

The Training of Children in Worship.

THE General Assembly of 1937 commended to the consideration of ministers a timely Memorandum, prepared by the Youth Committee, on the "League of Young Worshippers and the Attendance of Children at Church". This thoughtful pamphlet merits very careful reflection by all to whom is entrusted the supremely important duty of the spiritual direction of the young.

The Memorandum draws attention to the somewhat disturbing fact that, notwithstanding welcome advances in the organisation, equipment, and efficiency of Sunday Schools, children are for the most part absent from the regular services of Divine Worship. The fact itself is sufficiently obvious. Significantly enough, a recent Moderator of the General Assembly, in reviewing his year of office, singled out this dangerous symptom as one which calls for immediate and urgent attention. In spite of the increased care which is being given to religious education, our children are not forming the habit of regular Church attendance, as an older generation most certainly did.

Another closely related problem causing anxious thought is the alarming drift of young people from all religious influences from the age of fourteen onwards. Of those who, for one reason or another, eventually achieve the status of full membership in the Church, a considerable proportion never attain anything more than a merely nominal membership. Beyond an occasional attendance at Holy Communion, their contribution to the life and witness of the Church is negligible. During recent months a National Recall to Religion has been sounded in some form or another in almost every parish in the land. It is not too much to say that this problem of the relation of the young to the Church's life and fellowship and worship is of paramount importance in this connection. The vigour and effectiveness of the Church's witness in the years to come depends upon our success to-day in capturing and retaining the allegiance of the tide of young life surging into our Sunday Schools year by year. Here, surely, is one of the most pressing Home Mission problems of our time.

One hesitates even to suggest a criticism of the excellent work being done quietly and unobtrusively by a large and devoted band of Sunday School workers. Their self-denying service for the most part goes unhonoured and unsung, and is often accepted as a matter of course. But it is not altogether pointless to venture the query as to whether this comparatively modern development is, in fact, achieving all that it might in pursuit of what ought to be its true aim, namely, to shepherd the young into the active life of the Church, and to make them effective, witnessing Church members. There is, unfortunately, a tendency for this larger aim to be obscured. It is by no means uncommon to find a loyalty cultivated to the school, to the detriment or neglect of the Church. Fond parents who never enter a Church door will display with pride the certificates or prizes won by their children for faithful attendance at Sunday School. Yet in numerous cases neither they themselves nor their children, who afterwards swell the ranks of the "churchless million", seem to be aware of the contradiction involved.

It should be recognised that the school which does not encourage its children to share in the worship of the Sanctuary, and does not lead them into active, vital membership of the Church is failing in its chief aim. In truth, the obligation resting upon the Church to provide for the child's spiritual nourishment and growth in grace can only be seen in its right perspective against the background of the sacramental life. At Holy Baptism the child, by a Divine act, is received into the membership of the Church, and is admitted to the covenant of grace. In presenting the child for Baptism the parents take upon themselves certain solemn vows. But the Church also is under an obligation to make adequate provision for the child's spiritual nurture, and to prepare step by step for that time when the child, at years of discretion, will by its own intelligent choice ratify the vows of its Baptism, be solemnly Confirmed in the Faith, and claim its rightful place in the Church's life. During these impressionable years the whole scheme of religious training must be directed towards this end. As it has been aptly expressed, the Church should provide "a golden stairway from the Font to the Holy Table".

Obviously, if this spiritual objective is to be reached, mere religious instruction in itself is not enough. During these critical and formative years from infancy to adolescence the child's mind must be awakened to the reality of

God, and led to a personal devotion to Jesus Christ, which will find its fulfilment and completion in self-dedication to the service of God, through His Church. No system of Sunday School training, however well organised, can hope to accomplish this end if it is content simply to instil into the minds of pupils the historical facts, spiritual and moral, of Holy Scripture. That by itself is not enough. In Scotland, at least, this task is already being efficiently discharged in the day schools, by trained teachers, according to a carefully planned syllabus. The Sunday School has a larger and deeper aim than simply to repeat for a brief period once a week a process of instruction which has already been brought to bear daily upon the minds of the children. Its purpose is quite as much to foster reverence and the practice of devotion, as to convey instruction in religious truth.

