

The Influence of the Sunday School in the Formation and Development of Christian Character.

Address delivered by E. B. Ware before the State Sunday School Convention, at Santa Rosa, Cal., and published by request of the Convention.

(Continued.)

II. We notice the Influence of the School in the Development of Christian Character.

The Christian life is one of growth, one of development. We are commanded to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth.

The young convert is compared to a "new born babe who desires the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby." It is a well known fact that many come into the church who seemingly never make any advancement in the divine life, they play along, but they are always babes who need to be fed on milk. Instead of being built up in their most holy faith, their zeal increased and their hope made strong, they drift off into the cold and lifeless state of indifference, and it would take a telescope larger than that of Prof. Ross to locate the exact position of all such, in the spiritual heavens. One-third of those who are brought into the church is lost by desertion, another third is unavailable, being constantly afflicted with indifference. The church views this state of affairs with a sad heart, and the question is continually asked, how can we heal the malady, and what remedies can be applied to prevent the contagious disease.

Before we attempt to apply a remedy, we ought to try to understand the nature of the disease and the causes which produce it.

Many have urged that the lifeless condition of so many professed church members and the open apostasy of others, are the results of a failure in conversion; that such persons were never truly converted to God and to Christ; that they were brought into the church by improper motives and influences. That this view is true of some I have no doubt, but I think the number is comparatively small.

The difficulty, with a great majority of all such, I conceive to be, not in their conversion, but in their subsequent life; not in the formation of their Christian character, but in the subsequent development of it. Am I right in saying that the church in the past has not given this subject the careful consideration that its importance demands? The same Jesus who said, "Go, disciple the nations" also said, "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have said unto you." The same apostle who said, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" said, "Add to your faith virtue, knowledge and temperance."

Thus we see that the new-born babe in the Church of Christ must be nourished and cared for, its spiritual life must be strengthened and developed into perfect manhood. How can we best accomplish this? There are certain conditions essential to the development of all organic life, the most important of which are light, heat, nourishing food and exercise. The absence of any one of these conditions will result in an imperfect development. Many of our most beautiful flowers in California would soon lose their beauty and fragrance if transplanted in a colder climate. The stoutest of plants will sicken and die if shut out from the rays of the sun, and the most healthful child will pine away and die, if no opportunity of sufficient exercise is provided.

What is true of the physical organization is equally true of the spiritual. The light of God's holy truth must continue to shine in upon the soul, if there is a perfect spiritual development. "The entrance of thy word giveth light," said David, and "I am the true light (said Jesus) that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

The soul must be kept warm by keeping the heart filled with the burning words of Jesus, and by coming in contact with the fire kindled on the altar of hearts burning with the love of God and filled with a flaming zeal for the salvation of souls. It must be fed on that spiritual food which is found in the worship of the Lord's house. No child of God ever becomes a full grown man in the church, who did not become a constant attendant upon the service of the Lord's house. Those who never form this habit generally die in infancy.

But in addition to all this, in order to the development of Christian character there must be something to do. The child of God must have exercise, if it is ever fully developed. If "poverty is the mother of invention," idleness is the father of crime. "If you ask me (says Lavater) which is the real hereditary sin of human nature, I shall say indolence. He who conquers indolence, will conquer all the rest." The Turks have a proverb, "That a busy man is troubled with one devil, but an idle man with a thousand." No child of God can long hold out under the constant loss of spiritual life which never ceases to flow through the channel of idleness. "Of what did your brother die," said Spinoza to Sir Horrace Vere. "He died," replied he, "Of nothing to do." "Alas!" said Spinoza, "That is enough to kill any general of us."

If you would keep the mind pure, it must be constantly engaged in things which are spiritual; and with the mind kept pure the conduct will also be pure, for Cowper has truly said that:

"The mind and conduct mutually imprint And stamp their image in each other's hilt."

I need not call your attention to the fact that in the Sunday school we have all these essential conditions of spiritual growth and development, and every member of the Church of Christ, who is able to attend, from the gray headed fathers and mothers in Israel to the youngest convert, should occupy their place regularly in the Bible school. There the precious lamp of truth is constantly burning, and there it is,

"When bold inquiry diving out of sight, Brings many a precious pearl of truth to light."

