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The Pacific Excursion

Two years ago it was proposed to the California State Sunday-School Convention at Oakland to hold a Sunday-School Assembly after the Chautauqua type in Yosemite Valley, and one at Monterey, by the ocean. The convention indorsed the scheme. Committees were appointed. The writer of this was invited to take charge of the Assemblies. The programme was laid out, a chapel for the valley projected, and a paper published. It was a part of the original scheme to organize a transcontinental excursion and run an "institute" train from Omaha to San Francisco. Some months ago Rev. J. R. Berry of Iowa, was appointed Muster of Transportation, and the details of the excursion placed in his hands. Announcements were made, correspondence commenced, names enrolled, and

negotiations with the railway and palace car companies opened. As the outcome of it all the " Pacific Institute Excursion," consisting of about three hundred and fifty persons, in nine cars, left Chicago on Tuesday, May 27, and Omaha on Wednesday, May 28. There were, of course, some persons not interested in Church work who availed themselves of the low price of tickets and took the long-desired trip to California, but the most of "the tourists" were Christian people and Sunday-school workers. After leaving Omaha the company in each car was requested to appoint one gentleman as their representative, and thus a committee was constituted to attend to the details of the " Pacific Excursion Institute." The following gentlemen constituted this committee:—

J. H. Vincent, Chairman, (M. E.,) Plainfield, New Jersey.

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George A. Peltz, Secretary, (Bap.,) Jamestown, New York.

Stephen Partride, Car 0. (M. E.,) St. Louis, Mo.

W. W. Hammond, Car 1. (Bap.,) Detroit, Mich.

8 C. Bever, Car 2, (P. E.,) Cedar Rapids, Ia.

E. W. Page, Car 8, (F. Bap.,) New York.

Ed. 8. Wagoner, Car 4, (Ev. Luth.,) Mechanicsburgh, Pennsylvania.

J. M. Linn, Car 5, (Pres.,) Winnebago, Ill.

J. H. Redsecker, Car 0, (Chh. of God,) Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

Nathaniel Hills, Day Car, (Cong.,) Brighton, Illinois.

Sheldon Jackson, Car 7, (Pres.,) Denver, Col.

L. H. Trowbridge, Car 8, (Bap.,) Detroit, Mich.

At the first meeting of the committee, in Car 2, it was decided to issue a daily paper to be called "The Sxcun-Umitt," Rev. L. H. Trowbridge and J. H. Redsecker, Esq., editors. Each day the paper was prepared and read in the several cars.

As our train passed the stations of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific roads tracts and papers (generously granted by the American Tract Society and the Tract Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church) were distributed to the

spectators and especially to children, and suitable tracts were from time to time scattered through the train. A choir was organized under the leadership of Rev. G. A. Ford, of Pumrapo, N. Y. The "Chautauqua Carols," one thousand copies of which were donated to the Pacific Assemblies by Biglow & Main, were circulated through the train.

Sessions of the Institute were held in several of the cars; short addresses were delivered, and hints, oral and in writing, gathered on the following questions: "What Bible Journeys can we recall, and what lessons do we (rather from them?" and " What suggestive analogies for the benefit of Christian workers are furnished by railway travel?" The excursion left Omaha at 1:16 P. M., Wednesday, May 28, reaching Cheyenne next afternoon, and Ogden on Friday evening, where a dinner had been prepared for the benefit of a local Church interest and a public reception tendered the excursionists by the territorial and municipal authorities. The next day several of the party mnrlean excursion to the Ogden Canon, the rest taking the Saturday morning train for Salt Lake, forty miles south. Joseph Cook lectured on Saturday evening In the Salt Lake Presbyterian Church.

The Sabbath was lovely. The blue sky, the snow-white summits of the Wasatch range, the beautiful city, embowered in groves and fragrant with roses, the crystal water courses, gave the tourists a chance to see Salt Lake at Ita very best. A union Sabbath-school service was held at 9 A. M., when addresses were delivered by Rev. G. A. Pbltz, of Jamestown, N. T., and by James M'qee, Esq., of Plainfield, N. J. All the Christian congregations of Salt Lake (Roman Catholic and Protestant Episcopal, of course. always excepted) met in the Methodist Episcopal Church, where a sermon was preached by one of the excursionists. In the afternoon every body went to the Mormon Tabernacle to witness a Mormon service. The singing was fine, the audience very large. The Mormon paper had the week before called the attention of the coming tourists to the Mormon system, and requested them to give it a careful and frank examination. The speakers at the Tabernacle were arranged with special reference to the large

Gentile element in the congregation that day. They were short, emphatic, dogmatic, but also they were superficial, weak, and sophistical, and remarkable for what they omitted concerning the distinctive features of Mormonism. The whole service was an exhibition of silliness, bigotry, and fanaticism.

