

Our Contributors.

ON FILLING UP THE CASK.

BY KNOXIAN.

A young clergyman once asked Dr. Bellamy what he should do to have matter for his discourses. The Doctor replied, "Fill up the cask fill up the cask fill up the cask." That was good advice. There are some casks that if empty should be allowed to remain so, but a preacher or speaker who addresses his fellow men should fill up his mental cask, so that he may have something to say worth listening to. You can't take anything out of an empty cask.

A Presbyterian deacon in a large congregation in one of the best American cities told the writer that his minister was about to leave. He added that he was very sorry, for the minister was an excellent man, possessed of many admirable qualities, a good pastor and kind friend, but he had one defect which made it impossible for him to succeed. On being asked what that defect was, the deacon replied

HE HADN'T GOT ANY IDEAS.

That was another way of saying that the good man did not fill up his cask. Perhaps he had so much visiting to do, so many meetings to attend, so many committees to sit on, so much business of one kind and another to look after that he had neither time nor strength to fill up his cask. Perhaps his deacons and elders worried him so much that he really had no heart to keep his cask full. Possibly the cranks in his congregation bothered him so much that he had no time to fill his cask. Possibly he didn't know how to keep his cask full. Perhaps the cask wouldn't hold anything. There is a terrible possibility that he may have been afflicted with the idea that he didn't need to put anything in his cask. It is pretty hard to say what caused the trouble, but the hard fact remains that the good man could not succeed because he didn't fill up his cask. We once heard a theological professor, for whose opinion everybody has much respect, say that nine out of every ten ministers who fail in the Presbyterian ministry fail for lack of good matter in their sermons. If he had said good matter properly arranged and presented in language something like the language of every-day life, most people who have given the subject any thought would agree with him.

Empty casks abound. See that tea meeting orator who begins with the strikingly original observation that he is glad to be here. Then he tells you that he has been very busy, has had no time to prepare, and has nothing to say. This last statement is quite unnecessary as the fact is painfully evident. It is a sinful waste of time to spend half an hour in proving what is self-evident. Now what is the matter with that man? Simply this—his cask is empty, and he was too busy, or too lazy, or too conceited to put anything into it. He should have obeyed Dr. Bellamy's injunction and filled up the cask before he went to the meeting. If he didn't think it was worth while to put something in the cask for that meeting, he should have stayed at home, or at all events have stayed off the platform.

One reason why some Sabbath school teachers can never keep a class together is because they come too often with the cask empty. Children know when they are fed as well as grown-up people. Clever boys soon know when the cask is empty.

The class of people who call themselves evangelists have correct ideas about empty casks. They get down near the bottom of the cask in about a fortnight, and as soon as they scrape the bottom they take their money, hold a farewell meeting and leave. Some of the men who made a tremendous noise in a community for ten days could not hold out for a year if holding out were to save the community. The cask holds just so many stories, so many startling incidents, so many addresses, so many allusions to the great work I have done in other places, and the moment these are taken out the good man wisely takes himself away. The idiotic portion of the community don't see the bottom of the cask, and the idiotic portion of some communities is large.

Church courts are often sorely afflicted with empty casks. There is a man who for some unfathomable reason thinks he ought to speak on every question. He has no special knowledge of the questions nor special capacity for dealing with them. He has never done anything to make him an authority on church matters, and yet he thinks he has a right to lecture the court a dozen times a day. Every time he opens his mouth he makes it abundantly clear that he does not know any more about the matter to be settled than nine out of ten of the men who are supposed to listen patiently until his half-paternal, half-Dominic platitudes are through. The man's cask is quite empty. Why on earth are rational people expected to sit and watch him try to draw something out of an empty cask? Don't we all know the thing can't be done?

It is astonishing how much some casks will hold. Each of the lawyers in the big arbitration at Ottawa spoke about five days, and repeated nothing they did not want to repeat. Edward Blake has an enormous cask, perhaps the largest in the Dominion. He keeps it well filled, too.

It is nobody's business how you fill up your cask, providing you do it honestly. Get ideas any way you honestly can, only get them.

When you go to teach in the Sabbath school, fill up your cask. When you have to speak at any public meeting, always put something in the cask. Above all things, when you have to preach, fill up the cask. People cannot feed on mere words.

