

BIBLE TEACHING IN THE P.N.E.U.

A P.N.E.U. MEETING AT OOTACAMUND.

Ootacamund, Madras.

BY MISS BRUCE-LOW.

YOUR EXCELLENCY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I have been asked to read a paper on the P.N.E.U. Method of Teaching the Bible to children. About thirty years ago, the Parents' National Educational Union was formed, the principles of which are set forth in Miss Mason's "Home Education" Series. Miss Mason also started a College at Ambleside for governesses, who go through a two years' course and at the end of their training are sent to private houses or schools where they teach on P.N.E.U. lines. Though, naturally, those who have been trained in the method know it best, many others have taught on the P.N.E.U. method with great success. The method of teaching the Bible has been taken up in some of the Sunday Schools at home, and both teachers and scholars are most enthusiastic about it.

It is because I have had the privilege of being trained at Ambleside and not because of any superior knowledge or experience in Bible teaching, that I venture to read this paper to you to-day. (*Teacher used in the wide sense of the word throughout.*)

I think it is unnecessary for me to dwell on the importance of Bible Teaching, but I know that there are many of us who undertake to teach the subject who feel that we have been constantly defeated in our attempt to make the Bible a real and living book to the children. The latter may be interested in the stories, but either the lesson these are meant to teach is not brought home to them or else they ask so many awkward questions to which we cannot give satisfactory answers that the lesson falls flat or, worse still, awakens doubts in the mind of the child.

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How, then, are these difficulties to be overcome? Our aim in teaching the Bible is to give children a knowledge of God. We must therefore show them how God manifested Himself by degrees to His people, giving victory to those who believed in Him and tried to do His will, and punishing the wicked. Explain that just as there are many things in our own lives which we do not understand so in the Bible there are many things which puzzle us very much. This need not worry us, however, because in all we may trace God's love and guidance and in due time all may be revealed to us. In the meantime we are told to "Search the Scriptures diligently." Tell the children that clever men and women have been able to explain many things which before we could not understand and so we are often helped by reference to other books besides the Bible. Children have a right to see things in the light of modern research, but we cannot afford to put doubts in their minds, as to the authenticity of the Bible, for example. We must give children such a hold on essential truth that later they may be able to distinguish between this and accidental truth—essential being God's teaching through the Bible to men of all times; accidental being the mere accidents of time and place. The miracles, then, present no

difficulties. The children know that God deals with us all in different ways according to our needs; that He holds our lives in His hand to order as is best, and can perform any miracle He pleases to carry out His plan.

If some of the things which are recorded in the Bible seem impossible to us, what would the people of Old Testament days think if we could tell them that a message can be sent from one end of the world as it is known now to the other (a distance of about 8,000 miles) in four minutes? Would they not think this a miracle? Yet we know that by means of our modern inventions more wonderful things even than this can be done. If then, in this advanced age we know many of the laws of Nature and can give a reason for many of the things that happen around us, do we on that account say there is no such thing as a miracle or that we cannot believe in God? I think not. Neither will a child who loves God and is able to give a reason for the faith that is in him be turned aside or made to doubt because we tell him the world was not created in six days or that the sun and moon did not actually stand still at Joshua's bidding.

Now let us turn to the lesson. May I plead that it shall be from the Bible itself and not from any watered down stories written for children. The Bible narratives are told simply and beautifully

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in the Bible, much more beautifully than any modern writer could tell them, and a child demands the best. We want him, too, to become familiar with the Bible language from the earliest years. Let him begin with the stories in Genesis and the Gospels and he will not find the language too difficult. When we read our Bible passage to the children and then ask them to tell it back to us as nearly as possible in the words of the Bible it is surprising how well they will do it. The next step is to let them learn a passage by heart by repeating a verse or part of a verse to them and then letting them say it themselves. The verses to be learnt by heart should be taken from a lesson already given or have some connexion with it so that it really means something to the child. So often a child is made to learn a psalm of which he neither knows the author nor to what it refers. How, then, can he be expected to know what he doesn't understand? A child's interest must first be aroused and then he will learn easily. It is often a help, I think, with older children to learn with them, because then they will realize that we too care to know, that we love our Bibles not less but more as we grow older. And because of this it is worth our while to take a little trouble in order to have these verses in the storehouse of our memory.

Illustrations will be a help in the Bible lesson but these, too, must only be of the best. They must truly depict the scene and must be thoughtfully and reverently done. Most of the modern pictures are poor, but the Illustrated New Testament is good and the Gospels in Art, but this latter is, of course, an expensive book. We have others on the table for you to look at afterwards as well as some good text-books to be used in the preparation of the lesson.