In every age the Church has made its impact upon human life as a fellowship of worship. In corporate worship the souls of believers have been awakened to the vision of God, and in the strength and inspiration of that vision have gone forth in His Name to fight His battles and build His Kingdom. The Sunday School, therefore, in addition to teaching the elementary facts of the Christian Faith with the persuasive accents of personal conviction, must also be a school of devotion, where the child is taught to worship and pray with others, and to catch for itself this vision of God. This conviction has recently been very forcibly expressed by a well-known authority on religious education, whose judgment deserves respect.*

“Our aim should be the awakening of the child’s soul to the reality of God. And one of the most powerful means towards the fulfilment of this great end is training in worship. I would almost be content to have no Bible teaching in the Sunday School, if only the children were taught to worship God. It is one of the grave defects of our Scottish religion that it has been too intellectual, that the purely devotional has been obscured and neglected. . . . We have over-emphasised preaching and teaching, and under-estimated the devout approach to God in praise and prayer. I wish our superintendents could all be got to see this and to act upon it. . . . We want the children to form the habit of personal, reverent, simple, joyous worship”.

If this aim is to be realised in the Sunday School much more attention will require to be given to definite and considered training in worship than is at present customary.

* “The Church and the Child”. The Rev. F. J. Rae, D.D., Director of Religious Instruction in Aberdeen Training Centre for Teachers.

Much may be learned from the modern methods applied so successfully in the kindergarten and primary departments of well-organised schools. Here a simple, sincere form of service, intelligently adapted to the child's outlook, evokes a simple, reverent worship which is a beautiful thing to behold. There is significant action, there is colour, there is beauty, there is a sense of reality, and the children are given something definite to do, in addition to the singing of hymns. Where such methods have been introduced, with thoughtfulness and care, the question of training in worship at this early stage has largely been solved.

The fruits of this training, unfortunately, are not always carried forward consistently into the higher classes of the school. Especially at the intermediate and senior stages there is a tendency to perpetuate the bad old tradition of a couple of well-worn hymns, a long, rambling, discursive prayer by superintendent or leader, followed by an unduly lengthy lesson period. There is noticeably less action, and scholars are deprived of an active, vocal part in the devotions, except perhaps in the Lord's Prayer. The high standard of worship set in the early stages of the child's training is outlived, and there is nothing positive to take its place. Intelligent reform is urgently needed just at this point to ensure that the original expression of worship, natural to all children, should be enriched, made more intelligible and significant, and its forms and media carried over into the ordered worship of the Sanctuary.

If any effective reform is to be achieved the Minister himself will need to assume responsibility for it. Normally he is the one man in the parish specially equipped for the task. It will be granted that there is no more important part of ministerial duty than the training of the young so that they may be prepared to take their place in the worship and work of the congregation. If at all possible, then, he should personally lead the opening worship of the Sunday School, or, where it is a large school, at least in the higher classes. And for this purpose he should appear amongst the children suitably robed. That in itself will do much to secure a reverent, worshipful atmosphere. Where it is not possible for him to be present regularly, he should arrange both the form and the substance of the school devotions, so that they may express adequately the needs and aspirations of the young mind in its approach to God.

Ample liturgical material is available as a guide to types of service suitable to the various ages represented in the

school. To ensure that these aids to worship are rightly used, with a sense of reality and fitness, requires careful training and patient instruction. But any minister who is prepared to undertake this will find his work amply rewarded, and his time well spent. Doubtless, he will need to exercise selection and adaptation of the available material, with an eye to local conditions.* Numerous experiments have been made in this direction in recent years, but a completely satisfactory form of service is still a desideratum. This Society might, with advantage, apply itself to the task of drawing up such services, and make them available in a handy and convenient form.

