

## ART. VI.—THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CENTENARY.

THE former half of the eighteenth century was not more remarkable for spiritual torpor than was the latter half for the revival of true religion and the commencement of great religious movements. The first important centenary commemoration of work begun in the eighteenth century took place in 1839, when the Wesleyan Conference ordered the celebration "of the centenary of the formation of the Wesleyan Methodist Society under the providential instrumentality of the ever-to-be-revered and venerated John Wesley." The second great centenary, celebrated last month, is that of Sunday Schools. The former occasion was chiefly observed by the members of one denomination of Christians; the whole Church of Christ claims an interest in the latter.

Robert Raikes was not so great a man as John Wesley; only half a line of recognition is assigned to him in Bishop Ryle's "Christian Leaders of the Last Century;" and Messrs. Abbey and Overton, in their "English Church in the Eighteenth Century," content themselves with a foot-note allusion to his work. But no centenary commemoration was ever celebrated with a more hearty and universal enthusiasm than that which the Sunday School Centenary has called forth. Churchmen and Nonconformists vied with each other in doing honour to the memory of Raikes.

A hundred years ago, the *Gloucester Journal*, conducted by Raikes, was the chief, if not the sole organ of opinion by which the Sunday School system was made known to the country. But, during the centenary week, the whole Press, from the *Times* to the most obscure provincial newspaper, teemed with articles, paragraphs, and criticisms, of which Sunday Schools were the theme. Eminent men from France, Germany, the United States of America, and from the Colonies, bore testimony, at the various meetings, to the world-wide spread of this simple agency. Perhaps the spirit of the celebration cannot be expressed in more appropriate language than that of the first resolution, which was unanimously carried at the inaugural meeting held at Guildhall, under the presidency of the Lord Mayor of London:—

"That this meeting, inspired with feelings of profound thankfulness to Almighty God for the blessing vouchsafed to Sunday Schools during the past hundred years, desires on the occasion of the commemoration of this centenary to acknowledge the benefits which have accrued from their establishment to *the whole of Christendom.*"

This resolution was moved by the Archbishop of Canterbury, seconded by Sir Charles Reed, Chairman of the Sunday School Union, and supported by Lord Aberdeen, and Dr. Vincent, of New York. During the week a festival was held at the Crystal Palace, under the auspices of the Sunday School Union, when 30,000 teachers and scholars were present. The Earl of Shaftesbury officiated at the unveiling of two statues of Raikes; one at Gloucester, where the founder of Sunday Schools was born, the other in London, in the middle garden of the Thames Embankment; the cost of the latter is defrayed by subscription, in which 4,000 Sunday Schools have taken part.

Naturally, however, we regard this celebration chiefly from a Churchman's point of view. *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona*; and there were Sunday Schools outside as well as within the limits of the Church of England before Raikes' time. Cardinal Borromeo founded Sunday Schools in his diocese in the sixteenth century; Joseph Alleyne, the eminent Nonconformist minister, made use of them in the seventeenth; and Miss Hannah Ball, a Methodist, started a Sunday School at High Wycombe in 1769. These, however, and others which might be mentioned, were but isolated efforts. The Sunday School movement dates from the year 1780, and was the work of Raikes. To use the language of his fellow-worker, Thomas Stock, "the progress of this institution through the kingdom is justly attributed to the constant representations which Mr. Raikes made in his own paper of the benefits which he perceived would probably arise from it." Now Raikes was a decided Churchman, and Stock, who took almost as prominent a part in the establishment of Sunday Schools at Gloucester as Raikes himself, was a clergyman. In 1780, Stock was Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, head master of Gloucester Cathedral School, and Curate of the parish of St. John the Baptist, in Gloucester. It was in this parish that the undertaking originated and Stock says, with reference to his own share in it, "As minister of the parish, I took upon me the principal superintendence of the schools and one-third of the expense." It is evident, indeed, that the work commenced and was carried forward on Church lines. The scholars were taken to church every Sunday. Through Raikes' influence many of the boys regularly attended at "the Ladye chapel" of the cathedral at seven o'clock for morning prayers; and the more advanced scholars were instructed in the Church Catechism.

