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SABBATH SCHOOL AMONG THE EARLY REFORMERS IN SCOTLAND.

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It was said at the late meeting of Synod, in New York, that the Covenanters of the first Reformation period, in Scotland, engaged in Sabbath-school work two hundred years before the time of Robert Raikes, who is usually called the father of the Sabbath-school system. The following is a reply to many who ask on what authority this was stated.

The statement in Synod, above referred to, was made, in the first place, on the authority of a sabbath school report, read in the Free Church assembly, on June 3d, 1878. As the paper containing this report has unfortunately not been preserved, it can only be referred to from memory, as having asserted that the early Reformers diligently engaged in what was a very efficient form of sabbath school work, naming certain prominent ministers who, at an early date, were thus actively employed. Apart from this, however, there is abundant historical evidence that, as long before the time of Raikes as was mentioned in Synod, the sabbath school was one of the most efficient instrumentalities employed by Knox and his co-laborers in forwarding the grand objects contemplated in the first Scottish Reformation. And, without disparaging in any way the noble work commenced by Raikes in England in 1781, or wishing to detract from the honor in which his memory is justly held, it will be interesting and instructive to consider how the Reformers of Scotland sought to effect the same object.

That we may intelligently comprehend the work of the Reformers in this respect, we must take into account the moral and spiritual condition of the country at the time. Scotland, and also Ireland, first received a knowledge of the Christian religion toward the close of the second century by means of fugitives from persecution from the Continent of Europe; and these early evangelists, like the Apostles, sought to instruct their converts very thoroughly in the knowledge of Scripture truth. And there is evidence that in this respect they were remarkably successful, and that both countries, especially Ireland, were distinguished for learning and the prevalence of religious knowledge for many centuries. But when Rome managed to bring Scotland first, and afterwards Ireland, under her yoke, a most lamentable change soon took place, so that when the early Reformers commenced their work in Scotland, "darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people." A few sentences from McCrie's Life of Knox will show into what a fearful condition, morally and spiritually, the inhabitants of that country had been reduced.

After describing the shocking immorality which the dissolute lives of the Romish clergy both produced and promoted, he adds: "But the ignorance of the clergy respecting religion was as gross as the dissoluteness of their morals. Even bishops were not ashamed to own that they were unacquainted with the Canon of their faith, and had never read any part of the Sacred Scriptures, except what they met with in their missals. Under such masters 'the people perished for lack of knowledge.' That Book, which alone was able to make them wise unto salvation, and intended to be equally accessible 'to Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free,' was locked up from them, and the use of it in their own tongue prohibited under the heaviest penalties. The religious service was mumbled over in a dead language, which many, even of the priests did not understand, and some of them could scarcely read; and the greatest care was taken to prevent even Catechisms, composed and approved by the best of the clergy, from coming into the hands of the laity. Of the doctrine and knowledge of Christianity, almost nothing remained but the name."

Now it was in such a state of things that the Reformers commenced their work. Therefore, after solemnly renouncing, in Covenant, all connection with Rome Papal, as the Anti-Christ of prophecy, and accepting the true Christian religion as it is taught in the Word of God alone, they bound themselves to disseminate, in every lawful way, a "knowledge of the blessed Evangel," till "religion and righteousness would flourish in the whole land." And what were the means they employed to secure that object we learn from the 1st Book of Discipline, prepared by Knox and others in 1560, and adopted at the second meeting of the general assembly, in January, 1561. First, it was provided and enacted, as "a thing most expedient and necessary, that every kirk have the Bible in English, and that the people be commanded to convene and hear the plain reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, that so the gross ignorance which hath overflowed all may partly be removed." Again, "every master of a household was commanded either to instruct, or cause to be instructed, his children, servants and family, in the principles of the Christian religion." Moreover, "men, women and children were exhorted to exercise themselves in psalms, that when the kirk doth convene and sing, they may be the more able, with common hearts and voices, together to praise God." Then they sought to have competent preachers settled everywhere, as far as such men were available. And when a sufficient supply of ministers was not to be had, readers were appointed in vacant parishes, "men that could distinctly read the Scriptures and exercise both themselves and the church, till they grow to greater perfection." They also labored successfully to establish schools and colleges, in which, besides an ordinary education being given, the Scriptures and catechism were taught, and they made it compulsory on parents to see that their children received at least a school education. Then in every town and considerable village they held a weekly meeting for the exercise of prophesying, at which ministers and doctors and elders, readers and members of the church competent to speak to edification, all were free to use the gifts God had given them for the good of others. This exercise of prophesying, which they founded

