

→‡OUR BANNER.‡←

Vol. XIII.

OCTOBER, 1886.

No 10.

*THE PLACE OUR CHURCH STANDARDS SHOULD OCCUPY IN SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHING.**

BY THE REV. J. C. MCFEETERS, PARNASSUS, PA.

What are our Church Standards? The Westminster Confession of Faith; the Testimony; the Assembly's Catechisms; and the Covenants. These are regarded as uniform in authority, as Constitutional Law of the Church. Each of these Standards fills its own place, and its peculiar importance. They are called subordinate standards, when compared with the Bible, the supreme standard of all excellence in faith and action.

The Sabbath School is for giving and receiving instruction in Bible truth. No instruction is in place here except it spring from this fountain of redeeming knowledge, and can slake the thirst of the longing soul. No learning is worth receiving here except that which will make grace grow in the heart, and show in the life. Creeds are in place in the Sabbath school, only so far as they serve as cisterns to hold the waters of eternal life. We hold our Church Standards to be the truths of the divine word reduced to system. These compilations may not be complete; the arrangement may be defective. Yet we regard them as matchless in value and fulness; they are the best effort the Church has ever made to recite her Bible lessons in the presence of the world.

The Confession of Faith classifies and expands the doctrines of grace, and appeals to the intellect. The Thirty-three Articles are so many lamps arranged so as to form a magnificent chandelier; and into the golden bowls the oil flows from all the pages of the inspired word; and the heavenly light shines out to illuminate the mind of those who love the truth. The Testimony is made up largely of the same doctrines. They are differently expressed and appeal to the judgment. They are the voice of the Church in defense of the truth. They are evidence given in the trial through which true religion is passing. Church members are the witnesses in the trial; God is the Judge; the

*Paper read at the Sabbath School Convention held at Rock Point, Pa., August 3, 1886, and requested for publication in the Church magazines, by the Convention.

Bible is the attorney; the world is the jury; this little Book is the testimony. The Catechisms comprise the same truths prepared for memory. The questions are so many golden links of Theology; one link draws another into sight; all form a beautiful chain to hang around the soul. The Larger Catechism is intended for larger minds; the shorter for smaller minds. Parents can show their estimate of the child's capacity by the distance they put the child through the Catechisms. The Covenants are a summary of the same declarations. They appeal to the conscience, to the deepest convictions of fidelity. They are the soldier's avowal of allegiance to his Commander. As the Testimony is the deposition of the citizen of Christ's kingdom; so the Covenants contain the army oath. They make the citizen a soldier, and nerve him for heroic service. They pledge him to establish his testimony, though it be by the heaviest sacrifices, and to seal it though it be with his blood.

Thus we have the truths of our Bible arranged according to four distinct methods; and each method has its use, and their combination is of unique importance. Where ought these standards to be in the Sabbath schools? The Bible should always be first. This book is the Great Standard which identifies the Church as the Kingdom of Christ; His well-known banner which must ever be carried in the front ranks. It must be maintained by the Church in the front of all learning, and of all action. Kept in this position, it claims for any ecclesiastical denomination an honorable recognition, and demands respect for any evangelical body. But place it behind the subordinate standards, and the Church takes her place as a Sect; she becomes creed bound; is of necessity illiberal and quarrelsome with her neighbors; carries upon her countenance a human likeness, not the likeness of God. Our Church Standards should not be pushed forward in the Sabbath school in advance of the Bible. Let the divine Word lead; the lower standards follow. Yet they ought not to drop out of sight; they are all standards of the same army, emblazoned with the same mottoes, inspiring the same hearts. Let them be kept forward, yet with becoming modesty; not lifted above the Central Banner, yet waving on each side in its defense.

The Confession, the Testimony, and the Covenants, are advanced studies, they demand closest attention and deepest thoughts. It is no child's play to master these compendiums of Theology; they who can grasp them are able to study at home, and this is the place we would assign these studies. The quiet hours of home life employed after this manner will yield rich returns to heart and mind. The meaning of the Bible will take on a new emphasis; its teachings will grow into logic; its sentiments will mature into the strong fibre of convictions. These most excellent treatises are the strong meat dried; the strong soul can eat and become stronger. The Sabbath school hour is too short for a recitation in the Bible lesson, and in the subordinate stan-

dards. An advanced class cannot get the good of either, if they be led through both; yet the teacher can develop the study of the standards by frequent reference to them. He can bring forward these chosen doctrines and hold them before the class as beautiful statues by which to illustrate and enforce the lesson; or he can present them as golden vessels filled with the spirit of the text.

