

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

How to prepare the Sabbath School Lesson.

AN ESSAY DELIVERED BY REV. C. H. MARTELL, BEFORE THE CUMBERLAND AND COLCHESTER SABBATH SCHOOL CONVENTION, HELD AT NORTH RIVER, MARCH 5TH, 1879, AND PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL REQUEST.

Those who follow the International series of Sabbath School Lessons, which are arranged and published for the use of all denominations, know twelve months previously what portion of Scripture will be taken up on each Sabbath. But whether this order is followed, or some other, it is well for the Superintendent to announce to the teachers at least one month ahead what the lesson will be for each Sabbath.

The Sabbath School teacher must bear in mind that he is not an originator, but an interpreter; not an inventor, but an explainer. It is the office of a philosopher to stand before nature, to question her and learn what she says. So it is the duty of the Sabbath School teacher to stand before the portion of scripture assigned for the lesson, to discover its truth and repeat its voice. He is not to coin truth, but learn it. He is not responsible for the truth, but the way in which he presents it. He is not to build up a philosophy like Aristotle and Bacon, but to speak forth the things which he has seen and heard like Peter and John. He is God's messenger to his class, and when he stands before them with his mind full of Gospel truth, which he hopes has saved him and believes will save others, his words are like the melting flame, and hearts will be melted by them.

I. The Sabbath School lesson.

The Sabbath School lesson must be taken from the Bible, and it will contain some portion of divine truth. It is well to have some general knowledge of the whole book from which the lesson is taken, and particularly of the portion of scripture to which the series are devoted. To view each book as a whole, to take in its entire contents, to trace its history, author and date, is something too little done by every Bible student.

It is well to memorise some of the devotional passages in the lesson, or in its connection, for in this way you become better acquainted with the author, and it will prepare you to travel with him in his field of rich knowledge.

Read the lesson over carefully, without any regard to chapter or verse, to see if it is complete in itself, and get the germ thought—the living idea. Give special attention to every sentence and discover the difficult passages; it is well to uncover the rock before you strike the hardest blows. Interpret each passage according to its true meaning. Interpret history as history, prophecy as prophecy, and avoid all wild spiritualizing. Seek to interpret the author's language as he would himself. Don't cross him if he appears stiff and unyielding at first. You will become better acquainted by treating him devotionally.

Study carefully the most difficult passages, break through the shell, take the thoughts up, look at them, bring out what the author has put in—no more, no less. When the teacher is able to explain the difficult passages in the lesson, and bring out truth which at first appears concealed, the pupils are delighted, and place great confidence in him as a spiritual instructor. Don't be tedious;—you cannot expect to keep the class interested in the difficult passages as long as it took you to study it out.

The human body is now carried through space at the rate of a mile a minute, and the minds of children have learned to keep pace with the same speed.

Get the exact meaning of each passage. Much of the Bible is written in a colloquial style,—common talk, which can be understood by men and women, boys and girls, cultivated and uncultivated people. The general drift of the narrative or argument may be obvious enough, and practical impressions may be easily made, but when you study it closely and get the exact idea, you will find much under the words. The purest water is often under the

surface and can be obtained by a little digging.

The teacher does well to get into the spirit of the author. Nothing but fire kindles fire, and nothing but spirit moves spirit. The most beautiful of words, without spirit, are superficial, cold and dead. 'The spirit quickeneth, the letter when alone killeth.' The language of the Bible is human: the thought and spirit are divine.

Be clear. Never get into the cellar without a light. You cannot teach profitably that which you cannot see clearly. You cannot remember before your class what you cannot understand on your knees before God. If, after careful study, you still find difficulty, indicate it; but be sure you know where the difficulty is; and while you are separating the known from the unknown, the great iron gate may swing open of its own accord. A celebrated professor in one of the English Universities had an assistant who was called upon one day to teach a class in Greek without much preparation. When asked afterward how he succeeded, he replied, "I talked about what I knew, and let alone what I did not." "Good plan," said the old professor; "you had better continue to do so as long as you live."

