

Education in the L. D. S. Church Schools

No church can boast of a more nearly complete system of education than the Mormon Church and none can lay claim to higher educational ideals. This statement would doubtless be surprising to those who have been accustomed to regard Mormonism as synonymous with ignorance, lack of progress and materialism. Nevertheless it is true. The saints have succeeded in making religion and education practically identical, if these terms be taken in their highest sense. Life to them means an unfolding of all the powers of man—the physical, the intellectual, and the spiritual. The function of religion and education taken together is to make this development as full and complete as possible, with a view to the highest efficiency not only in this life but also in the life to come. "A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge," declared the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith. And the whole of what this Church stands for has been couched in the proverbial expression, "Eternal progress."

The Church school system is complete in itself.

RELIGION CLASSES.

First of all, there are the grades, including the kindergarten, like those in connection with the Brigham Young university at Provo. These grades, however, are not so numerous as they might be on account of the very excellent public school system that prevails in the states where the Latter-day Saints are found. Then, too, what are called Religion classes have been organized in almost every ecclesiastical ward for the benefit mainly of the children who attend the district schools. Though not held in connection with the school, this organization supplies what the day schools do not and cannot give, namely, ideas concerning God, human redemption, and eternal life. These religion classes therefore really take the place of Church schools, since the design is to have them held every day in the week. The work is divided into three departments—the primary, the intermediate, and the advanced—and meets for only 30 or 40 minutes each session.

PREPARATORY DEPARTMENT.

In this connection special mention should be made of the preparatory departments in the Church schools—preparatory, that is, to the high school, not to the college. At present there are in all parts of America, especially in the rural districts, large numbers of young men and women who, for one reason or another have not continued their attendance at the public schools till graduation. Should they afterwards wish to attend school they cannot do so because they are beyond the public school age and are unable to enter high schools on account of insufficient preparation. Hence they are compelled by circumstances to go without schooling. But the Church schools in their preparatory department provides for just such a class of young persons. In every Church school there is a place for them. They are sought out and urged to pursue the path of education in order to increase their usefulness in society. And so hundreds of young men and women owe to the Church schools whatever of educational stimulus they have received in life.

HIGH SCHOOLS.

In the next place there are the high schools. Of these there are now 27, with four new ones in the near prospective. And the number is increasing as fast as the means of the Church will permit. It is here that the system of religious education finds its greatest reward, since it is during the period of youth at which high school work is done when religion can best be inculcated. It is at this time of life, according to the best opinions on the subject, when the religious instincts are most active and when young persons are most impressionable on the side of the feelings. Hence, the main educational work of the Church will always be done here.

COLLEGE COURSE.

Lastly, there is the college course. Only two schools in the Church are doing college work, one at Provo and one at Logan; and even in these two there is considerable restriction, on

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account of various conditions which it is not necessary to enter upon here. It should be added here that the Church does not purpose to duplicate in all its parts whatever is done by the state in education. All that is designed is to supplement that work, to do what the state is not permitted to do—namely, to teach religious truths in the schools, and this supplemental work is done mainly at a time when it is most serviceable in establishing religious belief. There is never anything but the best harmony as between educators in the state schools and educators in the Church schools.

Of course, the main purpose of all educative means used by the Church is to inculcate the theology and religion of the Latter-day Saints. To this end classes in theology are held four times a week throughout the year for as many years as are required for graduation. In the high schools, for instance, the first year's course of study includes a careful study of the Book of Mormon, the second of the Old Testament and the third of the New Testament and the fourth of the history of the Church in our own day. To be sure, theology is taught in the Sunday schools, the Primary organizations, and the Young Men's and Young Ladies' Improvement associations outside of the schools. But in each case it is more or less isolated, set apart by itself; it has not generally that vital connection with other things in the boy's or the girl's life. At any rate, it often seems so to young persons. In the Church schools, on the contrary, theology, religion has a vital connection with everything the young man or the young woman does. They study algebra, history, literature and so on, if not indeed from the point of view of the higher truth furnished by religion, at least under the direct influence of that truth. And this is much.

DEVOTIONAL EXERCISES.

