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The Future of the Sunday-School.

AN IMPRESSION FROM ST. CHRISTOPHER'S COLLEGE.

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BISHOP CREIGHTON loved to insist that the distinguishing characteristic of the Church of England lay in its appeal to sound learning. Yet how often the Roman or the Nonconformist seems better able to justify his "Church-membership" than the Anglican. Is it because we fail to follow up exhortation by instruction, because we try to bring religion home to the heart rather than to the understanding, that we see the woman of means and leisure going promiscuously to Evensong at Westminster Abbey or Vespers at Westminster Cathedral; the "thoughtful" man trifling with Theosophy or Christian Science as if either could be embraced without denying the Catholic Faith; or find the young servant within a year of her confirmation forsaking the parish church for the Salvation Army meeting, while her brother, who once sang in the choir, now spends Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park listening with open mind to an adroit Atheist? Definite instruction in the Creed was never more needed, and for this, in the present uncertainty as to the place of religion in the Elementary Schools, we must rely more and more upon our Sunday-school. It has done splendid work in the past; it has to-day over three million children on its roll, but is it living up to its reputation?

The child spends six days in a fine modern building lavishly equipped, learning less important things from an expert teacher. On the seventh day he comes for the most important thing—the devotional and practical application to his own life of the truths of the Gospel—to an old-fashioned church room, probably lighted, warmed, furnished, even built, out of the Vicar's own income; ruled by a superintendent who has grown grey in office, and abhors innovations; staffed by teachers whose willingness to serve is their main qualification for service, teaching in a space

so confined that each class is within ear-shot of every other. There the lanky youth, all arms and legs, tries to tuck his toes under a bench of the same height as that on which his little brother fidgets with dangling feet.

And the result is that the Sunday-school is not taken very seriously. Said a mother lately quite complacently when asked where her children went on Sunday: "To the Church school sometimes, other times to the Methodist chapel, or the Baptist Tabernacle. You see, ma'am, I'm not bigoted to any particular religion." Her still more casual neighbour is satisfied if the children go anywhere so that they get out of her way, and "anywhere" may mean the Socialist Sunday-school, where they are taught dogmatically that there is no God, and that there ought to be no King.

We cannot improve on the devotion of those who trained up the God-fearing middle-aged folk of to-day in the Sunday-school of thirty years ago. But if their children and grandchildren are to be as good as they, we must improve upon the methods of the past generation, keeping pace with the enormous educational progress made since.

"There is urgent need to strengthen our Sunday-school system," resolved the Pan-Anglican Congress of 1908, and in February, 1909, an important step towards carrying out that resolution was taken, when the Archbishop of Canterbury opened St. Christopher's College, Blackheath, for three students, vanguard of 150 students who have since been taught there to teach. Eighteen months earlier an interdenominational College for Sunday-school teachers had been opened at Westhill, under a Canadian from Hartford University, U.S.A., and that it was promptly followed by a second and Anglican College is due to the Church of England Sunday-school Institute, which has already done so much during seventy years to provide for schools and to encourage teachers' study by annual examinations.

The purpose of the College is "to train ladies in the knowledge and practice of modern educational principles in the hope

of thereby raising the whole standard of efficiency in the Sunday-schools and Bible classes of the Church," and it looks forward to putting at least one trained worker into every one of our 870 rural deaneries, who will systematically pass on to others what she has herself acquired.

From a first-rate High Anglican school comes a girl who has learnt how to learn and loves teaching. The Kindergarten day-school, recognized by the Education Authority, which the College conducts, and the Kindergarten Sunday-school which is held at the College bring her into direct contact with the sort of youngster she hopes presently to tackle in her own parish. From a thoroughly Evangelical country home comes another girl engaged to a curate. She is qualifying herself to become a useful wife and colleague to a parson in a great industrial centre. And from that centre comes a Sunday-school teacher who has done well for years, but wants to do yet better, and to give real help to her younger fellow teachers. From the mission field comes an educational missionary, home on her first furlough, determined that her little school for the children of Asiatic Christians shall be second to none in modern methods. The varying ages and varied experience, and points of view of these students make life very interesting, and promote that spirit of happy camaraderie which is a feature of the College. The teaching is constructive rather than controversial, and they are teaching each other all the time that the things about which Churchmen agree are more numerous and more important than those about which they differ.

And beyond the study of Bible and Prayer-Book and Church History in preparation for the lesson to be taught, lies the study of the child who is to learn it. Very suggestive were the keen faces and rapid pencils of the students as they listened to a lecture on Social Psychology by the Principal, the Rev. W. Hume Campbell. For the Sunday-school exists not merely to impart information, but to form character. The boy who forgets the names of the Kings of Judah and even of the Apostles will not have gone to it in vain, if he takes with him

into all his after-life an instinctive reverence for holiness and for Him who is holy. What higher result could training have than that indicated in the following words: "I realized that my greatest difficulty in Sunday-school work was myself. I mean, by God's help, to be more to my boys in the future"?

Staff and students alike are fired with the enthusiasm of pioneers, knowing that such an institution is the best possible guarantee for the strength and permanence of that general forward movement in Sunday-school work which has been going on during the last few years. Here is the practical remedy for the condition as to teachers described by a depressed vicar to the Archbishop's Committee which reported last February on Sunday-schools. "We have to put up with anybody we can get, and must not be particular about quality." The status of the whole scholastic profession has been raised through the higher standard expected from, and reached by, secular teachers. So with the great "unpaid teaching order" of the Church. Their formal recognition as an integral part of the whole diocesan scheme must come with their gain in proved efficiency. And throughout England the Sunday-school will then grow in numbers, will include, as it already includes in Lancashire, scholars of all ages, and of all classes also, as in the United States, and so touch that religious unsettlement of the educated man and woman to which we have already referred. Many will then follow the example set some years ago by the Bishop of Peterborough, as vicar of a West-End parish, in forming a Sunday-school for children of the well-to-do—a notable success, as some of us can testify.

"There is, I am sure, a great future before our Sunday-schools, if we are wise and courageous enough to help to develop that future." The words come with great force from the Bishop of Southwark, as late Headmaster of Winchester. But that wisdom and courage must be shown by prompt and adequate support to St. Christopher's College on the part of Church-people generally.

Twenty-four students are at present housed in four roomy

old-fashioned houses with a pleasant garden of less than one acre, facing Blackheath. Their fees and a grant from the Sunday-school Institute just enable it to pay its way, because the Principal and one at least of his staff generously work "all for love and nothing for reward." But it needs a building erected for its special purpose to hold the fifty students which can make it self-supporting, and a site of four acres is already available for this.

It does not need to hunt for students, for it has been filled continuously; nor for posts for the students who have earned its certificates, for the demand for their services has been immediate, and will grow steadily. Fifteen thousand pounds, a gift given once for all, to secure the permanent efficiency of the Sunday-school system, which has deserved well of the Church and nation for 133 years, is a small thing to ask from the many who benefit when its children are "Christianly and virtuously brought up." Towards this the students have themselves contributed £680. If each parish in the kingdom were only half as generous as a parish as they have been as individuals, the sum needed would be found at once.

In the highest interests of the Church it is earnestly to be hoped that, in the words of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who both "cordially commend" the scheme, "Churchmen and Churchwomen throughout the country will help to carry into effect, on a larger scale, a plan which has already worked so well." For, as the Bishop of London writes, "the need of £15,000 to provide permanent buildings for St. Christopher's College is URGENT."