Give special attention to parallel passages; the Word of God proves itself; one writer interprets another. If a passage can be taken in two senses on account of some ambiguous word or phrase, consult other passages, and choose the one that is in accordance with the plain teaching of scripture. It is absurd to force meaning into a passage to satisfy some notion or prejudice of your own. Give the Holy Scripture chance to be consistent with itself. Let the Word of God speak through you.

A careful examination of references in the study of the lesson is of great importance. This is an important help in interpretation and gives the author a chance to make himself clear. Another writer may help you understand him; it often decides whether a passage is to be taken historically, figuratively, or allegorically. The reference passages will often furnish the teacher with useful material in the way of suggestion or proof, or by way of illustration. Every teacher should be careful to consult the references of the lesson; by so doing he will become mighty in the scriptures. As the bee gathers honey from every flower, so let the Sabbath School teacher gather truth from every verse.

The golden texts given in connection with the International series of lessons are of immense value; they often strike the key-note of the whole lesson. The golden text is to the lesson what the text should be to a sermon; it arouses the mind and demands attention. The portions of scripture for Daily Reading are good and can be used with great profit at the family altar. They are like side-lights to help the teacher when on the path, but not to lead him off. If you have only one hour each week to spend in Sabbath School work, spend half of it in studying the lesson and the other half in teaching it. When you study the lesson you are bending the bow and pointing the arrow, and when you teach you are shooting the arrows at the target. Send them strong and swift, pierce the heart and conscience.

II. Outside helps.

What we mean by outside helps is all helps outside the Bible. The Sabbath School teacher should have a Bible Atlas and a Bible Dictionary to associate history with geography. Make use of all the lesson papers and comments you can get upon the lesson, but never take them before your class. A minister might as well take a printed sermon in the pulpit and read it. What you cannot remember your class cannot understand.

Get the lesson fair in mind before you consult any help outside the Bible, and do not expect too much help from commentaries; you will find them skipping over the hard and difficult passages, and very prolific on the easy ones. If the commentator you consult on difficult passages is critical he is apt to give a half dozen long German names to pronounce without accent before you get much food. If he is suggestive you may find his thoughts as barren and unsatisfactory as your own. Yet a judicious use of commentaries is an immense help to any teacher. Facts are to the intellect what

rules of morals are to the will. You cannot teach unless the mind is full, and you can fill the mind by reading good books. Make yourself familiar with other good men's thoughts, traverse every road, explore every region, prove all things, hold fast to that which is good.

Every Sabbath School teacher should have a set of good reliable commentaries. Not that he wants to borrow from them, but that the author will assist in fixing the lesson upon the mind, and suggest thoughts that can be truly called his own. Glean upon every field, but be careful what you harvest. The Bible, the Bible is the only pure fountain: every other book is a stagnant pool.

III. Make the lesson your own, make it part of yourself, weave it into your best thoughts.

Study carefully the portion of scripture assigned for the lesson. Open the door, enter the ancient castle, venture alone through the sacred halls, examine the strong pillars, look at the golden arches; they are none the less beautiful because thousands have been there before you. By studying the lesson and making it your own you may discover some truths that were never brought to light before. The skilful gold-hunter often finds nuggets of gold in the path after hundreds have travelled it. Don't be afraid of a good thought because it is your own; give it a chance to stand erect and move as a soldier in the army. Don't suppose that other men's thoughts are infallible because they are printed; yours may look as well as theirs on the printed page. Make the truth your own, give it your own personality, so that no other person can teach the same truth in the same way. You cannot get flour from the mill unless you put wheat in the hopper, but be careful that uncrushed kernels do not appear through the bolt. Digest all your intellectual food and leaven it with the Spirit of God; by so doing you can learn the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans and be able to teach them to the Infant Class. Whether there be lesson papers they will cease, whether there be commentaries they shall fail, whether there be dictionaries they shall pass away, but the Word of the Lord liveth and abideth forever.

