at Chicago, and represents the present proposal of material for

such specialized work. Other lines of special instruction in method are needed, and will no doubt soon be supplied.

Meanwhile, however, the great denominations have made new beginnings of teacher-training effort, and have launched forth into various and exceedingly inco-ordinate schemes for the stimulating and training of their respective teaching forces. To unify these schemes so as to gain good for all from the separate excellences of each, and to make possible a basis of common work for the denominational leaders and the interdenominational associative bodies, the Committee on Education called a conference. Postponed from August, 1907, this was held in Philadelphia, January 7 and 8, 1908, at the instance of Secretary Pearce and under the chairmanship of Professor M. G. Brumbaugh as vice-chairman, Dr. Hamill being abroad. At this conference, the several denominational plans of teacher-training were explained and informally considered, and much unconscious and wholesome unifying was germinally begun. It was heartily agreed that standardization is desirable. A "first standard course" for pupils needing elementary instruction, and an "advanced standard course" for students able to do work of higher grade, were agreed on as to names and specifications, as follows:

It is the sense of this Conference in defining the *minimum* requirements for the Standardized Course for Teacher-training:

(a) That such minimum should include fifty lesson periods, of which at least twenty should be devoted to the study of the Bible, and at least seven each to the study of the Pupil, the Teacher, and the Sunday School.

(b) That two years' time should be devoted to this course, and in no case should a diploma be granted for its completion in less than one year.

(c) That there should be an Advanced Course, including not less than one hundred lesson periods, with a minimum of forty lesson periods devoted to the study of the Bible, and of not less than ten each to the study of the Pupil, the Teacher, the Sunday School, and Church History, Missions or kindred themes.

(d) That three years' time should be devoted to this course, and in no case should a diploma be granted for its completion in less than two years.

Important advances were also made in the formulating of working plans for the enrolling of training classes in Sunday schools, the exchange of enrolments between the denominational and the interdenominational offices, and the granting of examinations and conferring of diplomas. While no party to the arrangements is less free than before, and no diminution is likely in the healthy divergence of scholastic standards which must ever prevail over so wide a field, the teacher-training forces of the continent are now at one as never before; and they are moving forward to the practical realization of their ideals.