

## Symposium.

### How to Get Our Young People Interested in the Work of the Church.

By REV. D. McTAVISH, D.Sc., TORONTO.

#### No. 1.

It is a fact observed with sorrow by the majority of pastors and Sabbath School superintendents that many of the boys, when they grow up to the age of sixteen or eighteen years of age, slip out of the Sabbath School, do not enter into the full membership of the Church, and are for many years, if not altogether, lost to the Church's life and work. Just as a leak in a milldam lessens the power for work in the mill, so this leak in the Church lessens her power very greatly, as she is losing in this way much of that youthful enthusiasm which is an important factor in the prosecution of successful work. Then every pastor also knows that there are young men, professing Christians, who attend regularly the services of the Church, young men who are sharp, clever, energetic fellows in business or in anything to which they put their hands, but they are not in any definite way helping on the work of the Church. All are agreed that the Church of Christ should have the first and best of a Christian young man's strength and talents, but we have to confess with deep sorrow that in many instances such is not the case. Here, then, are two aspects of this oft-discussed and many-sided question. First, we are losing many of our best young people altogether from the fellowship of the Church; and, secondly, many who are in the fellowship of the Church are contributing little or nothing to its actual aggressive work. These two questions, though apparently distinct, are in a measure inseparable, and the remedy for the one will in a large measure be the remedy for the other also. While stating these difficulties one must not take too gloomy a view of the matter and conclude that the Church is not reaching the young people at all, especially the young men. The statistical fiend will meet you with figures, but figures are like popular advice, they will say very much what you want them to say. The rapid growth and almost phenomenal success of the Y. P. S. C. E. within the Church is surely an assuring fact to those pessimists who have taken up Elijah's wilderness wail, "and I only am left alone." Nevertheless the difficulties stated in a large measure still remain.

Before suggesting any remedy it is necessary, to use a medical term, to make a diagnosis of the case and try to discover the real cause of the evil. Of course the primary cause of all evils is natural depravity. But the question still needs solution. Why should natural depravity exhibit itself in those particular ways at that particular time of life? Youth and early manhood is undoubtedly a difficult age to manage. It is the age of emancipation; up to that time the will of the parents has more or less exercised control, but now begins to arise the consciousness of individual freedom. It is difficult for nations or individuals to use their freedom wisely at first. To thousands of negroes in the South emancipation was ruin because they abused it. The same thing is true also of thousands of young men. This precious gift of liberty is turned into license that often ends in ruin, and many a young man has to make this discovery amid the misery and desertion of "the far country." There is another characteristic of youth—one might almost call it an instinct—that keeps many young people away from the fellowship of the Church of Christ, and that is an innate abhorrence of hypocrisy and inconsistency. With what merciless judgment they scrutinize the lives of professing Christians. They see men occupying prominent positions in the Church of Christ mixed up with shady transactions in business. They see Christians sitting at the Lord's Table to-day and singing of their all-absorbing love for a crucified and risen Lord; next day they see them absorbed in scenes of utter worldliness where it would be an offence to mention the name of Jesus. Is it any wonder if these merciless critics put this and that together and say—"No, we don't want to be Christians like those people." You may call it harsh and censorious if you will, but here is undoubtedly one of the prime causes of alienation—an innate disgust at the inconsistent lives of professing Christians. The church has been busy inventing

all sorts of patent methods of reaching these young people. She has organized social clubs and literary societies and debating clubs and others too numerous to mention, thinking foolishly that the young people were afraid of religion, and that if they had something with the smallest possible modicum of religion in it they would be attracted, entrapped, and brought into the Church fold. What has been the result? The highway of the Church for the last quarter of a century or more is strewn with the emaciated corpses or bleached bones of defunct literary and social societies. No, young people are not to be deceived by this pretence. Why has such success attended the work of the Christian Endeavor Society? Is it not partly because it came out honestly before the young people and said we don't wish to coax you with cakes and coffee and with funny songs and recitations but we ask you directly in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to consecrate your life to His service. Thousands of young people have shown their appreciation of this courageous honesty and have stepped forward to take their place in the ranks of the active workers for Christ. It is, however, but an agency—the Church in its young people at work—and there are many still outside the Church's direct life and active work. There is no short cut, no patent method by which the Church can reach the young and yet gratify her own love of ease and self-indulgence. Let the Church of Christ in all her officers and members stop inventing methods and get on her knees and in full consecration to God seek for that power from on high which alone will make her life and work attractive to the young. This is the hard solution of the difficulty, for it is easier for many Christians to go anywhere than on their knees, or do anything than die to self and the world, but to my judgment it is the only true solution. The reason why many excellent men take no part in the active work of the Church is because they have not been started soon enough. The policy of the Presbyterian Church in the past with regard to the young has been largely a policy of repression. Thank God this erroneous idea is dying out and the Church is slowly coming to see that what the young people need is not repression but guidance and encouragement. If every possible work they can do, however small it may be, is laid upon the young men, and they are encouraged instead of being snubbed, the sentiment will soon prevail that it is the right thing for young men to be actively engaged in some way in the Church's work. Then the time may soon come when our Christian young men will not be giving the best of their time and strength, as many of them now do, to societies outside of the Church.

EVERY man feels instinctively that all the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action; and that while tenderness of feeling and susceptibility of generous emotions are accidents of life, permanent goodness is an achievement and a quality of the life. "Fine words," says one homely proverb, "butter no parsnips," and if the question be how to render those vegetables palatable, an ounce of butter would be worth more than all the orations of Cicero. The only conclusive evidence of a man's sincerity is that he gives himself for a principle. Words, money, all things else, are comparatively easy to give away; but when a man makes a gift of his daily life and practice, it is plain that the truth, whatever it may be, has taken possession of him. From that sincerity his words gain the force and pertinency of deeds, and his money is no longer the pale drudge 'twixt man and man, but, by a beautiful magic, what erewhile bore the image and superscription of God.—J. RUSSELL LOWELL.

HERE is a story with a moral so palpable and to the point that we reprint it: One day a Lie broke out of its inclosure and started to travel; and the man who owned the premises saw it after it had started, and was sorry that he had not made the inclosure lie-tight. So he called his swiftest Truth and said: "A Lie has gone loose and will do much mischief if it is not stopped. I want you to go after it and bring it back or kill it. So the swift Truth started out after the Lie. But the Lie had one hour start. At the end of the first day the lie was going lickety-split. The Truth was a long way behind and it was getting tired. It has not yet caught up, and never will.—Methodist Recorder.