It is there that the soul can feast on the bread of life, and drink at the fountain of joy in song. "It is there that we are, brother, right in contact with the burning flame of love and zeal, which warms into life every thing that comes under its influence. There is an atmosphere surrounding the Sunday school that will thaw out the coldest heart, when brought within its influence; and dead, indeed, and doubly dead must be that child of God who can not be restored to life when brought in contact with its quickening power. The observing preacher who has thought on this question and studied the best methods of awakening an interest in those who have grown cold and lukewarm in the faith, has not failed to notice the changes for the better, which are often effected by enlisting such parties in the Sunday school work. Time would fail me to mention the many instances which have come under my own observation. I just now think of a good brother who had become cold and indifferent, seldom attended the meetings of the Lord's house. After earnest and repeated solicitations, he finally consented to take a class in the Sunday school; from that day there was a change in that man's religious life. He continued to grow in zeal and knowledge, till to-day he is one of the best workers in the church.

Another good brother who was never very zealous in the cause, chanced to move into a neighborhood where there were no religious privileges, in conversation with him on the train, one day, he said, "What can I

do way out in that forsaken region?" I said, "Start a Sunday school." He resolved to try; and not very long ago he wrote me a letter in which he said, "Bro. Ware, there are just 29 children in the neighborhood, and 24 of them were at Sunday school last Sunday, and I tell you that they are all sugar plums to me; pray for us, and pray for me that I may be able to teach these children and do more for Christ." Thus we see what a mighty power and influence there is in this work to develop the Christian life and character.

Finally, fellow workers and toilers in the Sunday school army, let us not grow weary in the good work. In the language of one of our fallen heroes: "It is a grand thing to rally the people to the cross of Christ." Those were the last words of the lamented Knowles Shaw, who fell in the din of the fight, with the armor on; who was found with his finger pointing to that fadeless crown, the reward of his faithful labors, and whose dear name is enshrined in our memories by the sweetness of his song.

There have been many trials and many difficulties to impede our progress in California. I have no doubt but there will be many more, still there is much to encourage our hearts and cause us to continue to work with renewed energy and renewed zeal.

Nine years ago we met in our first State Sunday School Convention. There were few churches in the State that had Sunday schools, and those that had were next to nothing in efficiency. There was little or no interest manifested in the work by the churches generally. In some quarters it was denounced as an innovation, in others it was looked upon as a work suited to little preachers and weak minded women. But we witness a great change in these particulars if we look at the present.

There are few, if any, churches in the State which have not a Sunday school. To be without one is looked upon as sure indication of decay and death. Those that we have are generally of the most efficient character. The churches demand of their preachers that they take some interest in this work. The spirituality of the churches have been greatly increased. The old protracted meeting methods of building up the churches are rapidly giving away to the better and more Scriptural idea of settled pastors or bishops to labor in word and doctrine in pulpit, and from house to house. Many loving hearts have found a place to work in the Master's vineyard who before had stood idle all the day long. Many have been transferred from our ranks into the church of the living God, where they are doing good service as soldiers of the cross. Following the example of the Great Teacher let us continue to sow the good seed of the kingdom, remembering that "he that soweth in tears shall reap in joy," and "he that goeth forth and weeping bearing precious seed, he shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves." But let us never forget that the influence of our efforts for good depends upon the character of the seed we sow both in precept and example.

For pain or for pleasure, for weal or for woe,

The law of our being is, reap as we sow; We try to evade it, but do what we will, Our lives, like our shadows, will follow us still.

Sowing the seed by our word and our deed, Wicked or pure the harvest is sure; Sowing the seed till the truth is made known, The harvest is sure, and we reap as we've sown.

Let us ever try to engrave in the minds and the hearts of the children the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in doing this let us never forget that

No work shall find acceptance in that day When all disguises shall be swept away, That squares not truly with the Scripture plan Nor springs from love to God or love to man.

God in Nature.

There seems to be a strong effort put forth, in this enlightened age of our world, to array science against religion. The two cannot conflict with each other. God is the author of both. Our lack of understanding in each, is the main cause of the seeming contradictions between them. Some assert that the Scriptures contain the circle of sciences, while others assert that they contain biography, history and revelation of God to man in things pertaining to salvation. There is nothing in the Scriptures derogatory to man's advancements in all scientific knowledge. The Christian philosopher is the consistent man. Many persons make Moses say, in his five books, what he never said. And the apparent Jewish chronology does not seem to accord with the infirmness drawn from geological discoveries in modern times. And astronomical discoveries seem to point to the fact that the heavenly orbs, existed for, perhaps, millions of ages before our own planet assumed its present form. And some assume that matter is eternal, and never had a beginning, nor will ever have an end. Matter may have existed in some elementary form for millions of millions of ages, yet that does not argue that it is self-existent.

