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A Director's Report and Analysis*

HERBERT W. GATES, D.D.

In this final report as superintendent of our Church School I wish to summarize the main developments in our work during the last few years and the reasons therefor.

Together with other schools we are in a transition period with new conditions that must be met. The most important of these is the change to a new conception of the nature of religious education. It is not long since the very possibility of religious education was challenged. There are still some who hold that religion is purely a gift of divine grace through a more or less revolutionary experience called "conversion" or the "new birth" and not a matter of education at all.

Slowly but surely, however, the conviction has gained ground that, while religion is no less a relationship between God and man, nevertheless, God does choose to work through mental and spiritual laws and that the development of a religious—and that means for us a Christian—personality is as much a matter of instruction and training as any other phase of personality.

We may understand the present idea of religious education more clearly and control its methods more surely if we note how closely it corresponds to the modern program of general education. For general education and religious education have been moving along the same lines and have come more closely together, to the great advantage of both.

If we look back a decade or so we find the aims and methods of general education set up from the adult point of view. The results of human knowledge and achievement had been crystallized in certain formal studies, such as the three R's, geography, history, science and the like. The material of these studies was in books and the controlling idea in teaching was that of furnishing to the pupil the information and ideas to be drawn therefrom. By the acquisition of this information and ability to repeat the same, the pupil was held to have been educated.

It was increasingly evident to thoughtful observers that the results of this method left much to be desired. It was too common to find young people graduated from a long course of instruction without having acquired the ability to put their information to any practical use. We were not cultivating, to anything like the desirable extent, those interests, tastes and habits of thought and action which make for the highest type of human personality. Indeed some of the best results of this kind were observable in graduates of country schools, not supposed to be of the highest grade according to the prevailing standards; and in the so-called "self-made men" who had enjoyed very scanty educational privileges of the formal sort.

The study of such facts and their causes has led us to the modern conception of education which makes its aim, not so much the acquisition

*Report of the Superintendent to the Teachers and Officers Council Meeting (February 3, 1920) of the Brick Church, Rochester, by the retiring Director of Religious Education. Although the pressure of other material has deferred publication of this report for a long time, the analysis which Dr. Gates makes is so illuminating and so based on general principles as to be of permanent value.

of knowledge as mere information, but rather the cultivation of those finer tastes and broader interests, and those attitudes of mind and will which make the best type of manhood, able to think clearly on both sides of a question and disposed to act promptly and effectively for the greatest good of all.

Equally important has been the method accompanying this new aim. The method now centers about the pupil rather than the adult ideal of an educated person. It is seen that personality develops only through experience. If the child is to acquire broad interests he must be interested now. He learns to think only by thinking, not merely by reading or hearing about the thoughts of others. He learns how to act only by acting, really sharing in the work and service that are now to be done.

Most important of all is the modern appeal to motives. It is not enough to train the child in customary modes or tricks of behavior performed under the constraint of discipline, but we seek to give him the motives that will prompt him to carry on after constraint is removed. The child who acquires a taste for good reading will be a reader of good books when school days are over. The child who now learns to admire and love the true, the beautiful and the good in his present environment will continue to do so in the larger circle of adult relationships. The one who conducts himself at home in the interests of the family circle, or plays the game for the honor and success of the team, or shares in the social life and administration of the school for the good of the school, has the best preparation for those wider relationships in which he must move as a member of adult society.

The greatest emphasis is now being placed upon the effort to bring into the life and work of the school that spirit of partnership and sharing which characterizes the play life of the child and all his voluntary associations with comrades and elders.

Modern education is, therefore, "the introduction of control into human experience," as the recent statement of the Interchurch World Movement puts it, and it is the task of the teacher to arrange and bring the pupil to face situations and problems, whether imaginary and ideal, through reading and study; or actual situations in the course of daily experience; and to help him, through the responses he makes in thought and action, to acquire feelings, interests and attitudes of mind and will that shall pass over into the motives and habits of conduct appropriate to a thoughtful, broad-minded, efficient man or woman devoted to the highest welfare of all mankind.

This comes rather close to being a Christian ideal. Indeed, it is something for us as Christian teachers to consider very seriously, that many a child is actually getting better moral and ethical training in the public school than in the Church schools. It is this fact which is leading the Church to pattern its methods more closely after those of the day school.