on Paul's directions to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. xiv.) seems to have been their manner of conducting social worship or prayer-meeting, and contributed greatly then, as it is calculated to do still, to promote the practical knowledge of divine truth in those who waited upon it. In the large towns, moreover, they had preaching or exposition of Scripture every day, and in the smaller towns and villages on one day each week, besides the Sabbath, and during the time set apart for this exercise all labor was suspended that all might attend.

As to the Lord's day it was provided as follows: "It must be straitly kept both before and after noon. Before noon must the Word be preached and sacraments ministered. After noon must the young children be publicly examined in their catechism in the audience of the people, in doing whereof the minister must take great diligence, as well to cause the people to understand the questions proposed, as the answers, and the doctrine that may be collected thereof. The order to be kept in teaching the catechism, and how much of it is appointed for every Sabbath is already distinguished in the catechism printed with the Book of our Common Order, which catechism is the most perfect that ever was used in the kirk." It may, perhaps, be necessary here to remark that the catechism referred to in the above extract, and frequently in other parts of the first Book of Discipline, was what is known as Calvin's Catechism, as, of course, the Westminster Catechisms were not yet in existence; and the Book of Order, which was to be followed, was the "Book of Common Order," called "The Order of Geneva."

The above extract makes it very plain that the early Reformers, in the then condition of religious knowledge in the community, thought it most for the advantage of all, both young and old, to devote the afternoon of the Lord's day to catechetical instructions, and in their own fashion held afternoon Sabbath-school. The young learned Calvin's Catechism in the common schools, but by the regular public exercise of catechising on Sabbath afternoons were made to understand it, and the doctrines contained in the questions and answers for the day; whilst, as stated in another section, "The exercise of the children in every kirk shall be great instruction to the aged and unlearned," thus making the occasion profitable to all. Now we have in this substantially the whole aims and work of the Sabbath-School as it still exists.

Firstly. The work they thus attempted was *largely missionary*. In their attempt to fill all Scotland with a knowledge of the blessed evangel they kept in view the whole population. But many were not yet in the fellowship of the church. Notwithstanding they required their children to attend the public school, learn the Scriptures and catechism, and gathered them into the churches on Sabbath afternoons that they might be instructed in the true knowledge of what they had committed to memory, and thus their work, like all legitimate Sabbath-school work, was largely missionary in its nature and aims.

Secondly. As in many of the parishes the attendance of young persons must have been very large, and the children of many different degrees of attainments, it is obvious that all could not be catechised together in one body, or by one individual. It would be necessary, therefore, in most cases, to divide them into classes for con-

venience, and according to their attainments, just as in the modern Sabbath-school. And this will appear more obvious when we remember that, in many parts there were no settled ministers for many years for want of suitable men, but only exhorters and readers, among whom the work would soon come to be divided. Moreover, in many of the settled parishes there were, besides the regular pastor, doctors and professors and learned elders of high attainments, who would, no doubt, have a suitable part of the work assigned them to the help of the minister, so that soon a division of labor was found necessary in these catechetical exercises.

Thirdly. They diligently followed a certain order of study in this work. According to the Book of Order the day's lesson was marked off, and teacher and pupil knew what to prepare.

Fourthly. It was clearly impressed on all, that this public exercise on Sabbath afternoon was not to supersede in any degree the obligation of parents to instruct their children in religious knowledge, or to be a substitute for diligence on their part, but only a help to parents of weak attainments, and chiefly to be directed to the good of neglected children who had no proper parental care.

