

From The Gentlemen's Magazine - Letters to and from Eminent Persons - The Rev. Mr. Hearne, Rector of the united Parishes of St. Alphage, and St. Mary North-gate, Canterbury, to the Rev. George Horne, Dean of Canterbury 1786

You desire, Sir, as minute an account as possible of my schools. After consulting a person who knew much of the poor here, I went round my united parishes to learn who were willing to send their children to be taught, and I found my people very ready to accept my offer; at the same time I left a Christian Monitor at every house. About 120 children were collected. As both my parishes abound with poor, North-gate especially, which is poverty itself, I told my parishioners, when I declared my intention of erecting these schools, that I asked for nothing from them on this occasion but their countenance and influence. I directly provided books, and three men and one woman to take care of and teach these children. The pay of these teachers, as also of the clerk, who has since been engaged, is 1s. each for the day. They receive other civilities. The principal silk manufacturer gave 2s. 6d. to each of these five persons. The children appeared at St. Alphage Church on Sunday, January 23, 1785, very ragged and very disorderly. You will not be surprised at this when you are told, that some of them, perhaps, were never in a church since they were baptized; but usually spent their Sabbath in playing, cursing and swearing, in pilfering, or in some other mischief. These schools were at first kept at three different places, and have all been visited by me on every Sunday (except one, when I was at Exeter,) from the beginning of them to this time. I have now all the children together in the chapel of St. John's Hospital, under my own eye; for I find by experience, that unless one of more persons constantly superintend these schools, no good is to be expected from them. For some considerable time I have been at the chapel exactly at nine o'clock, the time when the school begins, and have continued there till eleven, the time when we go to church together. In the morning, while the teachers are instructing the little ones, I take 30 or 40 of the most forward into the chapel chancel and hear them read the Psalms, Collects, the Epistle and Gospel, and second lesson for the day; and, if we have time, other chapters. Whatever occurs in our reading that is remarkable, or tends to their edification, is taken notice of, and explained to them. At half an hour after one we meet at school again, and continue there till half past two, the time for church. At this time the little ones are taught and repeat their Catechism, or the questions in the end of their spelling-books, for the instruction of the children, &c. We read the New Testament, as before, till the clerk comes to sing a psalm or two with them. After church we return to school. The little ones are employed, as in the morning in spelling or reading, or repeating prayers or hymns. At this time I examine the most forward, and explain to them the Catechism, and the use of the Common Prayer Book. I exercise them in repeating after me the Lord's Prayer, and the Creeds, and all the responses. All this they do in a very decent and proper manner. We have gone through likewise Fox on Public Worship, and his Introduction, &c. and also Crossman's Introduction, &c. The church Catechism broken into short Questions, and Mann's Catechism. The books in common use are The child's first Book, 1st and 2d parts, Fisher or Dixon's Spelling-book, the Catechisms before mentioned, particularly Mann's, Devine Songs of the pious and excellent Dr. Watts; and every child is furnished with a Common Prayer-Book and Testament to carry to church, when they can use them. Firstly of Unwin's Sin and Danger, and 50 of Stonehouse's Religious Instructions are given to 100 children, who, after a time, exchange with each

