

Stopping the Intermediate Leak

No Sunday School problem is receiving more thought and discussion among earnest workers than that of the leakage which exists in the Intermediate Department.

What shall we do to stop this leak? Can it be stopped? What practical plans have been tested out, and what have been the results? The following suggestions may prove helpful:

1. *The first and most essential requisite is that pastors, superintendents, teachers and parents shall become aroused to the seriousness of the situation.* Every principle of spiritual conservation calls for the stopping of this leak. To enrol the names of babies on the Cradle Roll, to gather them into the Beginners classes, to carry them through a splendid course of training in Primary and Junior Departments, to bring them to the most critical period in life, and then to lose an alarming percentage—here is appalling waste which no argument can excuse nor conditions justify. The fact that some are won back in later years through the organized classes only accentuates the sadness of the fact that during the formative period of life, when they most needed to be surrounded by Christian influences, and trained for effectiveness in Christian service, they were lost to the Sunday School.

2. The Intermediate age is the hope, not the despair, of the Sunday School. It is a challenge to pastor, superintendent, teacher and parents to make good their claims. If the Sunday School is self-satisfied, prosaic, dull, behind the times, one of two things will inevitably happen—the School will change its character, or it will lose its boys and girls. The latter has usually been the result. *The second requisite, therefore, to stopping the Intermediate leak is to make the Sunday School an institution where life, and not form, shall dominate.* When the School awakes to the realization that it has lost and is losing its Intermediates, the usual procedure is to blame the boys and girls. The wiser plan would be to make a thorough analysis of the life of the School with a view to determining whether or not the deeds of these keen, discriminating young people are being met. Any School that will deal honestly and frankly with the problem from this standpoint will find itself rapidly approaching a real solution.

3. As has been pointed out in recent years by all who have studied this question, it is not so much a boy and girl problem as it is a teacher problem. We have developed specialists in Primary and Junior work, but have we developed specialists in the Intermediate Department? In many instances church buildings will not admit of a separate department for the Intermediates—which is ideal—

but this only makes the teacher problem the more acute.

Two facts stand out in bold relief as a result of much experience: *Men can best teach boys, and women can best teach girls of the Intermediate age; and a separate class-room is an absolute essential.* Thus again the Intermediate Department becomes a challenge to the School to provide trained teachers and better equipment. Without these two things no School can hope to solve its Intermediate problem. Of course an effective woman is to be preferred rather than an ineffective man as teacher for Intermediate boys, but there should be in the average School no such permanent alternative. Intelligent men can equip themselves to teach, and no pastor and superintendent should evade the God given responsibility of laying upon the hearts of their men the opportunity and the obligation for service in this direction.

New church buildings cannot be erected so as to provide separate class rooms on short notice, but curtains and screens will make possible a degree of privacy that will go far toward securing efficiency in teaching.

4. *Another vitally necessary thing in holding Intermediates is that they be given something to do.* In the opening and closing exercises of the School the Intermediates may be made the life of the programme. What they cannot be persuaded to do as individuals, they will often gladly do as groups. Music, Bible drills, brief missionary programmes, responsive readings and other forms of service in which they can participate by classes, will appeal strongly to boys and girls of this age, and will attract them where the study of the lesson alone fails to command their interest. Wisely planned programmes, full of variety and "spice," will prove of inestimable value to teachers in securing regular attendance. Too much textbook work palls on adolescents, who are so busy growing that they cannot take on heavy burdens of mental labor, but they will delight in sharing the lighter and more attractive tasks incident to worth while opening and closing exercises.

If your School has never seriously faced the facts regarding its Intermediate boys and girls, the stern national conditions which confront us should be a ringing call to prayerful action. Upon the boys and girls in their teens to-day will fall responsibility and obligations to-morrow such as few generations in the world's history were ever called upon to bear. Whether they shall be stalwart Christian leaders or moral weaklings depends largely upon their Sunday School training in the next five years.—Dr. G. S. Dobbin, in The Superintendent's Quarterly