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DO BANDS OF HOPE PROMOTE THE SPIRITUAL INTERESTS OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS?

Read at a Conference of the Bradford Sunday School Union,

BY

ISAAC PHILLIPS, Bradford.

“TRAIN up a child in the way he should go” is an injunction that comes to us with Divine authority. All the Lord’s people acknowledge the author and the importance of the injunction given, but a wide difference prevails as to the application of this Divine mandate. There are many good people who teach in our Sunday Schools who deem it sufficient to teach the broad principles of religious truth alone. They exhort to repentance, acceptance of the Saviour, and to a godly life, and this during a brief period on the Sabbath; while their scholars are exposed all the week to the evil customs of society and the treacherous temptations of a wicked world. There are other instructors of the young who are as anxious as their brethren that their scholars should repent of sin, accept Christ, and live a holy life, and they as prayerfully and devotedly use the appointed means for the conversion of their scholars to Christ. They see, however, that in innumerable cases the temptations that abound stand as barriers in the way of the accomplishment of their primary object, and notably among these the drinking customs of society. They believe that, while it is all-important to teach, it is also necessary to protect. They have, therefore, established Bands of Hope to this end. It may be asked—and we think the question a fair one—But do Bands of Hope prove a help in bringing our Sunday scholars to the Saviour? We have no hesitation in answering in the affirmative. Having answered this question, we think we are entitled to ask another. If it can be shown that Bands of Hope prove helpful in bringing our scholars to Christ, is it not the duty and privilege of Sunday School teachers to help forward so good a cause, even though it be by denying themselves a little pleasurable enjoyment? We are aware that it is customary with some people to settle the question at once, by giving as their opinion that there is no advantage from the Band of Hope in the direction indicated. As opinions are little worth unless backed up by facts, let us, as the Lord’s servants, and brethren engaged in the same grand work of winning the young for Christ, look at the question thoughtfully, and with unbiassed minds weigh the evidence carefully, and be guided in our judgment and action accordingly. We ask no more, and if we are faithful we can do no less. The question of better health and longer life is now fully established in favour of total abstinence, and we suppose no one will deny that universal abstinence would conduce to generally improved order, a higher morality, less crime, poverty and taxation, and would contribute to the happiness of the people. We will, however, leave out of the question these important considerations on this occasion, and confine our thoughts to spiritual results; but would say in passing, that if there were no other and higher blessings than these, Christian people should be among the first to promote them.

During thirty-one years’ connection with the parent and branch schools at Sion Chapel, the writer of this paper has known hundreds of scholars corrupted and cursed

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by strong drink, and lost to all religious influence. Scores of these have been full of promise and hope, some recognised inquirers, and not a few the children of pious parents. Yet with these surroundings they have yielded to the drink temptation and lost all interest in the schoolhouse of God, and religious service. Many have become utter wrecks, body and soul. It may be asked whether there were not among those of promise who belonged to the Band of Hope, many who became careless about Divine things and fell into open sin? Our reply is that a few have yielded to temptation and broken their pledges, but we have no remembrance of a single case among those who were true to their abstinence principles. There is another painful reflection from which we shrink, but duty calls for a passing word. Who can deny that from among those who have given their hearts to Christ in our Sunday Schools, who were trained in the moderate use of alcoholic drink, there have not been many who, by the use, have in after life become lovers of it, and to whom it has become a snare and a curse, bringing dishonour on the name of Jesus, and causing painful and humiliating discipline.

We fancy some are saying to themselves—Then you infer that total abstainers are without fault? No, we do not; but we do say that they are free from this prevalent one. They are deeply sensible that they are weak and liable to sin, and are surrounded by many temptations to evil they cannot avoid, and, therefore, they do not desire to nurse and cherish one they can avoid, and that might become their ruin, or, if not their ruin, the ruin of others who might try to follow their moderate example but would fail.