A characteristic feature of all such services is that the prayers are simply worded, quite brief, and provide for audible responses on the part of the children. In this way a deeper interest is awakened, attention is sustained, and the spirit of corporate worship is developed. Common prayers and responses can quite easily be memorised by the children, and once learned and used with regularity will never be forgotten. They thus provide a basis for private devotion in later years. For this reason, it is better to employ the traditional versicles and responses, and some of the simpler collects hallowed by the usages of the past, as well as the more familiar phrases of the Psalms.

In this connection a plea might be advanced for a more generous use of the Psalter. Children from an early age are encouraged to memorise the Psalms in the metrical version, and there is consequent neglect of the incomparable devotional language of the prose version. The Youth Committee would render a very useful service if they would arrange for the printing of selected passages, in a form suitable for responsive reading, and printed in clear type instead of the microscopic type commonly used in children's Bibles and hymn-books. If we cannot, as yet, teach children to chant the Psalms we can at least read them antiphonally, in a form as near as possible to their original use.

Along these lines the Sunday School can do much to provide a training in worship which will prepare the growing child to share intelligently in the ordered services of the Church. But it cannot, even for children, be a substitute for the regular worship of the Sanctuary. A place must be found for the children in the ordinary morning service.

* An example of an Opening Service for a Sunday School in use in a country parish is appended to this article. It makes no claim to originality or liturgical correctness, but has been found satisfactory.

Those of an older generation who can recall their earliest religious impressions will be in no doubt as to the profound, uplifting influence of the ordinary church service, and will deprecate the loss sustained by so many children to-day who are deprived of this opportunity. How are children in our Sunday Schools to be encouraged to attend Church, and what place will they find in its worship? Experience has shown that they can be got to attend, through the excellent scheme of the "League of Young Worshippers," recommended by the Assembly. Its methods are well-known, and its objects admirable, viz. :—"to secure the regular attendance of young people at the Sunday morning service of the Church; to foster a quiet attention to the Service, and a love for the House of God; and to encourage the reading of the Bible and daily prayer".

The very presence of the children at Church, however, creates a larger problem, to which as yet too little attention has been given. If they have already had the advantage of a training in the school in the forms and media of active, corporate worship, there is a danger that the ordinary church service may have a chilling, deadening effect. The hymns may be unfamiliar, the prayers are too often unduly long, and couched in language unintelligible to the child mind, and somewhat remote from its felt needs. Furthermore no opportunity is given for active participation in the devotions, except for the audible repetition of the Lord's Prayer, and in many country parishes even this is not encouraged. Sunday School workers have some ground for criticism here, and may justly complain that their efforts in encouraging active co-operation in worship are wasted. Even the carefully prepared "bait" of a picture album or attendance card will soon cease to satisfy the aspirations of the child, and his interest will tend to wane.

A modern "innovation" which has become fashionable is the so-called "children's portion", hailed by many as a complete and satisfactory solution of the difficulty. One wonders whether the advantages commonly claimed for it really compensate for the general lowering of the tone of the service, which, unhappily, is not seldom the result. A recent writer, of long experience in pulpit and pew, has examined the matter very carefully in its bearing upon the worship-values of the morning service in his own Communion. His pointed criticism should be carefully weighed.*

* "Vital Elements of Public Worship" (1936). The Rev. J. E. Rattenbury, D.D., Pp. 118, 130 ff.

"Another fact which has told against ordered worship has been the introduction, with the most admirable intentions, of the regular children's sermon. Where this is preached, one lesson tends to go to make time for the preacher, and a children's hymn tends to be substituted for the canticle. . . . The concentration on the two sermons has minimised worship-values, because it has over-emphasised what in Methodism needed no emphasis, the pulpit". "I have had many opportunities of worshipping in a great variety of churches, and must say that the forced witticisms of the children's addresses have been to me the most painful part of Non-conformist worship. The traditional, orderly, reverent worship of the Methodist people has been greatly disturbed by this interval of children's entertainment. I set it down for what it is worth as my considered judgment, that nothing during the present century has done more harm to reverent worship in ordinary services".