A brief glance, therefore, at the history of our reforming ancestors will, we think, warrant the conclusion that at a period, far antedating the time of Raikes, they had among them substantially all the elements of the Sabbath-school in full operation. And we think it may do more. It may supply us with some hints how to go to work that may be of use, even with all the improvements of modern days. Our brief notice of the work of the Reformers may well suggest: First, that in all our churches a larger proportion of the congregations should take a more lively interest in Sabbath-school work, both for their own profit and the encouragement of others. The presence and prayers in the Sabbath-school of many, who are never seen in it, would strengthen and encourage those at work, and at the same time spiritually benefit their own souls.

Moreover, it reminds us that such formularies of doctrine, as our excellent catechisms, might be more largely employed to great advantage in the Sabbath-school. There is no doubt but that the present system of lessons, now almost universally followed in Sabbath-schools, and the helps so largely provided to enable teachers the better to accomplish their work, have many and great advantages; yet, perhaps, they have, their disadvantages too. One of the latter, perhaps, is that memorizing psalms and other portions of scripture, thus laying up a store for the future, once so marked a feature, has greatly disappeared from many Sabbath-schools. Another may be that the use of our catechisms is in some cases becoming very limited, and in consequence the doctrines of divine truth are not taught so systematically and perfectly as of old.

And further still, the remarkable care the Reformers showed, as to the parties allowed to conduct the catechetical instructions of the Sabbath afternoon, may suggest the need of greater diligence in securing competent persons to conduct the exercises of the classes. If the stream cannot rise higher than the fountain, a well-instructed, competent, and reliable teacher should alone be allowed to take charge of a class, if we expect any real progress to be made. And thus whilst it is pleasant to think that in our attempts at Sabbath-

school work we are still following in the wake of the Reformers, and seeking to realize the same aims, we may well feel that we can still learn something from their example.

MESSIAH'S WILL vs. MAN'S WILL.

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In many ways men violate the will of the Master, but noway is so generally practiced as is that *open, flagrant* violation of God's law which teaches men that they can do as they please in the financial support of his kingdom.

Popularity could be no more certainly gained than to devise some way by which men could escape this duty altogether. But the strangest thing of all is that God is persistently robbed under color of law, which has no higher source than the will of the people.

Three distinct theories have been advanced for the sustentation of the New Testament Church. One of these is the Bible plan—the law of the tithe *and* offering established by the Head of the church. It has been practiced for almost 5,000 years to the exclusion of other plans. It has all the sanction that antiquity can give it, being hoary with the age of centuries, and is based upon the great unrepealed will of Jehovah. We have no record of any other plan until the rise of the Roman Catholic theory, almost a thousand years after Christ, called ‘Competent Maintenance,’ as Bellarmine declares. Its origin was with the Man of Sin after his incorrigible pride and license had grown great enough to usurp all rights and to do his own pleasure constrained by no emperor, prince, or king, and not even by the Word of God. To uphold the sacrileges and usurpations of popes and bishops the tithe as a tribute due to God was ignored, and the competent-maintenance theory introduced. This was done in order that the pope, as sovereign disposer of the revenues of the church, might alienate, commute, and appropriate the tithe as he saw fit. Had the divine right of the tithe been allowed to remain as an unrepealed law on the statute book of Jehovah—and in practice for nearly 5,000 years—some one might have disputed the pope's alienations by the authority of God's word. To avoid this the schoolmen framed this very convenient distinction: ‘That the divine and moral law extended only to a competency for the ministry, but as to the determinate quantity of a tenth this was only of ecclesiastical institution.’ Out of this seems to have grown all the abuses practiced by the Roman Catholic Church. The sooner the Reformed Churches leave this *wicked invention* of men which is taught for doctrine, the better for the church and all concerned.

The other theory is known as the alms theory, which places ministers and missionaries and the *poor on an equality*. According to Dr. Miller, the otherwise noble Waldenses are the progenitors of this illegitimate child. The excuse for them is that, driven out of the Roman Catholic Church by her corruption and persecution, they went to the other extreme and decided that all monies given for