The Band of Hope has been found to be a safeguard to the young. The Bradford Band of Hope Union, which was the first in the kingdom, came into existence in the year following the birth of this union. In September, 1863, the writer read a paper on the "History and Results of Bands of Hope in Bradford," the Union having then existed twelve years. It was shown from carefully-gathered information that there were in connection with the Bands of Hope in the union, mostly belonging to schools in this union, 560 Sunday School teachers, 475 members of the Christian Churches, many superintendents, secretaries, librarians, and directors of penny savings banks, twenty local preachers (three were in colleges preparing for the ministry, and five had entered into the ministry), who had been connected with the Bands of Hope. In 1874 we were again requested to prepare another paper on the twenty-three years' work of the Bradford Band of Hope Union. Circulars were sent to all the societies in the union asking for answers to questions therein put. The time for reply was short, and only twenty-two Bands of Hope out of thirty-eight responded in time for use. In the twenty-two Bands of Hope there were 670 Sunday School teachers, including superintendents, 827 members of Christian Churches, 54 local preachers (three were in colleges studying for the ministry, and seven had become pastors of churches), who had been members of the Bands of Hope. The average number of teachers in each school in this union is $37\frac{1}{2}$; the average number in the twenty-two schools having the Bands of Hope which sent replies, was in the abstinence section alone $33\frac{1}{2}$; the average number of scholars in the schools in this union who are members of churches is 33; the average number of members in the twenty-two schools which sent in replies was $37\frac{1}{2}$, from the Band of Hope section alone. The foregoing record showed a great army who were fighting the Lord's battles which, doubtless, would have been one-third larger had all made their return in time to be used.

We will anticipate an inquiry here whether these were teachers, members of churches, superintendents, local preachers, &c., through the protection of the Bands of Hope. We believe that many of them were; and we doubt if any person can positively assert that any one of them would have been in their present circumstances, had it not been for the Band of Hope influence. Another question, which is only natural and fair, may be asked, whether proportionately there had not risen up in the schools having no Bands of Hope, an equal number occupying similar positions? We reply that we have no direct data that would furnish an answer to the whole question. We have, however, some important facts which may aid us in forming a pretty correct judgment. We ask special attention to the following statements, as they are taken from the reports of our own union. We have been at much pains in carefully taking out the figures relating to the

following tables. They relate to every school within the borough in this union, except Bradford Moor, which has no church; and Ryan Street, St. Stephen's, and Laisterdyke (Independent), which are new causes, and also have only recently joined the union. As none of these give any results, except one having joined the church, we cannot be charged with making the most of the case. We have the particulars in a tabulated form we are now about to submit, and any one having a desire can see them, or I shall be happy to answer any question pertaining to them.

In the ten schools in our union having no Bands of Hope which give the greatest number of scholars to the churches during the last four years, an average of $31\frac{3}{4}$ in the 1,000 per annum are reported as joining the churches. In the ten schools having Bands of Hope from which the greatest number join the churches in the same period, an average of $49\frac{1}{4}$ in the 1,000 of scholars per annum are reported. In the ten schools *not* having Bands of Hope which have the greatest number of scholars, an average of $12\frac{1}{4}$ in the 1,000 per annum during the last six years have joined the churches. In the ten schools with Bands of Hope having the greatest number of scholars, in the same period, $22\frac{1}{2}$ in the 1,000 per annum have joined the churches. In every single year, in both sections, the schools having Bands of Hope show by far the greatest results. We will now proceed to consider the whole of the schools in our union within the borough, except the four above referred to. These figures also embrace the whole of the last six years, which I will give consecutively:—

<i>Schools with no Band of Hope.</i>					<i>Schools with Bands of Hope.</i>				
Yr.	No. of Schools.	No. of Scholars.	Joined the Church.	Per 1,000.	Yr.	No. of Schools.	No. of Scholars.	Joined the Church.	Per 1,000.
1871	17	4,976	21	$4\frac{1}{4}$	1871	18	6,529	115	$17\frac{3}{4}$
1872	16	4,524	36	$8\frac{1}{4}$	1872	21	7,857	135	$17\frac{1}{4}$
1873	20	5,422	68	$12\frac{3}{4}$	1873	20	7,425	198	$26\frac{3}{4}$
1874	21	5,678	129	$23\frac{1}{4}$	1874	19	7,112	229	$32\frac{1}{4}$
1875	22	5,999	94	$15\frac{3}{4}$	1875	16	6,047	193	$32\frac{1}{4}$
1876	22	6,178	140	$22\frac{3}{4}$	1876	17	6,420	327	51
		32,777	488				41,390	1,202	

Or an average per annum of $14\frac{3}{4}$.