The Church also has thought of religious education in terms of the adult ideal and has made altogether too much use of the information method. It has emphasized instruction at the expense of training. We have been too easily content with bringing the child to the point where he can repeat and under pressure of exhortation or constraint, gives his assent to certain doctrinal forms which we have held to be the orthodox labels of a religiously educated person. If we also succeed in bringing him to the point at which he joins the Church, attends its services more or less regularly, gives something to its support, and, in general, behaves himself so as to

avoid serious criticism, we are altogether too ready to convince ourselves that we have done a great piece of work.

We have not tested our work by sufficient inquiry into the motives, the interests, the real spirit that actuate the one whom we have thus educated. Much less have we brought our standards of requirement up to a genuinely Christian level.

As a result we find ourselves complacently accepting professed conversions actuated by no higher motive than that of fear or plain selfishness. We have called by the name of Christian many who can rejoice in their own salvation and remain comparatively indifferent to the fate of the rest of the world. We struggle with Church members from whom meager gifts are teased for the extension of God's kingdom and even marvel at sacrificial spirits who delight in giving to the limit of money, and time, and work, and spiritual energy for the sake of others. Yes, we have even put into places of religious leadership some whose conduct of their daily affairs and relationships with their fellowmen are far from Christlike.

Thank God! We can honestly say that extreme cases of such inconsistency are less common than they once were, due in no small part to the clearer vision and better methods of which we have been speaking. It may still be wholesome for us, however, in no self-righteous manner, but in all humility of spirit, to reflect that Jesus reserved his sternest words of rebuke for some of the leaders of his own Church, men who held just such positions as you and I do. His accusation of them was that they were punctilious in formal religious observance but lacking in brotherly spirit. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone."

Christian education, then, is that process by which we seek to lead the child, through activities in which he has a real share of interest and personal participation, to acquire those feelings of love toward God and man, those attitudes of mind and will, and those modes of behavior at home, at school, on the playground, at his work, and in society at large; which are heartily and genuinely Christlike. We can be content with no lower aim and no less effective method and still call ourselves good Christian teachers.

Now, against this background of aim and guiding principles, let me place a list of the ways in which our school has tried to realize its ideal of Christian education and ask you to note for yourselves how well the two compare.

1. We use graded courses of study that we may select our material and methods with reference to the interests, needs and capacities of the pupils in the various stages of development.

2. We have introduced into our course of study, in the lessons themselves, the stories of the Children's Church League, and in the programs of devotional services and special exercises abundant missionary material and this for several reasons.

- (a) It introduces variety which stimulates interest and opens up so many more points of contact for spiritual impression.

- (b) It gives reality to religious instruction by the use of material more nearly within the range of the pupil's experience. By using such mate-

rial along with the Biblical we carry over much of this sense of reality into the Bible study. The pupil is led to see that God's revelation of himself and His leadership in the affairs of men was not limited to Bible times alone, but is active today.

(c) It presents just so many more concrete situations which call upon the pupil for sympathy and helpful service.

3. The school is organized in departments, thus enabling those of like ages and similar interests and viewpoints to share more freely not only in the study, but also in the worship, the conduct of school affairs and social activities.

4. All through the school we have increasingly emphasized the principle of sharing on the part of the pupil in the life and work of the school. This is illustrated in the simple group activities of the beginners' and primary departments; in the organized class work of the older ones; in the share taken by individuals and classes in the junior-intermediate grades in leading devotional exercises, and, through their executive council, in helping to plan the departmental program; in the more highly organized work of the senior, or young people's department, which elects its own officers and plans and conducts its own exercises and social affairs; and, in general, in the practice of submitting to this council all the more important matters of policy instead of having such decided by the executive committee alone.

This principle of shared activities has governed the work of the Children's Church League from the beginning and is largely responsible for its success. It makes for greater interest and loyalty to Church and school.

5. Through the organized class work and in departmental projects we have tried to nourish the spirit of service and Christian helpfulness. Many of our classes have records of which they are justly proud. Here is the crucial point in our work at which we pass over from impression to expression.

The object of this statement has been to remind you that the steps we have taken have had a goal and what that goal is. Let me also remind you that no plan or program will work itself. Success depends upon the two elements: leadership and coöperation.

To such leadership as has been given you have, for the most part, responded nobly. For my successor I ask the same generous spirit and coöperation that you have given me. And for you, as teachers and officers, I pray that you may have a truly spiritual and world-wide vision of your opportunity. It is yours to help fit these boys and girls and young people for citizenship in a new and more Christian order, a democracy that will be safe for the world.

All the elements for this training lie open and ready to your hands. Know your pupils, intimately and sympathetically. Share with them and let them share with you all the finest aspirations and noblest accomplishments of life and you will find yourselves in a fellowship so inspiring and so boundless in its possibilities that you will be richly repaid.