Opinions, no doubt, will differ sharply on this question, and it may be that in Scotland we have been mercifully preserved from the graver excesses referred to. Let us hope so. The writer, however, has witnessed within the ambit of Presbyterianism displays of "ministerial facetiousness" and pulpit buffoonery, in the children's address, which detract greatly from the spirit of reverence and devotion which should always characterise our approach to God in common prayer and worship. It is not without significance that the General Assembly of 1937 found it necessary to "bring to the notice of all Ministers of the Church the requirements of the *Directory of Public Worship* with regard to the reading of Holy Scripture as part of Divine Service". Apparently some of the results which Dr Rattenbury deplores have already been observed here in our midst.

His constructive suggestion is that the *regular* children's sermon should be omitted, and that the service should be restored to its full compass, enriched and made more intelligible, and that much greater attention should be given to the congregation's vocal share in worship. Children should never be allowed to conclude that only a small section of the service is for them, and that the rest may be "sat through". It should be made quite clear that the whole service is a reverent and joyous act of worship in which they can join, in every part. This latter view is emphasised in the Youth Committee's Memorandum, with the entirely relevant remark: "This does not necessitate something in the nature of a children's service every Sunday, but it does require a simplicity and concreteness which bring the services nearer to the level of the child mind, and it may be added, to the minds of the majority of worshippers".

With encouragement, children can be instructed in the meaning and sequence of the various parts of public prayer, and the other traditional elements in worship. They can also be invited to revert to the old custom of following the reading of the Lessons in their own Bibles, a practice which seems to have fallen largely into disuse. This can be conveniently arranged if they are given to know before the service begins where the Lessons are to be found. It can also be made clear to them that they are at liberty to join in the Lord's Prayer as fervently as they do in the Sunday School, without being unduly afraid of their own voices. And they can be taught the great hymns and canticles of the Church Universal. For this purpose there is no more convenient medium of instruction than the "League of Young Worshippers", which should have as its main aim this systematic training in worship. If the Minister avails himself of this opportunity either before morning service or at some other suitable time he will find his efforts well spent. Such a self-discipline, on the Minister's part, would give point, brevity, relevance, and simplicity to the various acts of devotion, including the sermon, with great benefit to the gathered congregation afterwards.

It must be admitted that we are still a long way from taking even tentative steps towards affording the worshipping congregation a larger vocal share in the devotions of the Sanctuary. Meanwhile, until more enlightened counsels prevail, we can at least secure that all the varied acts of worship and their significance are made as intelligible as possible to all, including the young. Occasionally, especially at the great seasons of the Christian Year, it is of great advantage to hold in Church a special service for children, using the forms and methods of worship with which they have already become familiar in the school. Adults will naturally be attracted to this type of service and will, in time, see the point of the new, or shall we say, the very old, well-tried methods.

DAVID A. HODGES.

OPENING SERVICE OF A SCHOOL.

ORGAN VOLUNTARY.

After which the first HYMN is intimated, and the number looked up.

MINISTER : Let us Worship God. (Children stand).
The Lord be with you.

CHILDREN : And with thy spirit.

MINISTER : Lift up your hearts.

CHILDREN : We lift them up unto the Lord.

MINISTER : O God, we have come to Thy House—

CHILDREN : Help us to remember that Thou art here. May we
pray to Thee and sing Thy praise with all our hearts and
may we listen to Thy Word with open ears, through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MINISTER : O Lord, open Thou our lips.

CHILDREN : And our mouth shall show forth Thy praise.
The HYMN is then sung, without further intimation.

MINISTER : Let us tell God that we are sorry for our sins, and ask
Him to forgive us.

CHILDREN : The Lord is gracious and merciful.