Average per annum of 29.

It will be seen that there has been no exceptional year, when the schools having Bands of Hope have not shown considerably greater results than the schools having none, and that the average has been about double. We could have gone further back, with a more favourable comparison still. We think that none will deny that these auxiliaries have proved great blessings to the schools with which they have been connected. If this is granted, it follows that the schools not having them have suffered as the result. We further remark that in the schools having Bands of Hope, the greater number proportionately of the scholars who do join the church are from the Band of Hope section. We have verbal evidence from many schools which bears out this statement. We have, however, detailed particulars from only one (in Bradford), which, as they are to the point, we beg to submit, although they have many times been given before. Some years ago the writer of this paper found, from the use of the church book, that in the schools where he laboured, in seven years 137 scholars joined the church. The scholars were about equally divided between those who abstained and those who did not, the latter having the preponderance a little. Of the 137 who became members of the church, 106 were from the Band of Hope section, leaving 31 from an equal number, who were not guarded by abstinence principles. The same results have continued. We believe this school is a fair representative of others similarly circumstanced. Brethren, do you wonder at these things? It would be a wonder if they were otherwise. A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. However we might desire it, we could not make it do otherwise. This deadly, strong drink upas tree, has by its fruits destroyed myriads of our brightest, and in many cases most hopeful young people. Our scholars need guarding as well as teaching in a world so full of temptation to evil, and

especially from the drink system which increasingly abounds. We are certain, from long experience, that the young in our schools, notwithstanding the depravity of human nature, are susceptible of receiving the word and spirit of truth as it is in Jesus, and that they often feel its power, but mixing as they do with the evil customs of the world, and notably among these the drink evil and its associates, the good seed is choked, and our anxious labours are neutralised, and the young are victimised and lost. It is a solemn thought that if the young are not effectually won for Christ before yielding to these temptations and evil customs, they seldom come to Him at all.

Brethren, suffer the word of exhortation. We are all highly privileged, but have weighty responsibilities. Let us do our work and perform our mission in the most effective way. The great enemy of souls has already drawn tens of thousands of the young into his hellish meshes, some of whom have listened to our instruction. No instrument has been so destructive in his hands as strong drink. No language can adequately set forth the evils resulting from its use, to the world and to the Church. It is a gigantic evil which must be met in a special way, and stayed by a special remedy. Entire abstinence stands in the most direct opposition to it, and it is the only instrument which will prove completely successful while human nature and the properties of alcohol remain what they are. If any one can show a more effective plan we will adopt it, but till then we claim for our Band of Hope cause that respect which is due to it, and ask for that help which it deserves, especially from the Lord's people, and most of all from Sunday School teachers. Let it be a personal matter. It will give you a lever, which is in harmony with the Gospel you teach, which will enable you, in the hands of God, more effectually to lift your scholars into a state of Gospel truth and blessedness, and prove a source of safety in that exalted position. This can be done with perfect safety as regards health, and with a little perseverance, custom and its associates will be overcome. From twenty-seven years' experience we know the cause to be good, and one on which we can consistently ask the Lord's blessing. None but the Almighty knows what good has been accomplished by the agency of Bands of Hope, in their spiritual as well as temperance teachings, and the protection they have afforded. The Lord has set the seal of His approval upon them, and what the Lord approves let none despise, but rather promote.

By all means teach in much faith and with fervent prayer the grand truths of salvation through a crucified Saviour, and at the same time shield your charge by abstinence principles. When the Lord's servants become alive to their duty in this matter we will venture to predict, that our hearts will be more often gladdened by seeing our scholars giving themselves first to the Lord and then to His people. It has been a pleasing reflection while perusing our reports for information for this paper to find that year by year more and more are dedicating themselves to God and His service. May it ever and increasingly be so. Brethren, our time for labour and the power of example will be short, and especially for some of us. Let us use it to the best advantage, remembering that the power of our example and teachings will continue to be felt long after these frames cease to move, and the tongues which now speak shall have been laid silent in the grave.