It was, therefore, to be expected that the Church of England would cordially fall in with the Centenary movement. Her Sunday Schools are the lineal descendants of those established at Gloucester in 1780. The Church of England Sunday School Institute, with more than its wonted zeal, undertook the arduous task of organizing the various services and meetings which were

to be held during the week; and but one opinion has been expressed as to the admirable manner in which that task has been fulfilled. The Institute, which was founded in the year 1843,<sup>1</sup> claims to be the centre of Sunday School work in connection with the National Church. That claim has again and again been made good, but never more conspicuously than in the arrangements made for the observance of the centenary. The programme included special sermons in St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey on Sunday, June 27th; a special commemoration service at St. Paul's on the Monday evening, when a sermon was preached to a vast congregation by the Archbishop of York; a meeting at Exeter Hall on the Tuesday evening, at which the Bishop of St. Albans presided; and conferences at Cannon Street Hotel and at Lambeth Palace on the Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. If a friendly criticism may be passed on the proceedings at the conferences, it would have been well if each speaker had been limited to a particular branch of the general subject. The need of this was specially observable at the Cannon Street conference. The subject was "The Sunday School: its Growth, Value to the Church, and Means of Improvement." Here were three departments of the subject. Canon Barry, in an exhaustive paper, covered the whole ground; the consequence of which was that Mr. Saumarez Smith, who followed him, was obliged to complain in a good-humoured way that all his points had been taken up by the previous speaker. The truth is, that the Sunday School, though a topic full of interest, is limited in its range; hence the importance of assigning to each speaker, as far as may be, some definite theme, especially when, as in this instance, there is a rapid succession of meetings.

The crowning event, however, of this memorable week—an event which will long be remembered when all else is forgotten—was the gathering, on the Saturday afternoon, of children belonging to the Church Sunday Schools at Lambeth Palace, by the kind permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Twenty thousand children were assembled in the grounds behind the Palace. Their vast numbers, the marshalling, grouping, and marching, the music and singing, the distinguished company present—including the Prince and Princess of Wales, their five

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<sup>1</sup> Among its founders or earliest supporters we find the names of Bishop Villiers, then Rector of St. George's, Bloomsbury; Prebendary Auriol, Rector of St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street; Dean Champneys, then Rector of St. Mary's, Whitechapel; Canon Dale, then Rector of St. Bride's; the Rev. Daniel Moore, then of Camden Chapel, Camberwell; and the Rev. Josiah Pratt, Vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street. Mr. J. G. Fleet, the first corresponding secretary of the Institute, is still actively engaged in furthering its interests.

children, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Bishops of London and Rochester—presented a truly impressive spectacle. Perfect order was maintained, and the arrangements reflected great credit on all concerned in them; Mr. Pennefather, a lay member of the Institute Committee, deserves the highest praise for the skill with which he organized this grand gathering.

The centenary observance now brought to a close suggests a spirit of devout thankfulness to Almighty God for the blessing which has followed the seed sown in our country a century ago. Herein is that saying true, "One soweth and another reapeth." As the eye rested on the venerable Archbishop, standing among the children at Lambeth, we called to mind the manly piety and Christian consistency of character which adorn the high position which he occupies. And memory reverted to his predecessor of a hundred years ago, who brought such scandal on the Church by the balls and routs which he gave at Lambeth, that George III. addressed a letter of remonstrance to him, requesting him to desist from such improprieties at once. The parochial clergy, who marched past the Royal party at the head of their schools, may be said to contrast favourably, in point of zeal and love, with the clergy of a hundred years ago—a period in which Blackstone is said to have gone from church to church, to hear every clergyman of note in London; the result being that he did not hear a single sermon which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero.<sup>1</sup> If it be otherwise now, if the Church of our day is reaping the fruit of increased zeal, piety and consistency in her clergy, she owes it to the labours of the men who were raised up in those days to sow the seed of Gospel truth, and to set the example of holy living: men like Whitfield, Wesley, Venn, Romaine, and others, who sowed in tears, amid obloquy and derision.