Study the lesson one week ahead, and carry the thought in your mind as the mother carries her young to give it strength and life. The Sabbath School teacher stands as an interpreter between the lesson and the class, as a medium between God and the child. You have it in your power to fit the truth into the mind of each member of your class as the molten iron is run into different moulds. Use that power; use it for God and salvation. Make your words go home to the heart and conscience as messages fresh from on high. Emphasize every sentence with "Thus saith the Lord." A certain philosopher was continually talking to his friends about his garden. At length one of them came to visit him, and found this wondrous garden to be a mere patch of ground, not larger than a common-sized dining room. "What," says his friend, "this is not your garden; it is not very large." "No," said the philosopher, "but it is wondrous in height." So I would say to the Sabbath School teacher. Your work may appear small to you, but it is wondrous in height, it goes up to heaven, and if rightly conceived of reaches out into eternity.

For Christian the Messenger.

Letter from Charlottetown, P. E. I.

This day closes the third year of my pastorate here, consequently three years of united work, as pastor and people, for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom have come to an end. The period naturally awakens in the mind thoughts of mingled sorrow and joy. When we think of precious time wasted, opportunities for doing good allowed to pass by unimproved, half-heartedness in labor, and want of faith in prayer, the retrospect causes sadness and prompts a prayer for forgiveness for the past and grace for the future; but thoughts of God's favor in permitting us in our unworthiness to accomplish anything for Him in the spread of His kingdom mingle our cup of sorrow with drops of joy. "Hitherto has the Lord helped us." At our first acquaintance as "laborers together with God" we numbered only

sixty-one; to-day, by his blessing, we number one hundred and ninety-two, and the outlook is promising.

A brief sketch of the work of the year just closed will not be without interest to your readers. The additions during the year have been thirty-seven—twenty-five of whom were Pedobaptists and entire strangers to us at the commencement of the year. Our prayer-meetings are profitable and our Bible-school is flourishing.

We have been breaking new ground of late on Rustico Road, a settlement thirteen miles north of the city. Already many sheaves are garnered and the harvest is ripening all around.

As the origin and progress of this work are worth knowing, you will permit me to refer to them at some length. About two years ago a young woman from that community—belonging to a family of the strictest sect of the Presbyterians—was spending some days on a visit in the city. She came to our meeting, was converted, and, amidst much opposition, followed her Lord in baptism. Some months afterwards one of her brothers came to hear "what this babler had to say," and he also was caught in the gospel net and submitted to the easy yoke of Christ. This good brother and sister lived daily the religion they professed, and the community saw the change and "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Who can estimate the power of a consistent life! A few months ago the wife of this brother asked for baptism, and the Lord taught us that she should be baptized in her own settlement, and thus should bring the people face to face with the ordinance which they so much despised. Accordingly the appointment was made—the hour arrived—the community came out to see and hear; a sermon was preached; our authority for believers' immersion was read and enforced, and in the beautiful Oysterbed River, surrounded by scenery that called forth as the spontaneous utterance of the soul the charming words of Watts:

"Nature with open volume stands To spread her Maker's praise abroad And every labor of His hands Shows something worthy of a God."

Our sister was "buried with Christ in baptism." Never before was such a scene witnessed there, and never before, we believe, was such an influence felt upon the minds of all present; for the Lord was in the place approving of His own ordinance, administered in strict harmony with His word and example. With the assistance of good lay brethren amongst us, who "love to tell the story of Jesus and His love," we have sustained fortnightly meetings in that community, and the result has been, as seen, the baptism of twelve happy converts, besides those referred to above, the last four of whom I baptized on the 23rd ult. There are several others who are "almost persuaded," and I venture my opinion, in the language of one of those recently baptized, "They will all come yet." Thus the blessed and beautiful simple principles of Divine faith in the atonement, as expressed by the immersion of the believer—maintained by us in their primitive purity—are rapidly spreading throughout our little Isle; and that time is swiftly coming when the unmeaning ceremony of infant sprinkling will be numbered among the things that were.

