

THE UNION SEMINARY MAGAZINE

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THE LOUISVILLE ASSEMBLY.

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This discussion of the Louisville Assembly is not written from the point of view of an eye witness, but from that of a reader of the printed minutes. That is the correct point of view from which to get a proper estimate, since it is through the printed minutes and not through the intentions of the body that it will ultimately be judged and through which it will influence the Church and history. For lack of space much will have to be omitted that must have lent a peculiar charm to the meeting, the interesting city of Louisville, the historic church of Stuart Robinson, in which the Assembly met, the splendid hospitality of the pastor and congregation, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of our Church, the presence of the Theological Seminary, the phenomenal work among the negroes in the city, and the ideal moderator, himself in his youth a favorite with Dr. Stuart Robinson. The limits of space will also make it necessary to omit allusion to a number of things done by the Assembly and confine attention to the more important ones.

I. This Assembly was distinguished by the unusual number of extremely important subjects it was called upon to handle. Of these, probably none is more important than the complete inauguration of the work of a Permanent Committee on Systematic Beneficence. Our whole system for gathering and administering the funds for the benevolent work of our Church has been changed within the last year. Previously we had nine

THE INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS.

By A. F. SCHAUFFLER, D. D.,

Chairman, International Sunday School Lesson Committee, New York.

Sunday School teachers all over the world are aware that there exists such a course as the International Sunday School Lesson Course. As to how this originated, and as to the story of its development up to the present year, very few teachers, and indeed very few pastors and superintendents are aware. It is so long since the International Sunday School Lesson system was started, that most of those who saw its incipience have passed away, and their places have been taken by others "who know not Joseph." For the sake of those, it seems worth while to review the whole interesting story, and to set forth the evolution of the International Sunday School Lesson system up to the present time.

Before 1872, there was no uniformity among the Sunday Schools of the United States in the matter of the lesson studied each Sunday. There were in the field a number of denominational and some undenominational courses of lessons, each competing more or less with the others. In 1872, at the great Sunday School Convention, in Indianapolis, the idea of a Uniform Lesson to be studied by scholars of all ages in all Sunday Schools in the United States, was broached. There were those who advocated and those who opposed the scheme. Among prominent advocates may be mentioned the late B. F. Jacobs of Chicago, and Bishop Vincent of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. It is needless to go into minute details in this interesting history. Suffice it to say, that the scheme of the Uniform Lesson for all scholars was adopted, and a representative Committee was appointed, to whom was delegated

the important duty of preparing such an outline, with the intention to lead scholars through both Old and New Testaments in a rational way. This Committee adopted a seven years' course; seven years, because they estimated that this was about the average length of time during which scholars remained members of individual schools. [This period was subsequently shortened to the six year period, for reasons which it is not necessary to dwell on in this article.]

Slowly but steadily the idea of the Uniform Lessons won its way, and before very many years had passed, every denomination in the United States and Canada, excepting only the Episcopalians and Lutherans, had adopted the International Course of Lessons. One result of this study of Uniform Lessons by so many millions of scholars was that the very best lesson writers who could be found, were engaged to prepare the lesson helps for both teachers and scholars. A literature sprung up such as had never been seen before, all bearing upon the helpful interpretation of the Divine Word. In this way the great Sunday School army was unified and solidified. In the great State and National Conventions, lessons could be illustrated by the most competent teachers with the assurance that the audience in such Conventions would be familiar with lessons then presented.

The Lesson Committee as the result of experience improved upon its work year by year. In 1896, as a result of large experience, the Lesson Committee then in office adopted the "biographical," as its governing idea in the selection of portions to be studied from the Word. If at any time they choose lessons from the Psalms, the Prophets or the Epistles, they linked them on chronologically to the names of those who were concerned in writing these portions of the Word.

For a long time there was manifested great satisfaction with the result of the work thus inaugurated in Indianapolis. All conceded that the Uniform Lessons had advantages which were not lightly to be esteemed. At the same time there were not lacking those who claimed that lessons that were appropriate for the older scholars in our Sunday Schools, and for adults,

were not appropriate for Primary classes or for Beginners in Sunday School life.