But we would assign the catechisms another position. They are the easy lessons in saving knowledge; the child should learn them, and learn them in the Sabbath school. They belong to the primary classes; and these pupils require variety, they grow weary of monotony during the hour of recitation. There is time enough for both the lesson story and the catechetical question; both are needed to make the best impression. Train the child to memorize the Catechism; you are thereby making channels in which the water of life may flow through the garden of the heart. The Catechism is a necklace for the child; place it upon the memory, and it will glitter like a row of diamonds. It is a chain with the charm of eternal life attached; if worn, it will adorn the intellect even in old age. The truths collected here, if engraven on the soft heart, will be beautiful mottoes for action and trust in after days; will shine with fadeless lustre when the eye grows dim and the limbs tremble under the burden of years.

The skillful teacher can employ the hour with the children with greatest effect by joining the lesson-story and the catechism-question together. A question can be fitted into the gospel story of each day, like a gem into a setting of gold; let the teacher set the gem; be sure to set the gem each day. The teacher ought to paint the gospel lesson on the mind of the pupil in better than Indian ink. Then name the question of the Catechism which corresponds. Is the story of the day about the beggar dying at the rich man's gate? what an illustration of "the benefits after death!" Is the story concerning Naaman bathing in the Jordan? what an illustration of "sanctification!" Is the story about the expiring Saviour? what an illustration of "Justification!" Put a glow into the description; then make a question shine in that glow. Thus the apt teacher can fill the dry Catechism with the sweet juices of the gospel; and the children will like them. The Sabbath school without its Catechism classes may be a pleasant place for children, but it is not without danger. The little lambs may be turned into clover; but they have no paths leading to the fold, and they may get lost; they have no well beaten tracks of truth, and the tender mind may wander far from truth. Without the question book each scholar rides in a little boat, drifted by the varying winds of modern instructions; with the question book in hand, the boat moves steadily before the unchanging breeze of the ripest Christian scholarship of all ages. The children in their classes are stimulated by each other; a worthy emulation carries them forward. Parents have less difficulty, though no less responsibility in home training. And for this purpose the Sab-

bath school exists. The well organized Sabbath school has its graded classes in the question books; these reach from the beginning of Brown's short to the end of the Assembly Larger. Then out of the Larger, the scholars graduate into the Bible classes. In this manner a good foundation is laid for Bible study in after years. The mind is filled with systematic truth; the intellect is trained to form correct ideals; the tongue is taught to speak accurate words; the conscience is enabled to act with vigor, stimulated by the vigorous doctrines in which it dwells. Nothing is better than a thorough course in the Catechisms to make a clear head, a dutiful conscience, and a true heart; and nowhere is there a better place to receive such a course of training than in a well regulated Sabbath school.

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN BRITAIN.

BY THE REV. JAMES KERR, GLASGOW.

The sound of the late Parliamentary battle has not yet died away. The strife is being still carried on in muffled measure throughout the constituencies, and especially on the floor of the House of Commons, where, indeed, it first arose. Nor, I fear, will the battle end soon. Political parties are in close antagonism; feelings run riot, and it is not easy to foresee the issue. The tactics of the Parnellites may at length exhaust the patience and outdo the powers of both Houses, and gain for Ireland an independent Parliament in St. Stephen's Green. In that case, the issue of the conflict would be perilous to the religious and civil interests of the country for which it is being waged.

Soon after the accession of the Liberal party to power, about eight months ago, Mr. Gladstone appeared to be resolved to make large concessions to the demands of the Irish Nationalists. The Nationalists held the balance of parties, and their support was necessary to Liberals or Conservatives in order to the retention of governmental powers. Mr. Gladstone's action was calculated, if not designed, to secure the adhesion of the Nationalists to the Liberal party; but, as the event has proved, the Liberals have lost heavily every way by this procedure. At the period of the elections last year, Mr. Gladstone condemned the Parnellite demands in the strongest possible terms, and with great energy called upon the electors to grant him a large Liberal representation that he might deal effectively with the Tory-Parnellite alliance. Speaking of Parnell's followers, Mr. Gladstone has said; "It is perfectly true that these gentlemen wish to march through, aspire to the disintegration and dismemberment of the empire, and, I am sorry to say, even to the placing of different parts of the empire in direct hostility the one with the other." He has also said that, "The Imperial Parliament must be supreme in these three kingdoms, and nothing that creates a doubt upon that supremacy can be tolerated by any intelligent or patriotic mind." After these and many other declar-