AN INTERESTING FEATURE

of the work at Rustico is that fourteen of the nineteen baptized there are heads of families—men and women of influence in the community—representing children and grand-children to the number of seventy-seven. When it is remembered that, as a rule, the children of Baptists become Baptists, the prospects for Rustico, in the face of the above record, are bright.

Our house of worship in Charlottetown being old and cold, and on many occasions too small, we decided to "arise and build." Having secured an excellent design, we let the contract in the early part of last summer, to be completed in October next, if we can gather the "where-withal." The building is up and the basement nearly ready for plastering. The walls of the building are of brick and the roof is to be covered with slate. Some of our good brethren of other churches, not understanding the circumstances, think we might be content with a wooden building, and their zeal to aid us is slackened by the thought. A word of explanation here will, we are

sure, satisfy all that the church have acted wisely in deciding for brick. We had our plans and specifications made out for a wooden building, but asked contractors to tender for both. On opening the tenders we found that a brick building, with slate covered roof, would cost only \$1,750 more than a wooden building. We mentioned the fact at the close of our prayer-meeting and asked the brethren to think and pray over the matter ere we decided which tender to accept. A gentleman from Brantford, Ont., being present, gave me \$25, and said that if we built of brick he would give us \$100. Another (not a member of the church) said he had made up his mind as to how much he intended to give us, but if we built of brick he would double it. Another (not a Baptist) said if we built of wood he would give us nothing, but if of brick he would give \$50. Before our time for decision came we were all convinced that it would be easier for us to raise the amount needed for the brick than that needed for the wood, besides having a house that would not begin to rot as soon as it was built; that would not need the expenses of painting every three years; that would be warm in winter and cool in summer, and one that would save considerable, yearly, in insurance premium. I am convinced that any one understanding the situation would fully justify the church in their decision, and instead of withholding his aid because we built of brick would send the additional proportion: We may be compelled to postpone operations for want of funds. We think we are doing all we can, and we are earnestly praying that the Lord would give us favour with our friends outside. On a flying visit, last fall, to Shediac, Moncton, Sackville, Hillsborough, Hopewell and Amherst, we received much sympathy and encouragement, notwithstanding the "hard times," and hope soon to receive from these places the aid for which we asked. Dear reader, if you find it in your heart to help us in our work for God, the smallest donation, sent to the undersigned, or to Mr. John Darrack, Treasurer, will be thankfully received and duly acknowledged. If "silver or gold you have none," go to your closet and pray that God may give us favor with those who have. Although we are growing in numbers, it is here to a large extent, as it was in the days of Christ's flesh, "the poor have the gospel preached unto them" as we preach it. D. G. MACDONALD.

For the Christian Messenger.

Letter from Boston.

Boston, March 31st 1879.

The city of Boston though possessed of many advantages peculiar to itself cannot indulge in boasting as regards climate, and the weather this spring has been such as to fully establish its already unenviable reputation.

During the past month East winds have reigned supreme accompanied by frequent rain, and to-day there is a blinding snow storm without, so that March is indeed "going out like a lion." Furs and winter garments are not yet laid aside, and although in some sheltered spots crocuses and snowdrops have struggled into bloom, the general aspect of things predicts a fulfilment of the old prophecy "Late Easter, late Spring." The late season will of course affect the spring trade somewhat, though the general opinion seems to be that the prospect for brisk sales is better than for several years past. To judge by the number of apparently busy people that throng our principal streets and stores on fine days, we should say that buyers were numerous, and doubtless Easter will bring out as many new customers as ever before. There has been rather a lull in the gay circles for a few weeks past and there will not probably be much new in this way until Lent is over. Madame Gerster who is said to be scarcely second to Nilson, is to appear again in Boston quite early in April. So much enthusiasm was aroused by her former appearance here that she will not fail to draw an audience at any time. There is not much worthy of special notice at present as regards lectures and musical entertainments though one can always find something enjoyable in the way of music in this city, perhaps more than any other. Joseph Cook gave the last lecture in this year's course, two weeks ago, to the regret of