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A Graded School at Work

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The graded course of the Disciples School, Church of the Disciples, Boston, Mass., has had a trial of seven years. The first three years were necessarily marked by many changes in details, but the main lines have been preserved from the first, and the course is now used from year to year with little alteration.

The school assembles at quarter before ten on Sunday morning. The session lasts an hour and fifteen minutes. The Primary and Kindergarten departments meet at eleven and are in session during the church service. Thirty minutes are given to the opening exercises of the school, thirty-five minutes to class-work, and ten minutes to the closing exercises. The thirty minutes given to the opening exercises are filled to overflowing with memory services; which consist of the recitation of Bible selections, hymns and other expressions of poetry grouped about the central ideas of Fatherhood, Brotherhood, Leadership, Character, Progress, the singing of choice hymns set to selected music, the ensemble reading of great passages from the Bible, chosen for their teaching value and their dramatic power—the reciting of our faith and covenant. Pictures bearing on the central thought of the service are brought to the front to aid in the creation of an uplifting and harmonious atmosphere. In the conduct of the opening exercises emphasis is placed on the emotional and imaginative elements of religious education.

A graded system inevitably tends to emphasize the individual class-work, and thus to make many independent units. In such a system the school life should be strongly felt at the center, the class units being brought interdependently into an harmonious whole. Continuity in the work of the school as a whole invites this unity of spirit. At the close of a school year, a definite achievement should be in the possession of each pupil, as a result of the opening exercises.

To illustrate: Not only, for a year, may thoughts be grouped about certain great ideas of Fatherhood, Brotherhood, etc., as suggested above, but the superintendent may provide for continuity in the school Bible-readings by taking for the central

thought some one verse of the Bible which may lend itself to a variety of expansion. "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law." He may show the two-fold elements in each attribute of the spirit, that

Love is adoration and service.
 Joy is possession and sacrifice.
 Peace is contentment and desire.
 Long-suffering is endurance and hope.
 Gentleness is nobility and lowliness.
 Goodness is justice and mercy.
 Faithfulness is vision and choice.
 Meekness is strength and kindness.
 Temperance is gratification and restraint.

Herein is material for continuity and progression for a year of Bible readings—a choice of the dramatic passages being preferred, to illustrate each virtue. In a few instances a single selection will illustrate the two-fold lesson, the passage in the last of John, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me," affording a perfect example, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee!" "Feed my sheep." Here we have both adoration and service entering into that supreme fruit of the spirit which is love.

The school spirit is further strengthened by an interest in the missionary work of our denomination—the school contributing once a month to an association treasury. Twice a year offerings are brought for the Children's Mission, and twice for the Morgan Memorial, two organizations in our city, devoted to charitable and rescue work. It is important to lay especial stress on this Central giving of the school, in view of the many special forms of social service in which the separate classes are engaged.

No interruption to the progress of the graded lessons is permitted. Festival occasions celebrating Harvest, Christmas, Easter, Association Day and other red-letter days are given a special hour convenient to both school and congregation. Thus only can the graded course acquire steadiness.

Each teacher holds a class two years, a time sufficient for intimate acquaintance. A change of subject the second year provides mental refreshment, while the alternate repetition of subjects secures in time expert teaching.

In a school of a hundred scholars with the co-educational plan, ten teachers are sufficient for the classes. In a larger school, two or more classes of each grade are required, the

biennial promotions being so planned that the complete course of study may be in operation each year. The grading lines between Primary and Kindergarten and between Primary and Junior should be elastic, that the little people may neither be unduly hindered or forwarded by set promotions.

The Disciples School course covers a period of twenty years—from four years of age to twenty-four. It is arranged in ten grades. Recognition takes place at the end of the Senior year (the pupil's age being about sixteen years). Advanced recognition follows later. An appropriate book containing an inscription by the minister is formally presented. Members entering the school irregularly are placed according to age and attainment, and opportunity given to receive such partial recognition as late entrance upon the course may afford. The aim is to give the school the benefit of the system of day-school methods, avoiding extreme requirements, and such rigidity as might limit its reasonable membership, and impair its usefulness.

By referring to the printed curriculum, published in RELIGIOUS EDUCATION for December, 1907, it will be seen that the plan consists of three parallel courses called Bible Lessons, Ethical Teaching and Social Service. These courses while appearing distinct upon the program are interwoven according to the adaptability of the teacher. One method is to give five minutes to the ethical teaching each Sunday. A better method is to weave that teaching into the Bible lesson, and connect it with the very *life* of the child without his realizing that he is being morally instructed.

I believe that this Disciples Course is so simple, that it may be easily adapted to the needs of many schools, the denominational teaching being replaced by whatever statement of belief belongs to the school adopting the course. The social service has a distinct advantage in being graded, for the scholars become definitely interested in many forms of helpfulness. When the yearly reports of social service are made, the young people in the advanced classes hear the reports of all the forms of social service in which they have once engaged. The variety of interest is healthful, and an experience in many ways of giving leads to an intelligent choice when public interests in the future must be wisely limited.

A school so organized retains its scholars through young manhood and womanhood, attracts them to church-membership, and binds them in loving loyalty to the varied church-interests and activities.

Such a school, supported by the church, is made secure for the future.