other. Thus 50 tracts will serve 100 children. they have likewise Stonehouse's Prayers. I take children of all ages, from 5 or 6 to 16 or 17. It is best to begin with them early. Some time since two lads, the one my parishioner, the other of the next parish, were condemned to death for house-breaking. The melancholy event was taken notice of by me on the Sunday following, and the children sang The Lamentation of a Sinner. This performance of children, some of whom, if no care had been taken of them, might be in the same dreadful situation, had a wonderful effect upon every one who heard them. This accident led me to think, that as much psalmody as was necessary for divine worship, would be useful and pleasing both to the children and the congregation; I therefore engaged the clerk, who is a sober serious man, to give these children a little instruction, which he does on one or two evenings in a week. Mr. Flacton, whose name is well known as a teacher and composer of music, is a benefactor to these children, and likewise condescends to give them some assistance; he has set to music some of Dr. Watt's Songs, Addison on Providence, &c. which they perform so well as to be heard with pleasure. About 100 of these children are sent to school every day for one or two hours, as they can be spared from spinning wool, or winding silk, at one penny per head per week, the usual pay for such instruction. This is of great service to them. I have picked out four little girls to learn to work, and pay for them with money that has been entrusted with me for such purposes. I have gone through the Book of Psalms with some of the elder girls, and am going through it a second time at my house, where they, for one hour every day, are instructed. Some few boys from other schools attend my Sunday school. Such are the advantages my children have enjoyed, and they have profited by them as much as could be expected. They are greatly civilized as to their behaviour, and gave satisfaction when they were examined in the church. The little ones repeated prayers, hymns, &c. the great ones gave proper answers to the questions which contained the substance of the Church Catechism, but not just in the words of the Catechism. The little ones in general come on very well. One little fellow, who is only six years and four months old, read to me with justness and propriety, Fox's Introduction, a book he had never seen before. This child has had no instruction but from this school, and from his parents at home, who are poor people. Parents, if they have any goodness in them, will be induced to do all they can for their own children, when they find so much done for them by others. I think myself bound in duty to mention some circumstances, that shew the reputation of the school, and reflect great honour upon the persons I shall mention. A stranger, who was at this church, was so well pleased with the instruction, that he gave a guinea for me to apply as I should think proper. A neighbour who is a Quaker, offered to subscribe, if the schools had been supported by contribution. Another parishioner, who is a dissenting teacher, gave me money for the use of the children. A charitable lady, who lives a few miles from Canterbury sent me a noble present of five guineas; and some other ladies and gentlemen, both in and out of the parish, have been very liberal to these children, and to their parents, who wanted relief. Many of these children, who were almost naked, have been clothed by some benevolent persons. My friend, the Rev. Mr. Byrche, (who has done much on the occasion,) with two other worthy gentlemen, the principal supporters of the weekly school, have been of great service to me, not only by their money, but by their constant visits to the schools. One of these gentlemen, who was a surgeon and apothecary, is ready to assist any of them in the way of his profession, as well as by any other act of kindness. My third colleague, who is a captain of a man-of-war, has been a great benefactor to these children, and to some of their families. One very great advantage of Sunday schools is that they afford every minister an opportunity of giving to the children of the poor instructions in the plain and important principle's of

religion, of bring them to church where under the eye, and under the eyes of their benefactors, who may take proper notice of their good or bad behaviour. My children are very narrowly watched, and no instance of improper behaviour is passed over without a solemn and severe rebuke. If they are disorderedly they partake of no benefaction intended for good children, and if this treatment will not reclaim them, they are expelled. When I find any of them guilty of lying, the whole school is called together, and I read to them the little book, called An Exercise in Lying, concluding with the prayer at the end. Such are the regulations that have been observed in my schools; which gentlemen may adopt or vary, according to their particular local circumstance. It is very evident to multitudes by facts (which are better than a thousand arguments) that this institution has been attended with many beneficial effects. I have heard of persons, no friends to religion, who have supported these schools, and they are, in my opinion, no bad politicians, for our lives and fortunes will not be less safe because our servants, and the lower people in general, have been instructed in a religion that commands them, under the severest penalty, to hurt nobody by word or deed. I suppose every magistrate, when a young offender is brought before him for theft, &c. gives him some good advice. Would not good advice given him by his minister before he became hardened be more likely to prove effectual? If ever a reformation be brought about in this kingdom, it will be by the labours and diligence of the parochial clergy, each in his parish. If our lawmakers would endeavor, by these schools, and by setting a better example themselves, to reform men, they would shew more wisdom, than by any mode of punishment they can inflict on them for being wicked. I sincerely wish, that, by the blessing of God this institution of Mr. Raikes (a name that every clergyman, especially those of his own city and neighbourhood, should highly reverence) may universally prevail, and produce the best effects. 1786, May