This claim steadily grew in volume and finally resulted in the action taken by the great Convention at Denver, held in 1902. At that Convention the Lesson Committee was instructed to prepare a two years' Beginners' Course, appropriate for scholars from four to six years of age (the committee had previously prepared a *one* year's course). To suit the varying taste and judgment of teachers in the Beginners' Department was no slight task. The Lesson Committee met with representative Elementary workers to hear their views as to what type of lesson was best for these little ones. In all, the Lesson Committee had before it forty-one schemes of lessons suited to the Beginners. Using their very best judgment and being guided largely by the opinions of experts, the Committee put forth a two years' Beginners Course. This was hailed by teachers of the little ones, and with reason, as a decided advance on the Uniform Lesson for all scholars of all ages. At that same Convention in Denver, the plan was broached to direct the Lesson Committee to prepare an especial set of lessons for adults. The Convention, however, voted that resolution down. A resolution was then presented and adopted as follows:

Resolved, That the following plan of lesson selection shall be observed by the Lesson Committee to be elected by this Convention:

"A. One Uniform Lesson for all grades of the Sunday School shall be selected by the Lesson Committee, as in accordance with the usage of the past five Lesson Committees; provided, that the Lesson Committee be authorized to issue an optional 'Beginners' Course for special demands and uses, such optional course not be bear the official title of 'International Lesson.'

"B. *Resolved*, That at this time we are not prepared to adopt a series of advanced lessons to take the place of the uniform lessons in the adult grade of the Sunday School.

"C. The Lesson Committee is urged to consider how far a better continuity of Bible study may be secured by alternating at longer intervals—of one or more years—the selections from the Old and New Testaments respectively.

"D. *Resolved*, That this Convention reaffirm the instructions on the subject of temperance lessons adopted at Pittsburg and reaffirmed at St. Louis and Boston.*

"E. *Whereas*, The International Primary Department has expressed its appreciation of the value to the primary work of America of the action of the Lesson Committee in providing a Beginners' Course, and has asked that this course be extended to two years:

"*Resolved*, That we transmit this request to the Lesson Committee for their careful consideration."

At the next Triennial International Convention held in Toronto in 1905, the matter of Graded Lessons again came to the front, and long debates were indulged in, the pros and cons of further gradation of the lessons being presented with clearness and vigor. The result of the debate was, that the Convention voted to instruct the Lesson Committee to prepare a Course of Lessons adapted to adults who had already been through the Uniform Course once or more. The Lesson Committee endeavored to carry out this behest and, up to date, has prepared three Advanced Courses for adults. These, however, have not met with sufficient approval on the part of the Sunday School public to warrant their continuance, for one reason or another. Several editors declined to use them, or using them (as they did in some cases) found no sufficient demand on the part of their constituency to warrant any further expense in publishing these adult lessons.

The demand for still further gradation in the Sunday School curriculum, however, did not subside, and expert workers from east and west asked for a complete Graded Course fitted for the varying capacities of Sunday School scholars from the time they

* The instructions are as follows: "We most heartily recommend the International Lesson Committee that a Specific Bible Temperance Lesson be given quarterly or some other Sunday than the review Sunday, in order that the subject of Temperance may receive the proper attention its importance demands, and complications with other subjects be thereby avoided."

It was further urged that, as many schools wilfully neglect to teach the Temperance Lessons, the committee should so arrange these lessons that their importance should receive the same recognition as that of other lessons.

The aid of the denominational publishing houses in effecting this end was advised and it was urged that the subject of Temperance should be stressed wherever possible throughout the whole course.—*Editor*.

entered the school to the time that they reached maturity. These Elementary workers from whom these requests came all agreed that at the most, only twenty-five per cent of the Sunday Schools in the United States could adopt a minutely Graded Course of lessons. They all agreed that the great majority of Sunday Schools were not sufficiently organized to enable them to adopt such a course, and that for these schools, constituting seventy-five per cent of the total, a Uniform International Course would have to be provided along the same general lines as those adopted in 1872.