As auxiliaries to the religious spirit of the school may be counted the general devotional exercises, the priesthood

meetings, and the domestic organizations. Every morning the whole school meet together for prayer, congregational singing, and, generally, a short address on appropriate subjects either by one of the teachers or somebody invited from without. These exercises last only from 10 to 20 minutes. After there is special music, vocal or instrumental. Then, again, the male portion of the school meet in priesthood capacity, and occasionally for instruction on topics suited only for the needs of young men. The girls likewise meet separately for special instruction on things that concern only their sex.

DOMESTIC ORGANIZATION.

The domestic organizations deserve particular mention. In all the Church schools there are many who come from a distance and who reside only temporarily in the place where the school is situated. These need and get special attention. Inconveniences, discouragements, temptations, sometimes arise consequent upon the young people being away from home. Hence, there are in all the schools domestic organizations, so called, according to which such students as have not their permanent residences in the town are visited by their teachers. At the Provo university, which is the mother educational institution in the Church, this organization has been made very efficient in looking after the needs of the large number of students that attend that school from outlying towns.

PRACTICAL WORK.

Because the Church schools have for their main purpose the teaching of spiritual truth, it does not follow that they emphasize this at the sacrifice of other branches of learning. On the contrary, scholarship, general efficiency, technical skill, receive their due proportion of attention. Thus is avoided that narrowness which often results from denominational schools.

In those departments, for example, which are commonly termed "practical" the work done is of a high grade of excellence. Specially skilled instructors are employed in wood and iron work,

in agriculture, in domestic arts and science, and in all other forms of manual training. The educational value of this is considered, as well as their practical utility, to those who shall have learned them. So, too, with such studies as bookkeeping and shorthand and typewriting. The Latter-day Saints' business college at Salt Lake City, is probably the best equipped and tutored school of its kind in the entire west. Hence, the Church institutions educationally are fully abreast with the world in those branches that furnish a means of earning a livelihood through a trade; and in doing this are putting into effect, plans which were drawn by President Brigham Young years before manual training was put into the public schools.

RIGID DISCIPLINE.

Scholarship, too, is highly regarded by the Mormons. They appreciate the fact that before such men as Morse and Edison are possible some one must discover the general laws which inventors apply. Encouragement is given to the study of the arts and sciences. To bring about higher aims in this direction the general superintendent two years ago called a convention, which adopted uniform text-books throughout the Church schools, and which discussed also ways and means of bringing scholarship to a higher uniform standard. The measure of skill and efficiency in the teacher is being constantly increased, and, of course, the salaries are raised in proportion. Moreover, in the secondary schools the proportion of male to female teachers is greater than that in other schools of similar grade in the country. The students are held down to their work by a system of discipline more rigid than has hitherto prevailed. Even in the subject of theology, where laxity of preparation, recitation, and method is easier than in more intellectual subjects, the study is made to yield its full quota of mental discipline.

One other word is necessary concerning the conventions referred to in the preceding paragraph. Every year one of these is held, usually at Salt Lake

City, the most central place, which all the instructors in the schools are required to attend. The main subject of discussion, of course, is either better methods of presenting theological studies or some subject finding its roots in this one. The reason for doing this is, that the teachers in the Church schools are expected and urged to join the public teachers' associations in the localities where they live and to take part whenever they can in the discussions of the various conventions so that, if this be done, they will have had the full benefit of the regular state and county associations of public school teachers, leaving to the Church school convention such topics of consideration as are peculiar to them.

UNITY AMONG STUDENTS.

Under this system of education there is a larger opportunity for individual work than is afforded in non-religious schools. By reason of the strong spiritual atmosphere that prevails here a closer bond of union and brotherly love is established between students on the one hand and between teachers and students on the other. In theology, for instance, teachers may get into closer relations with their pupils than they can in any other subject, and closer here in these other subjects than where similar conditions do not prevail. And after all this is what counts in the long run—close personal contact of the student with instructors who are worthy men and women. But this personal relation between teacher and pupil has its influence through the school; its wholesome tonic is felt in all the classes.

ELECTIVE SYSTEM.