MINISTER : O God, our loving Father, we confess that we have
sinned against Thee and have done many things to
grieve Thee. We have often been selfish and ill-tempered
and disobedient. We have sometimes forgotten to pray
to Thee, and we have not loved Thee as we ought. For
these and all our other sins, O loving Father, forgive us,
for the sake of Him Who died for us, Jesus Christ our
Lord.

The LORD'S PRAYER (together). Amen.

Organ Voluntary, as the Offering is collected. As
the Offering is brought forward to the Holy Table the
children stand reverently. The gifts are received on an
Alms Dish by the Minister, and placed upon the Table.

MINISTER : O God, our Father, from Whom all good things do
come, we thank Thee for all the gifts of Thy love. And
we ask Thee to receive and bless these our offerings which
we have brought to Thy House, that they may be used

in Thy service here and in all the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thereafter, the *Children's Creed* is said (or on occasion, the *Apostles' Creed*).

I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth, Who loves me and all His children :

And in Jesus Christ, His Son, Who came down from Heaven to live amongst men : He died upon the Cross : He rose to life again and went back to Heaven, where He lives for ever as our King.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who helps me to be a faithful member of the Church : I believe that my sins are all forgiven ; and I hope to live for ever with the Saints above. Amen.

Intimations are given. The Lessons for Morning Service are intimated, the children finding the places in their Bibles and marking them with their bookmarkers.

MINISTER : Let us ask God's blessing upon others.
Let us pray for the Church.
Let Thy blessing, O God, be upon Thy Church in all the world. Give His spirit of love and wisdom to all who tell the story of Jesus and bring others to love and serve Him. So may the glad news of Thy love go forth to the ends of the earth, and Thy Holy Name be praised.
Lord, hear our prayer.

CHILDREN : And let our cry come unto Thee.

MINISTER : Let us pray for our King and country.
O God, Who rulest over all things, we ask Thy blessing upon our country and Empire. Give wisdom to our King and bless him in all his labours for our good. Guide all who lead us and rule over us. Make us as a people strong to do the right, to live in peace with all men, and to save and defend the innocent and helpless.
Lord, hear our prayer.

CHILDREN : And let our cry come unto Thee.

MINISTER : Let us pray for peace among the nations.
O God, send Thy Spirit into men's hearts that they may hate war and love peace. Teach the children of this and every land that it is better to love one another than to fight, so that wars may cease and Thy Kingdom of love and brotherhood may be set up through all the world.
Lord, hear our prayer.

CHILDREN : And let our cry come unto Thee.

MINISTER : Let us pray for the sick and suffering.
 O God, Who didst send Thy Son Jesus to heal our
 souls and bodies : we ask Thee to bless all who are sick
 or in pain of body or mind. Comfort them in their
 sadness, and heal them if it be Thy gracious will. Bless
 all doctors and nurses in their work in our hospitals and
 infirmaries, and help them to bring comfort and healing
 and happiness in the blessed Name of Jesus.
 Lord, hear our prayer.

CHILDREN : And let our cry come unto Thee.

MINISTER : Let us thank God for all His goodness.

CHILDREN : O God, our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the
 beauty of the world around us. We thank Thee for the
 love of our parents and our friends, for work and play,
 for food and clothing, and for all the happiness of life.
 But most of all we thank Thee for the birth of Jesus
 Christ, Thy Son, for the example of His life, and for the
 love which made Him die for us. And we pray that we
 may ever serve Him faithfully and fight His battles,
 through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

MINISTER : The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of
 God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all
 evermore. Amen.

Thereafter, a HYMN is sung and children go to classes.

NOTES. The service is held in Church before morning service,
 and conducted from Lectern and Holy Table. Time, 20
 minutes. The "Amen" is sung. The earlier prayers are
 fixed, the intercessions being varied as circumstances
 suggest. Common prayers are memorised by children.
 The material is mostly adapted from "The Children's
 Service", published by The Challenge Limited, London.