The whole question, therefore, naturally came up again at the Triennial International Convention in Louisville in 1908. The Convention instructed the Lesson Committee to proceed in the preparation of a complete Graded Sunday School Course of lessons for such schools as were sufficiently advanced to adopt them. At the same time the Committee was instructed to continue in the preparation of the International Uniform Course of lessons. Thus instructed the Lesson Committee went ahead and is now still engaged in the preparation of a complete graded course. Of course, the Lesson Committee has been obliged to avail itself of the wisdom of experts in the various departments of Sunday School teaching.

With very great labor, the Committee has issued already a two years' Course of Lessons for Beginners from four to six; two years of the course for Primaries, ages six to nine; two years of the course for Juniors, aged nine to twelve; one year of the course for Intermediates, aged twelve to fifteen. These lessons have been prepared for teachers and scholars by such writers as have been selected by the various publishing houses, and are now in the hands of these schools which have elected to use them. Other courses are in process of preparation. When the curriculum is completed, it will stand as follows:

Beginners, two annual Courses.

Primaries, three annual Courses.

Juniors, four annual Courses.

Intermediates, four annual Courses.

Seniors, such additional annual Courses as may be called for. To carry out consistently the plan, the Beginners' Department

in any school will have to be divided into two sections, one containing those four to five years of age, and the other, those five to six years of age. Each of these sections will study a different lesson. All Primary Departments will have to be divided into three sections, to each of whom a different lesson will be taught.

The Juniors will be divided into four sections, and the Intermediates into the same number, while to each of these sections a different lesson will be taught each Sunday. In this way any school adopting the completely graded course will teach thirteen different portions of Scripture each Sunday, besides which they will teach as many different adult lessons as they choose to adopt.

All this time, let it be well borne in mind that, for such schools as are unable for any reason to adopt the Graded Course, there always remains the Regular Uniform International Lessons of the same type as has been studied for the past thirty-nine years.

Only experience can prove whether so minutely graded a course as that which has been explained above is the best even for highly organized Sunday Schools. It will take three or four years more to reach a rational conclusion. Then, and then only, shall we be able to pass an intelligent judgment as to the wisdom of so minutely graded a curriculum.

There are many who do not know how the International Lesson Committee is appointed, or how it works. For their information we may say that the International Lesson Committee is appointed every six years by the International Triennial Convention. To them is then entrusted the whole matter of the Course of Lessons, Uniform or Graded. This committee works in conjunction with the British Section appointed by Sunday School leaders in Great Britain. In order that our readers may see the constitution of the present joint Committee, their names are appended.

THE AMERICAN SECTION, 1908-14.

Elected at the Twelfth International Sunday-school Convention, Louisville, Ky., June 20th, 1908.

Rev. A. F. Schauffler, D. D., Chairman, New York City.—Presbyterian.

Prof. Ira M. Price, Ph. D. LL. D., Secretary, The University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.—Baptist.

Prof. John R. Sampey, D. D., LL. D., Louisville, Ky.—Baptist South.

Mr. John R. Pepper, Memphis, Tenn.—Methodist Episcopal South.

Prin. Elson I. Rexford, M. A., LL. D., Montreal, Canada.—Episcopalian.

Prof. Charles R. Hemphill, D. D., LL. D., Louisville, Ky.—Presbyterian South.

Prin. William Patrick, D. D., Winnipeg, Man., Canada.—Presbyterian.

Pres. W. Douglas MacKenzie, D. D., LL. D., Hartford, Conn.—Congregational.

Bishop Wm. M. Bell, D. D., Berkley, Cal.—United Brethren.

Prof. Hall Laurie Calhoun, Ph. D., Lexington, Ky.—Disciple.

Prof. Conrad Clever, D. D., Hagerstown, Md.—German Reformed.

Prof. Melancthon Coover, D. D., Gettysburg, Pa.—Lutheran.

Prof. F. C. Eiselen, Ph. D., Evanston, Ill.—Methodist Episcopal.

Justice J. J. Maclaren, D. C. L., Toronto, Ont., Canada.—Methodist.

Prof. Wm. G. Moorehead, D. D., LL. D., Xenia, Ohio.—United Presbyterian.

THE BRITISH SECTION, 1908.

Elected by the British Sunday-school Union. Denominational representatives are so indicated.