Joseph Cook was announced to lecture and give a prelude in the evening. The Presbyterian Church being too small, the audience retired to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Mr. Cook's prelude on "Mormonism" was an inspiration. The house was crowded. A large number of representative Mormons were present. And they heard it thunder that night. With the thunder there was lightning—forked lightning—sharp with justice and truth and divine vengeance. Arguments unanswerable, brilliant imagery, bristling facts, biting sarcasm, filled this wonderful speech, which strengthened the cause of truth in Salt Lake, and tore off the disguises by which the leaders of the "Latter Day Swindle" (as Mr. Cook calls it) deceive the people of these "vail ys among the mountains." The shallow editors of their paper may howl, and the apostle and elders writhe, but the bold utterances of Mr. Cook on Sabbath evening, June 1, in Salt Lake City, will be echoed and re-echoed through the land. The Mormons crave admission Into the Union. When once clothed with the prerogatives of a 8tnle Government—then farewell to safety and success for the Gentile population. Disloyal to the United States Government, fanatical to the last degree, polygamist In faith and practice, with a shameful record of cruelty and oppression in days of power, the Mormons of Utah are unfit for a place among the States of this Union.*

Monday was spent by many of the tourists in a trip to Salt Lake. In the evening the party left Ogden for the West, reaching Colfax at noon of Wednesday. The excursionists reached Sacramento on Wednesday afternoon, where a royal welcome awaited them. Cars and carriages conveyed them to the State House, where the Christian ladies of the city had prepared a collation. The High School pupils sang a song of greeting, Rev. Dr. Robert Bentlet, pastor of the M. E. Church, and Secretary-of-State Beck, delivered addresses, to which responses were made by Joseph Cook and the Editor of the Journal. An hour later the train moved westward, dropping some of its party at Stockton to take rail to Milton,

and thence by stage, via Big Oak Flat, to Yosemite. The rest came on to Lathrop and Merced. At the latter station two parties left to enter the valley, one by Coulterville and the Merced Grove of Big Trees, the other by Mariposa and by Mariposa Grove. The rest of us came on to Madera, and by two days of staging entered the valley, some of our party making a detour to visit the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. The Madera is a magnificent route. Its roads are smooth, coaches comfortable, horses good, prospects magnificent.

We entered the Yosemite Valley at 2 P. M., on Friday, June 6, by way of "Inspiration Point." The view from that point is simply indescribable. Most of the wonders of this world, written up by authors, talked up by lecturers, scattered by engravings and chromos, and glorified by painting and poetry, lose somewhat of their prestige by actual observation. The spectator is, at least at first, disappointed. The first glimpse of Niagara usually fails to meet the traveler's expectation. But Yosemite never disappoints. From Inspiration Point it opens out—a marvelous picture—a glorious prospect which one is tempted to assert cannot be excelled on earth. Yosemite is a thousand Niagaras. It awes at first by its grandeur, but it crowds as the days go on, even when one stays down in the valley and looks up to the heights that touch the sky. The excursions in every direction give new and wider and grander views. To describe them is impossible. Yosemite must be seen to be enjoyed.

