

"TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE . . .

A man arrived at a railroad station just as the train was pulling out. He ran after it just as fast as he could but was not able to gain on the train. "You don't run fast enough," cried a passenger who was watching him from the rear platform. "Ah! no," he panted, "I did not start soon enough." He missed it, not only because he did not run fast enough, but because he did not start soon enough. Too little an effort! Too late a start!

Too little and too late was first used by that war premier, Winston Churchill, as a criticism of Britain's effort and her failure to reinforce positions of peril. Great Britain's destiny for a time was at stake because of this colossal blunder and she owes her existence today to kind Providence if not the timely aid of the United States.

But these tragic words are fully as applicable to the Sunday School today. They explain to a large degree the lamentable retrograde movement of recent years. It started at the beginning of the century in Great Britain where the Sunday School originated and later the evidence of deterioration was apparent in America. In the first two decades of the century there was a decline of a million and a half in the Sunday schools of England and Wales and a falling away in American schools of a third of that number in half that time. But in the past two decades not only has the decline persisted in Great Britain, but it has attained such momentum in America that more than 4,000,000 pupils were lost from enrollment in less than eleven years.

Not only the destiny of the English-speaking people but millions of children in other lands will be determined tomorrow by our attitude toward the Sunday School today. We can no longer hope to be a great Evangelical Teacher Training Association missionary force when once we have become a great missionary field. A nation which cannot save its own children can never hope to save the world.

I notice in the first place that we have given too little attention to the Sunday School. Did you know that 80 per cent of all the Protestant churches in the United States today were first Sunday Schools? Did you know that 97 per cent of all the Protestant preachers were first members of the Sunday School and through its influence were led to attend church, become Christians and, eventually, ministers of the gospel? Did you know that 50 per cent of all the unsaved people who attend our churches are members of the Sunday School and that Sunday School is providing the church with one-half of its prospects for future membership? Did you know that 98 per cent of the boys and girls that attend Sunday School regularly never get into any serious trouble or crime?

Despite these challenging facts, how few churches today regard the Sunday School as their major enterprise. They are more concerned about the size of their morning congregations than the attendance of their Sunday Schools.

Not only is too little attention given to the Sunday School by the Church but by the home as well. The great difference which the Sunday School finds existing between itself and the home is indifference. The home does not take the Sunday School seriously, at least not as seriously as it takes the public school. Perhaps this lack of respect may be due to the

weak organization and impoverished program of the Sunday School. Certain it is that as we improve the Sunday Schools we will come closer to the homes.

In the second place we have given too little support to the Sunday School. The Sunday School is the gold mine of the church. It yields, as we have seen, as high as 90 per cent of the new members, new workers and new home contacts. Moreover, its dividends have a long record of steady payment. Good church strategy would suggest that the pastor and the people properly provide for the operation of this gold mine.

Real Sunday Schools cannot be run without real money. The church which leaves the Sunday School to be carried on by the pennies of the children will probably never have a real school. Thousands of churches expect their Sunday Schools to pay their own way and contribute something to Church support besides. While the nation's annual luxury bill is \$200 per capita, its crime bill \$111, its drink bill \$46, the individual contribution to religious purposes is only fifty cents. Of this, a mere pittance goes into the Sunday School. Are we so absolutely indifferent to the moral and religious education of our own children that we cannot support the institution that is willing to assume that responsibility?

Sunday Schools today not only receive too little support in money, but too little in men. The Sunday School is impoverished from lack of workers. Not more than eight per cent of church membership is teaching in the average Sunday School. Ninety-two per cent of our man power is not even working in this gold mine.

There has been too little preparation for the work of the Sunday School. The average child spends 25 hours a week in public school, 63 in sleeping, 7 in eating and 72 in reading, working, and playing. Is the Sunday School prepared to give the child every chance in this one golden hour out of every 168?

We have not only given too little to the children but we have started too late. We have been too late in reaching the children. Sally Rust Moss has well said, "From the hour of physical birth to the day of the spiritual birth there is not a moment to be lost." Failure in the superstructure naturally results when the foundation is not properly laid in the early most impressionable years. "When we get to the place where we pay more attention to the high chair," said Warden Lawes of Sing Sing Prison, "we will have less need for the electric chair." Most of the perplexing problems that arise in childhood and adolescence can be answered by two words, "Begin earlier." We have been too late in teaching the children.

"When can I begin teaching my child religious truths?" a mother asked of a well-known psychologist. "How old is he?" "Five years." "Five years? Hurry home madam. You have already lost the best five years of your boy's life!"

The Army chaplain opened our eyes to the serious neglect of religious instruction for the soldiers in their younger days. Chaplain Francis B. Sayre took a poll of the Marines on the "U. S. S. San Francisco" and found that 90 per cent had been exposed to some sort of Christian education, but not over ten per cent had received any lasting impression. Chaplain Witmer, now President of the Fort Wayne Bible Institute told me that in the area of his ministry that the Protestants out-numbered the

Catholics, 7 to 3, but when it came to attending religious services—and this is tragic—the Catholics out-numbered the Protestants 7 to 3. No wonder one of our chaplains is quoted as saying, "If I get back into a parish I shall teach and teach and teach. Everything that goes on that does not teach, I shall regard as superfluous."

Most distressing of all, we have been too late in saving our children. Dr. Rollins has truthfully said, "Our duty in the Sunday School is to bring a cargo to port and not a derelict." It was the opinion of Dr. John Clifford, the great free church leader, that the churches must arrange their whole worship, their work, their teaching and preaching, their fellowship and ministry to win and hold in allegiance the child and the adolescent. It was Lionel B. Fletcher who said that while it was "a wonderful thing to have the testimony of a dozen men redeemed from shame it was a far greater thing to get a dozen boys of twelve years into real living touch with Christ."

Child Conversion Is The Natural Way

It is as natural for children to be saved, as unnatural for adults. Perhaps there is no more important fact that the Church needs to learn. Children make decisions, but when you labor with an adult, you are trying to get him to reverse a negative decision which he has already made. Why did Solomon address his Proverbs to youth? Why are five of the first seven chapters of the Proverbs addressed directly to "My son"? Why does that remarkable philosophical study of life, the Book of Ecclesiastes, conclude with the counsel, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth"? It is evident that Solomon realized that for the vast majority of people the choice is made between the religion of youth, or no religion at all.

It is most significant in the light of these wise counsels to learn that of all who reach the age of twenty-three, having never made any profession of religion, not more than two out of 100 will ever do so, leaving ninety-eight who never will. There are seven times as many converted at the age of sixteen as at twenty-six; and more are converted at thirteen than any other year of life.

2. **Child conversion is the permanent way.** "The most surprising evidence of the permanent results of child conversion," says Lionel B. Fletcher, "are to be seen in any meeting where those who were converted under the age of twelve are asked to hold up their hand. Generally, the proportion is so astonishing that any sane man must wonder how it is that people will continue to theorize, instead of acting on the evidence of their own eyesight." Spurgeon confirms this fact in the following statement: "I have more confidence in the spiritual life of the children that I have received into this church than I have in the spiritual condition of the adults. I will go even farther than that. I have usually found a clearer knowledge of the Gospel and a warmer love for God in the child convert than in the adult convert."

3. **Child conversion is the scriptural way.** Did you ever notice how definitely God speaks of child evangelism in the Old Testament? Five times in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Joshua, God reminds the parents that if they would exercise care to observe certain ordinances and give certain instructions to stimulate the spirit of inquiry, the children of their own accord would ask, "What mean these

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