Rev. Alfred Rowland, D. D., LL. B., Chairman, London.—Congregational.

Mr. W. H. Groser, B. Sc., Secretary, 56 Old Bailey, London.—Congregational.

Rev. Prin. W. F. Adeney, D. D., Manchester.—Congregational.

Mr. F. F. Belsey, J. P., London.—Congregational.

Rev. George Bennett, Leeds.—Primitive Methodist.

Rev. J. Williams Butcher, London.—Wesleyan Methodist.

Rev. Robert Culley, London.—Wesleyan Methodist.

Rev. Prin. A. E. Garvie, D. D., London.—Congregational.
Rev. Prof. S. W. Green, M. A., London.—Baptist.
Rev. Frank Johnson, London.—Congregational.
Rev. Charles H. Kelly, London.—Wesleyan Methodist.
Prof. A. S. Peake, D. D., Manchester.—Primitive Methodist.
Rev. Richard Roberts, London.—Presbyterian.
Mr. Frederick Taylor, London.—Society of Friends.
Mr. Edward Towers, J. P., Saxmundham.—Congregational.
Mr. Charles Waters, London.—Baptist.

The method of operation of this Committee is as follows: After election they at once organize; then the general lesson scheme for the Uniform Course is blocked out for six years, giving three and a half years to the New Testament, and two and a half to the Old Testament. The selection of individual lessons is then passed over into the hands of sub-Committees, one dealing with the Old Testament, and the other with the New. These Committees block out lesson courses, a year at a time, choosing the lesson title, the golden text, and the passage of Scripture to be studied. After the sub-Committees have done their work, the result is presented to the whole Committee and amended, and adopted. The next step in the procedure is to send these tentative schemes, for one year, to the ends of the earth, to editors, teachers, lesson writers, etc., for suggestion and helpful criticism. Of course this takes time, for returns must be awaited from England, Canada, India, Africa and New Zealand, so that the Committee may avail itself of all helpful criticism possible. When these criticisms have been returned, they are then considered in detail by the general Committee and are accepted or rejected as the case may be. Only after such prolonged labor is the authorized list of lessons to be studied in any given year, issued by the Lesson Committee. (In all this, let it be borne in mind, the British Section of the Committee is in constant co-operation with the American Section.) Since these lesson lists must be in the hands of lesson writers at least a year ahead of the time when they are to be studied by the scholars, it follows that the Lesson Committee has to prepare its work far in advance. At present the lessons for 1913 and 1914 are still at the ends of the earth, being studied

and criticised by experts. At the coming International Convention at San Francisco, the lessons for 1913 will be finally passed upon and then authoritatively issued.

There are many who seem to think that the Lesson Committee is responsible for the preparation of teachers *helps*, and *helps* for the scholars, and they sometimes send rather caustic letters to the Committee complaining of statements that are made in these lesson helps. Let it be clearly understood that all that the Lesson Committee is responsible for, is title, golden text, and portions of Scripture to be studied. The various publishing houses, denominational and undenominational, to whom the lesson Committee's list is sent, then pass these lessons over to their writers, and on them, and on the firms which employ them, lies the responsibility for the treatment of the lesson text. There are those who prepare the lesson from the standpoint of the higher criticism (with which the writer has no very great sympathy), but for this the Lesson Committee is not responsible.

The above sets forth with some measure of detail, the creation and the activity of the International Lesson Committee. It also shows the incipience and the complete evolution of the minutely graded curriculum. It is needless to say that upon the Lesson Committee rests very grave responsibility, and that the task which they have in hand is one that calls for much time and labor. Besides the work that is done in the separate Committees (which is not small), the general Committee meets once, or occasionally, twice a year and takes two days for its work, sitting an average of eight hours each day in consultation. The members of the Committee receive no remuneration for their services, their work being a labor of love. Their expenses, however, are paid by the Sunday School lesson publishers, the aggregate amount being divided among those publishers on the pro rata basis, estimated by their circulation. It may interest some of our readers of the statistical turn of mind, to know, that each meeting of the Lesson Committee calls for travel aggregating 27,000 miles and for an expenditure for fare and hotel accommodation of anywhere from \$600 to \$1,000 for each meeting.