The many hundreds of teachers present at Lambeth, suggested a similar cheering contrast. A century ago, very little Church work was done by laymen. In most parishes there was scarcely any parochial organization; and the clergy generally had no inclination to encourage or utilize lay zeal. At such a time it was that Robert Raikes established Sunday Schools, conducted by

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Overton, however ("English Church in Eighteenth Century," ii. 37), thinks that "too much stress has been laid upon" this "somewhat random observation of Sir William Blackstone;" and he adds: "It is not true that the preachers of this period entirely ignored the distinctive doctrines of Christianity; it would be more correct to say that they took the knowledge of them too much for granted—that they were, as a rule, too controversial, and that they too often appealed to merely prudential motives. And therefore the sermons of the century may rightly be noticed among the Church abuses of the period, although the abuse of this powerful engine for good was by no means so flagrant as it is sometimes represented to have been."

poor women who were paid a shilling a Sunday for teaching the children. Thus was the seed sown; and what do we now reap? It is calculated that in Great Britain alone there are more than half a million voluntary teachers; and if we add to these figures the statistics of Sunday Schools in other lands, we have a total, it is said, of a million and a half. And it would be a great mistake to suppose that the benefit accruing to the Church from this agency is confined to Sunday Schools; for Sunday School teaching draws out the sympathies, and develops the talents of the laity in such a manner as to fit them to serve the Church in every branch of her operations.

The spectacle, too, of the vast assembly of children at Lambeth, suggested the marvellously rapid growth of the Sunday School system since its foundation. The Sunday School has become a nursery to our Church in all parts of the British Empire. When Queen Charlotte sent for Raikes, she expressed a desire to know "by what accident a thought, which promised so much benefit to the lower order of people, was suggested to his mind." Those were the days of sowing. How little could she have anticipated that within a century of her interview with Raikes, her great-great-grandchildren would receive Bibles presented to them by 20,000 Sunday scholars, who themselves were but a small section of that world-wide nursery in which above twelve million of the young (five million in Great Britain alone) are being trained up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Truly "the little one has become a thousand."

While, however, we thank God for the success already achieved, it must need be the wish of every wise friend of Sunday Schools that the general interest awakened by the Centenary Commemoration should take a practical form, and that it should result in the extension and improvement of the Sunday School system. We disclaim all sympathy with the violent and indiscriminate censure lately poured on this agency by a clergyman whose words mingled harsh discord with the harmony of the centenary season; we cannot at all agree with the gloomy critics who continually complain of the failures; nevertheless, it would be unwise to shut our eyes to many defects which impede the progress of Sunday Schools. The most urgent need, however, is that the teachers themselves should be duly qualified for their work. And it is in this point of view that the great value of the Church of England Sunday School Institute is most clearly seen. The Institute helps the teacher. It provides him with carefully prepared Notes of Lessons on the Bible and the Prayer Book. It maintains an able deputation staff, the members of which visit every part of the country to deliver practical lectures to teachers, and to give, in their presence, lessons to a class of children, in order that the right

manner and style of teaching may be more clearly understood by teachers. The Institute also conducts Annual Examinations of teachers, and it is encouraging to learn from the Report for last year that upwards of 900 teachers were examined, of whom 538 obtained first-class certificates. Indeed, so useful and so highly appreciated are the efforts of the Institute to raise the standard of attainment in the Sunday School teachers, that a more generous support accorded to it by the Church at large would be a most satisfactory result of the Centenary of 1880.

There is one consideration specially calculated to stimulate the zeal of Churchmen in the work of strengthening and perfecting the Sunday School system. It is that School Boards are becoming universal, and that their action is such as to render the efficient maintenance of Church Day Schools in poor parishes a matter of increasing difficulty. A timely regard to the possibilities of the future demands that Sunday Schools should be more directly recognized as part of our Church's system; that defects in their working should be more promptly supplied; and, above all, that the teaching provided in them should be more thorough and distinctive, embracing both Bible and Prayer Book, and thus (in the words of Mr. Bridges in his "Christian Ministry") "framing Churchmen and Christians by the same process, in the same mould."

F. F. GOE.

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### THE YOUNG RULER.

*"He was very sorrowful, for he was very rich."*

AND this was all for which thy wealth sufficed,  
With a sad heart to turn away from Christ,  
To gaze on splendours with a secret pain,  
To toss upon a gorgeous couch in vain,  
(Fevered and sleepless for the words He said  
Who had not where to lay His tranquil head,)  
While through the darkness flame His eyes which saw  
Through all thy virtues that undream'd-of flaw,  
And the calm voice thou never shalt forget  
Tells through the silence what thou lackest yet.

Ah, smother were thy brows, thine eyes less dim,  
If, rest of all, thy feet had followed Him.

GEO. A. CHADWICK.