On Saturday evening [June 7] the new chapel (built by the Sunday-school workers of California) was crowded for the "Chautauqua Vesper Service," and other opening exercises of the long-expected "Yosemite Assembly." The "Hutchinson Family" (now in California) favored us with several songs. With grateful and enthusiastic hearts—the roar of Yosemite Falls in our ears—we joined at the close of this first service in singing the Yosemite Doxology, composed by Joseph Cook while riding over in the stage the other day :— "The hills of God support the skies; To God let adoration rise; Let hills and skies and heavenly host, Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Sabbath was a high day for Yosemite Valley. The hotels were crowded, but no "excursions" were projected. The tourists set an example of loyalty to the day. A Sunday-school was held at 9 o'clock A. M., Rev. G. A. Peltz, superintendent. At 11 A. M. Rev. Thomas Gdabd, of Oakland, delivered the dedicatory sermon from the words, "Are ye not of more value than many sparrows f" The sermon was clear, forcible, and elegant. It made a profound impression. At 3 P.M. an "Open-air Service" was held on the piazzas of Barnard's Hotel. A large audience assembled. The Editor of the Journal preached on "The Way of Salvation." At 4:30 P. M. Rev. Dr. Sheldon Jackson lectured in the Chapel on the "Aztecs." At 7 P. M. the first Conversation was held on "The Spiritual Power of the Sunday-school, and how to increase it." Twenty States and Territories and ten denominations were represented. It was a most profitable service. At 8 P. M. Joseph Cook preached a logical, powerful discourse on "The Omnipresence of God; or, God in Natural Law." The house was again crowded. On Monday a Conversation was held in the chapel at 9 o'clock A. M., on "The Preparatory Lessons of the Chautauqua Course." At 10 A. M. Dr. Sheldon Jackson lectured on "Alaska " as a field for missionary labor. At 11 A. M. John Muir gave a most captivating talk on "The Geological Records of Yosemite." In the afternoon the tourists trudged up the tedious trail to the foot of the Upper Yosemite Falls, returning in time to hear a grand lecture in the evening by Dr. Thomas Guard, on "The Mental Forces and the Word of God." On Tuesday the morning Conversation on "Lesson Systems " was followed by a dlscourse on "Certainties in Religion," by Joseph Cook. The day was rainy, and no excursion was attempted. Mr. Muir lectured again in the evening, on "Mountain Sculpture." Wednesday, June 11, was an "excursion day." Early in the morning foot passengers and horsemen began to climb to Glacier Point, (more than 3,000 feet,) where John Muir had promised a lecture at " high noon." Some of us started early enough, and climbed fast enough to reach Sentinel Dome and return to Glacier Point before noon. That morning walk will not soon be forgotten. The ruin of the previous day had moistened the ground and washed the vegetation. By a zigzag path we climbed steadily for over three hours, shaded by

great rocks and trees, catching glimpses of the lovely valley below, which seemed to sink lower and lower as we ascended. The roar of the marvelous Yosemite Falls was never silenced. The white clouds in the blue sky, at first faint and few, grew in size and whiteness, now concealing for a moment that they might more fully reveal the glories above and below. The prospect from Sentinel Dome (more than 4,000 feet above the valley) is far-reaching and indescribable. Banks of snow clung to the granite dome, and close to the snow beautiful little flowers bloomed, as if in defiance of wind and snow and hard granite. The clouds increasing rapidly, we found ourselves at noon on Glacier Point in cloud-land, and unable for any length of time to see the valley, its rocks and domes and waterfalls. Mr. Muir changed his theme, and discussed the "Big Trees." After prayer, doxology, and benediction, our party descended to enjoy a good supper, and to gather later on in the evening around a big "camp fire" built in the grove by Mr. Muir. There, in the dark night, stars overhead, Yosemite Falls thundering just beyond us, and the light of the camp-fire beautifying the pine and fir forest in which we had gathered, our company spent a delightful two hours in songs, in chapters from the experiences of tourists on this and the other side of the Atlantic, in a carefully conducted Conversation on the means of promoting spirituality in our Churches, an address on the "Sequoia" by Mr. Muir, songs by the Hutchinson Family, etc., etc.

Thursday morning was devoted to excursions. In the afternoon Rev. G. A. Peltz gave a lecture, and conducted a Conversation. The evening was made pleasant by a concert given by the Hutchinson Family. On Friday there was a Conversation at 2 P. M. on "The Pastor's Work in Sunday-school;" at 3:30 a report from the Yosemite Chapel Committee; at 4 o'clock a lecture by Rev. Dr. Peltz on "A Week of Sunday-school Work;" at 8 P. M. a Conference on "Improvements Needed in our Sunday-schools," with brief addresses by Jas. M'Gee, Rev. Dr. Willey, Dr. Gregory, and Rev. Messrs. Allis and Kittredge. Saturday was excursion day to Nevada and Vernal Falls. Another Hutchinson Concert closed up the day.