The attitude of the teacher is of the utmost importance in every lesson, but particularly in the Bible lesson. How can we make the children love God and want to know Him if His Word is not very real and precious to ourselves? Children are very quick to detect whether we care or not, and if we do not care enough our attitude will be reflected in the children.

The Method of a P.N.E.U. Lesson is very simple and is as follows:—

(1). The teacher prepares the lesson carefully beforehand, choosing what part of it she wants particularly to bring home to the children.

(2). The lesson should be apparent throughout and not rubbed into the children as a dry bit at the end.

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(3). First of all the previous lesson is recapitulated by the children, and then the teacher connects it with the present lesson.

(4). The teacher gives a picture of the scene of the lesson in a few words, thus appealing to their imagination and making the scene live before them. Mention any points the children are specially to notice. They usually remember the story fairly accurately themselves but do not always draw the moral from it. If places are to be found on the map let this be done now so as not to interfere with the flow of the lesson later on.

(5). The teacher (or children, according to the age of the children), reads the portion of the Bible comprising the lesson.

(6). Then the children narrate, in turn, each telling a bit of the story. The narration should not be interrupted but corrections may be made at the end. We all know how difficult it is to tell a story vividly and well if we are constantly being interrupted or asked questions.

(7). Talk over the lesson with the children in the light of modern research.

THE LESSON. For children between the ages of 9 and 12.
Joshua x., 1–14. The Battle of Beth-horon.

The Aim is to show that if we ask God's guidance He will help us through even overwhelming difficulties.

STEP I. The children recapitulate their last lesson about Joshua's treaty with the Gibeonites, the teacher helping them, if necessary, to bring out the lesson of how Joshua determined to keep his promise to the Gibeonites though he was deceived, and how the Gibeonites were punished for their deceitfulness.

STEP II. Say that in to-day's lesson we are going to see how Joshua kept his promise in spite of what might seem overwhelming difficulties. Remind the children that Joshua was deceived because he had not asked God's guidance. Here we are actually told that Joshua prayed to God, but we read that God spoke to Joshua, and we know that God will speak to all of us by the voice of His Spirit if we are listening for it, but not unless.

STEP III. Say that the Gibeonites sent in great haste for help against the five kings of the Amorites, who were encamped before Gibeon. Let the children find the camp of Gilgal where the Amorites were and trace the way they would have to go, showing where the battle was fought. Compare the distance and kind of country with the part the children know. Explain Joshua's difficulties, i.e., the huge armies of the Amorites encamped in the passes they knew so well. It was already nearing night and the Israelites

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must take the Amorites by surprise or the battle was lost. Could they reach the enemy before sunrise? Show how Joshua's character is again brought out as a man of action. He didn't hesitate but set off at once.

STEP IV. Let the children read the story from the Bible, telling them to notice all the ways that God helped the Israelites.

STEP V. The children narrate, the teacher being careful not to interrupt the narration, but

if there seems any difficulty in continuing give them a question to help them to go on. Draw from them the points they were told to notice.

STEP VI. Talk over with the children the verses about the sun and moon standing still. Say—How often have we started off with great enthusiasm to do something, feeling that God was with us, just as the Israelites did for this battle, and then have been discouraged because we thought things were too difficult for us. But Joshua had God's promise, "Fear them not, for I have delivered them into thine hand." Those words "have delivered" made victory so certain that Joshua's faith never wavered. He knew that if their victory was not complete before night fell the enemy would escape under cover of darkness. So he said "in sight of all the people," probably to encourage them, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon," knowing that his prayer would be answered. Tell the children that Joshua's words may have just been a poetical way of saying "Let the light remain longer." Remind them that Eastern people have a poetical way of speaking, and words very similar to those of Joshua are found in Habakuk [sic] among other poetical language. Read to them:—

The mountains saw Thee and trembled.
The deep lifted up his hands on high;
The sun and moon stood still in their habitation
At the shining of Thy glittering spear.

But whether the sun and moon did actually stand still or not we do know that the day was made long enough for the victory to be gained, the greatest victory in the whole history of Israel.

Say that God's promises are meant just as much for us now as they were at the time they were made. Suggest that all through the day and whenever we are in difficulty or temptation we should think of the words, "Fear them not for I have delivered them into thine hand." This will remind us that God knows what enemies we will have to face and has promised us the victory over them all if we put our trust in Him.