

## THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE.

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No doubt the right way to begin any discussion or paper on the teaching of Scripture, is by reminding ourselves of the supreme importance of this subject and of its outstanding place on the Time Table. But as we surely all agree on this point, may I pass straight on to a few practical points which might arouse discussion.

It may prove useful to remind ourselves of one or two of the principles behind the teaching of Scripture, which belong especially to the P.N.E.U. philosophy; also of any directions which we have for the teaching of this great subject. I have taken the points which seemed to me to help us most from Miss Mason's *Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education*. It is there that we find her fullest account of Bible lessons.

She says, for instance (p. 162):—

“The teacher opens the lesson by reading the passage from The Bible for the Young, in which the subject is pictorially treated.”

But on our programmes of work we read:

“Teacher study Paterson Smyth to bring the passage home to the children.”

Which I have always taken to mean that we did not read Paterson Smyth's book aloud. Now which is correct? Surely both? Sometimes one, sometimes the other. But in either case, this introduction forms the first of the three essential parts of every Scripture lesson. It may be simply a reading of one of Paterson Smyth's vivid word-pictures, of which Miss Mason is thinking in the passage I quote. It may be that the teacher gives a few words of her own, based on what she herself has read in the Bible for the Young. There may be one or two textual difficulties that need clearing up. Here we are on difficult ground. Should we ever explain the meanings of unusual words? If so, when should it be done, before the reading or after the narration? We know it must never be between the two. In any case, this part of the lesson should be brief, as the children will want to get on to the real thing, namely, the reading of the Bible text, followed by narration. The last part of the lesson is devoted to discussion—this is a very important part, as here lies the opportunity for bringing

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home any special teaching the story may afford and of clearing up any difficulties raised by the children.

To return for a moment to the second part of the lesson, the reading and narration. We are reminded in the *Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education*, that “the Bible text must be read without interruption.” This is, of course, so familiar to us as to be, at first sight, hardly worth mentioning. But we do still hear that “small children cannot possibly understand the Bible”—or, that one must have an easier version for the little ones.

Now, in Natural History, we do not give small children a flower to study with the sepals, stamens or pistil picked off, because they are too young to learn such words or the functions of these parts, and only the bright petals will appeal to them. We let them have the real flower

and they take from it, for themselves, those joys and interests suited to them. This is a somewhat far fetched illustration, but it may suggest what I mean. If the beauties of our English Bible be spread before the children, they will take and reject for themselves. The part of the teacher is, surely, that of helper, by giving just the right background and introduction in the first part of the lesson.

Let us pass to the next direction.

“Forms III. and IV. read for themselves the whole of the Old Testament as produced by the Rev. H. Costley-White.”

Does Miss Mason mean that they ought to read this silently? I do not know. But, for a large number of the term’s lessons, it has always been, in my experience, the only way of getting through the work—although the harder parts of the book need very careful supervision. Surely here is a good starting-place for training children in Form III. to study alone (if they have not already learnt to do so).

Again, in the *Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education*, in connection with New Testament, we find

“Narration [sic] is often curiously word-perfect after a single reading.”

It is indeed surprising how children will do this almost unconsciously. Surely a witness to the beauty of our Bible language! What opportunities our children get of laying up for themselves large stores of these beauties. As a rule we discourage “word-perfect” narrations as simply verbal memory. But in the New Testament lessons it seems that this need not be so. [p 370]

Lastly, Miss Mason tells us that she felt it to be extremely important for our children to have

“... a poetic presentation of the life and teaching of Our Lord.”

That in such a study they will experience

“... a curious and delightful sense of harmonious development ... of the progressive unfolding which characterises Our Lord’s teaching.”

Because “the need seemed urgent,” because we are “waiting for the great epic,” Miss Mason put forward what she called a “stop-gap” in the six volumes of the *Saviour of the World*. Most unfortunately I can say nothing from personal experience as to the best means of studying this with the children. When I have had girls old enough to take it, I have not been teaching New Testament, as parents have desired otherwise. For I am told that you don’t really know the *Saviour of the World* until you have taught it. My sister was not “brought up on it,” as I was, and never cared for it. But she says that now that she teaches it, she loves it. But I am quite convinced, from having been taught it, that we ought not to neglect the wonderful opportunities it gives us. May I briefly illustrate what I mean?

Firstly, we have the development of Our Lord's life and teaching brought out. Take, for example, the portions which comment upon the passage following the story of the healing of the man at Bethesda; I mean those in St. John beginning "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." How clearly the *Saviour of the World* portions bring before us the point of dispute between Christ and the Jews—namely, the observance of the Sabbath. Then we follow on to Our Lord's teaching arising from this—about the Oneness of the Father and the Son, the Work of Judgment committed to the Son and the Atonement of Father, Son and those who will follow Him.

Secondly, what opportunities there are for building up a clear view of life upon a sure foundation. For instance, such passages as that about the colours held in the white light, in the poem on the Annunciation; or those called Rest and Restlessness; or, again, the commentary on St. John's Prologue—

"No longer baffled we by tortuous quest  
Whether all life proceed from two or many,  
Whether our origins be high or low—  
Those things concern the manner of our making:  
In Him was life; this is enough to know:  
How He dispersed the largess of His bounty,  
'Twere good indeed to learn; and time will come

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When ear to hear the whisper of the Word  
Shall wake; a man, learned in the laws of things,  
That he heard whispered by the Word, shall tell.  
Till then we wait, not knowing whence we came,  
But knowing Him from whom all doth proceed."

Surely some such study gives a much-needed background in our present life of rush and whirl? Many delightful sidelights on familiar stories are thrown by "The Disciple" poems in all six volumes. After reading of the Syro-Phoenician Woman, we find a little picture of ourselves as the happy dogs of Our Lord, waiting His command, telling of His going forth, gathering in His sheep, lying still at His bidding.

In all our teaching we seek occasion "to visualize, realize, every incident of Our Lord's life; to ponder, search after" His sayings and discourses, and to find in Him "the consummation of all human aspiration and the means of its accomplishment."