This year there is an experiment on foot at the Latter-day Saints' university. The elective system is put on trial. Formerly, as now elsewhere in the Church schools, a boy or girl could choose his course, but not his subjects. Subjects come in groups called the English course, the classical course, the commercial course, and so on, one of

which was to be chosen by the student on entering. Now, however, in the school named, the students, under certain conditions, are allowed a free choice of subjects. These subjects, instead of being grouped into so-called courses, are arranged according to the year in which they may be taken. That is to say, all the subjects are placed in four groups—first year studies, second year, and so forth. The only limitations in the matter of choice is the natural one of inability to take an advanced subject until the elementary one shall have been studied. The only prescribed subjects are theology during all four years and English during two years. The virtue of the courses is guarded by a carefully arranged set of pre-requisites, which, as stated, are in each case natural. A student, for example, is not permitted to take second year English or German until he has had the first year in the subject; but only, however, because he lacks the power, even if he have the inclination, to carry the subject.

The condition spoken of under which the student is allowed his freedom of choice in subjects is that there must be consultation with the teacher on the part not only of the pupil but usually of the parent also, in which the student is given a sort of preview of subjects as well as of his life's work. Accordingly, a boy who comes from the farm and his future will most probably be spent on the farm, he is not compelled to pursue the same subjects that are taken up by his companion who expects to follow the profession of engineering, the law, medicine or teaching. So, too, when a girl enters the school who will probably never go beyond the high school course, her health and continuance at the institution are not put in jeopardy by making her take subjects for which she is wholly unfit. All this, however, as already remarked, is but an experiment, and is tried this year only by the Latter-day Saints' university.

It may be added here that the result so far has been very satisfactory; for the students have not, as was

feared by some, elected the "snappy" courses. As a result of this experiment, which is carefully watched by a number of leading educators in the Church, it is quite probable that the subject of election of studies in the secondary schools will form a topic for discussion at the spring convention of Church school teachers.

NORMAL TRAINING.

More emphasis also is placed upon normal training in this Church institution than in any other school not specifically normal. The Mormon people are not anything if not a race of teachers. Their capabilities in training children and youth are taxed in the family, and in various Church organizations. And so, to meet this demand for a knowledge of the fundamental principles of teaching, every opportunity is taken advantage of in order to equip the future fathers and mothers of the Church with the requisite ability.

In conclusion, it may be freely stated that, whatever minor differences there may exist in the methods pursued by the various Church schools in arriving at results, the great end sought is the same in all to fit the young men and women in the best possible manner for their life's work, both in the Church and in the state. The words of President Joseph F. Smith, spoken recently before one of the Church schools, may serve both as an authoritative expression of the purpose which these schools serve and also as a fitting conclusion of an article on this system of education:

PRESIDENT JOSEPH F. SMITH.
"You can get education, such as is given in the schools of the state, outside of this school, independently of this school, or of any of the Church schools; but there is an element connected with this school that does not exist in the schools of the state. It is this particular element that does not exist in the common schools of the state, to which I desire to call your attention; and I implore the students who attend here to bear this very carefully in mind. We do not seek to educate the mind. We do only desire to give you an opportunity of becoming learned in all the branches of education that may be acquired in the ordinary schools of the land; we desire that you should have all these privileges, that every opportunity that can be afforded you outside this school may be enjoyed and possessed by you in this school. But in addition we desire that you should be wedded, I may say, to the Church. We desire that you should learn the principles of the Gospel of the Son of God. We desire that you should be good men, pure men, noble, upright, reliable and religious men—not sanctimonious. When I use the word 'religious' I do not mean that you should put on a long face, that you should not enjoy yourselves in all legitimate pleasures; I do not mean that you should say long prayers, or become sanctimonious or anything of that kind. But I mean by 'religious' to be devoted to God and truth, to righteousness and purity of life, honesty and integrity, that you will live in accordance with every sacred principle advocated in the Gospel of life and salvation. This is what we want, and this is what we should desire above everything else."

"I want to say to the boys and to the girls who come to this school, or who attend any of the schools of the Church, that if they are unmindful of these principles and this object of their coming to school, they are recreant to the faith and the object of this school; they are unfaithful to it and unworthy of it. I do not care who the boy or girl is that will come here and yet not learn to appreciate the main purpose of this school, they will fail to attain the real object that we have in view for them in life: that he may become a true and honest and upright man, and that she may become an honest woman, a true and virtuous woman—girl though she may be now—that she may develop into the highest and purest and noblest type of womanhood. That is the object we have in view for you girls. These are the things we desire, and this is one of the principal objects in view in the establishment of these schools by the Church."