Moses speaks of days in the creation; but we assume that the days of creation were ineffable periods of duration. God was in the beginning, and was before all things, and by him all things exist. There is, therefore, no self-existent, uncreated, eternal being or thing but God. He is the God of nature and of grace. Mind and matter harmonize together, though they seem to be essentially different from each other. The essential properties of matter are as mysterious to us as those of mind. We cannot fully understand either of them. We can believe facts, though we may not understand how those things are. God—the great mind—pervades all space—all matter; and must, of necessity, be everywhere present at the same moment.

We speak of the laws of nature, as though God ruled by them, as men rule in earthly affairs. A law is a rule of action ordained by a higher power for a specific purpose. God is essentially a law-maker, and an executor of his laws. And he is also the God of all spirits—of all minds. The laws of matter and those of spirit are different from each other; yet each is of God, and cannot conflict with each other. To say that science, which treats of matter and its properties, conflicts with religion, or the laws that govern it, is to say that God is in conflict with himself. If all scientists were men of God; and were careful to trace out the discoveries of science with revelation, mankind would be bettered.

DAVID NEWSOME.

Life in China.

An old writer tells us that China is a country "where the roses have no scent, and the women no petticoats; where the laborer has no Sabbath day of rest, and the magistrate no sense of honor; where the roads have no carriages, and the ships have no keels; where the needle points to the south, the place of honor is on the left hand, and the seat of intellect is supposed to lie in the stomach; where it is rude to take off your hat, and to wear white clothes is to go into mourning;" and he asks whether in such a country one can be astonished to find "a literature without an alphabet," and "a language without a grammar." Now this description, though not exactly accurate, is not altogether wide of the mark, and, indeed, a much longer list of Chinese contrarieties might be made out; such as, that they mount a horse on the right side instead of the left; that old men play marbles and fly kites, while children look gravely on; that they shake hands with

themselves instead of with each other; that what we call the surname is written first, and the other name afterward; that they whiten their shoes instead of blacking them; that a coffin is a very acceptable present to a rich parent in good health; that in the north they sail and pull their wheelbarrows in place of merely pushing them; and that all Chinese candlesticks fit into the candle instead of the candle fitting into the candlestick, and so on. Finally, it is no uncommon matter for a man to court two or more young ladies at once, and, what is more, marry them.

The present royal family of China embraces the trifling number of some forty thousand souls. Of course this is easily accounted for, if it be recollected that most Chinese emperors have wives by the score, and consequently the number of aunts, uncles, cousins, and cousins ever so many times removed, owned by each emperor, make up a rather startling figure. But of course nobody could be expected to love forty thousand cousins; so by Chinese law (or custom) all claim on the emperor's attention closes somewhere about the existing generation of first cousins. Still, as the odd thirty-nine thousand seven hundred and sixty are undoubtedly of royal blood, a large proportion of them receive about a dollar a month from the public treasury, and if within a certain degree of relationship, are entitled to wear a yellow girdle. This, however, does not in the least interfere with their honestly earning their bread, and the mess cook in the British Legation at Peking in 1863 was a yellow-girdled "cousin," entitled, moreover, to wear I don't know what button on the top of his very dilapidated old hat. All members of this imperial clan, however, if they get very little in the way of pension, have one great advantage—they can not be tried before an ordinary court. A special tribunal exists to try them, and it was stated in a tolerably recent Peking Gazette that its members got a terrible wiggling for letting off some of the emperor's relations for some offense they had committed. So much for royal cousins in China. But the ladies of the palace afford the most curious paradox to foreigners, who forget that the Chinese are not the only people who make a great distinction between profession and practice. An ordinary Chinaman, in China proper, will tell you that women are decidedly inferior beings; and as to their having souls, pools the idea outright. But if you remark that the whole government of the country has for the last eighteen years (with a short interval) been carried on by two ladies—the emperor's mother and the empress dowager, two of the cleverest women now alive in China or any other country—he calmly remarks that perhaps they are different from other folk; and he will not at all admit that the average Chinawoman can possibly possess brains or sense. It is of no use pointing out to him that Chinese history abounds with heroines, and that cases of female pluck, ability, and virtue are constantly recorded in imperial documents even at the present day. He incontinently changes the subject. —Harper's Weekly.

—The German Proverb "If I rest, I rust," applies to many things beside the Key. If Water rests it stagnates. If the Tree rests, it dies—for its winter-state is only a half-rest. If the eye rests, it grows dim and blind. If the Arm rests, it weakens. If the Lungs rest, we cease to breathe. If the Heart rests, we die! What is true Living but Loving? And what is Loving, but growth in the likeness of God?

—The wool-growing farmer now wrestles with his sheep-ticks, the hitherto negligent house-wife with the bed-ticks, and the anxious office seeker with politics.