The second Sabbath of the Assembly was a notable day. Jas. M'Gee, Esq., of Plainfield, N. J., was Sunday-school superintendent; present, two officers, five teachers, and seventy two pupils. A permanent Sabbath-school was organized, and I. C. Tichworth, of the Valley, elected superintendent. Rev. Dr. Willey, of Santa Cruz, preached at eleven o'clock, and in the evening at seven came a vesper service and the farewell meeting, Rev. G. A. Peltz presiding. Addresses were delivered by Messrs. Linn, Willey, Gregory, Rice Peltz, Searly, Geddes, Nelson, M'Lean and M'Gee. Thus closed the long anticipated Yosemite Assembly. It was a success from beginning to end. It secured two model Sabbaths for the Yosemite Valley. It left us its practical memorial a Protestant chapel, a bell to echo among the rocks and remind the people of God and his Gospel, and a Sabbath-school in which the hitherto neglected children of Yosemite may meet every Lord's day to study his word.

The California Churches were skeptical concerning the success of this undertaking. Not until they heard that three hundred Eastern tourists had left Omaha did they believe in the expediency of the Assembly. The committee appointed by the California State Association to accomplish this work did their part nobly and against great odds. "Pacific Grove Retreat" Is a beautiful campground near the quaint old Spanish town of Monterey, nearly two hundred miles south of Ban Francisco. The grove and forty thousand acres of land adjoining are the property of David Jacks, Esq., an industrious, sagacious, liberal Scotchman, a Methodist, who resides in Monterey, and who is interested in the "Grove." The second Assembly was held there, beginning June 27 and closing July 4. Sermons and lectures by Joseph Cook, Dr. Stratton, Dr. Peltz, Dr. Willet, Dr. M. C. Briggs, Dr. Beckwith, Rev. 11.11. Rich, Rev. G. S. Abbott, Prof. Norton, Rev. A. S. Fisk and others, with Conversations on Sunday-school themes, Vesper Services, etc., made up the programme. The attendance was better than at Yosemite. The Grove is beautiful. The ocean 1a there, with tide and swell and roar of waves. All through the summer Californians go to the Pacific Grove Retreat for recreation and rest. A "California Literary and Scientific Circle" was

organized, to meet annually at the Grove, and to operate in all parts of the State as a branch of the Chautauqua movement.

Our visit to California (the third we have been permitted to make within the decade) was full of arduous labor, but full also of delight. Methodism is not asleep on the Pacific Coast. Its ministers are hard worked and faithful, true to the Gospel, and loyal to the Republic. The "dust of the Sand Lots " has not wholly blinded them. Joseph Cook rendered good service to the cause of Christ and the country on the Pacific Coast. The daily papers abused him and refused to publish what he said. But the hundreds and thousands who heard his brave and eloquent words will honor his courage, repeat his doctrine, and good shall come of the strong utterances, which a cowardly press dared not repeat. Our fellow-townsmen, James M'Gee, Esq, rendered valuable service on the excursion and at the Yosemite Assembly. By a sad accident he was laid up for weeks at the Big Tree Station. A careless driver upset the coach in which he, his wife and daughter were coming from the valley. The daughter escaped, Mrs. M'Gee was bruised a little on the face, while Mr. M'Gee himself was much injured in the left shoulder and foot. At this writing the full extent of his injuries is not known, but there are strong hopes that he is not permanently disabled.

The California Assemblies are over. If we had known when suggesting them, in 1877, what labor and anxiety they were to occasion, it is probable that the proposal would not have been made. As it is, we give thanks to God for the success which has attended them, and pray for his full benediction upon the dear brethren of the California Coast in all the Churches, and upon the members of the "Pacific Institute Excursion," who will always, we are confident, recall with pleasure their trip from shore to shore. The attendance at Pacific Grove Retreat Assembly was better than at Yosemite, and as such was decided that a "California Literary and Scientific Circle" should be organized, to meet annually at the Grove, and to operate in all parts of the State as a branch of the Chautauqua movement.

Reference

Vincent, J. H. (1879) Sunday School Journal for Teachers and Young People,
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