N.B.—We have not said anything to those amazingly clever people who can teach and preach and deliver addresses on all subjects without any preparation. Most of them have no cask to put anything in.

ON THE BEST METHOD OF BRINGING THE YOUNG INTO THE FULL COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH.*

I have been requested to open the conference on this subject and I will try to do so by referring to a few points out of the many that might be touched on in dealing with it. It need not be said that no subject could come before the Presbytery of greater importance than this. The young are the hope of the Church, and soon they will be the bone and sinew, and the brain and heart of it: and to have them brought up within its pale and kept there, is of vital moment both to them and to the Church.

This has always been a matter of anxious thought, especially in the earnest times of the Church, as in the early centuries, when schools were established under the care of the Christian ministers, lest the youth of the Church should lose their religion by attending the schools of the Roman philosophers and rhetoricians, and, as in the days of the Reformation when the Reformers gave much attention to education, especially John Knox, who formed a great scheme for the training of the young. In our own day, too, the subject is one of the leading topics in almost all religious councils and conferences, and this on account of the large numbers of the youth of professedly Christian families that stray away from the sheltering fold of the Church, to swell the ranks of the indifferent and the sceptical.

In the carefully digested report of the Assembly's Sabbath School Committee it is stated that of the youth who mature year by year in the Presbyterian families of Canada, less than one-half come into the fellowship of the Church. Whether this be the actual proportion or not, it is beyond doubt that a large number of our young people are not found in the membership of the Church, and many of them have forsaken altogether the creed and the worship of their fathers.

Now for this there must be a cause and also a remedy. There are many minor causes but we think that to find the chief cause we must go back to the earliest stage of their life, for if "as the twig is bent the tree's inclined," if "the boy is the father of the man," and if a child who is trained up in the way he should go "will not depart from it when he is old," there must have been some error or some serious omission in the training of these young people in their childhood to account for so large a defection in their riper years. The want of piety in the children is the fruit of defect of piety in the parents, or of the want of faithful co-operation on their part in the religious training of their children. It is not due to any increase of depravity in the race, nor to any decrease of susceptibility to religious influences, nor to any failure in the divine promises; for it is matter of common observation,—

First, That children who are brought up in godly families, where both parents unite in training them in the fear of God, or where the mother at least is of decided piety, the children grow up by a natural process to a Christian maturity, and come regularly into the full communion of the Church; and secondly, That in times of revival the young flock into the Church.

In both cases it is because evangelical influences have been brought strongly to bear upon them, and their impressible hearts have, through the blessing of God's Spirit, received the truth. They have (allowing for the apparent inevitable exceptions) been brought to Christ, and the love of Christ is in them, warm and glowing in them, and they have, without needing much persuasion, come forward to join themselves to His avowed disciples.

Now, in order to have the young people at large brought into the full communion of the Church, they must be brought into the same state of mind. They must be brought to the saving knowledge of Christ. It is of no use bringing them into full communion without this. Coming to the Lord's table without the spiritual enlightenment, without knowledge to discern the Lord's body, and faith to feed upon Him, would be disastrous to them. It would nourish in them self-righteousness and delusion, and they would prove a weakness rather than strength to the Church, as dead branches are a weakness to a living tree.

But this must be accomplished early in life. They must be taken young. It is in the family, before they go out into the world, that they must be born again into Christ's kingdom, if the lamentation now heard over them is ever to cease. The Christian family is the nursery of the Church. Let parents, therefore, be urged to the cultivation of a deeper personal piety, to a greater sense of their own responsibility for the spiritual life of their children, and to more earnest and prayerful efforts for their early conversion. If Christian parents had, in general, more of the Apostle Paul's yearning desire for Israel, if their heart's desire and continual prayer to God for their children was that they might be saved, and if they regularly instructed them, catechising them after the good old fashion (so nearly obsolete now), praying with them and for them, pleading God's covenant promise, as those who wished and expected an answer to their prayers; and if, also, they dealt personally with them, with the kindness and fervour both of a loving and sanctified heart, and with the frequency and perseverance of those who are bent on attaining their end, doubtless the Lord's promise would be fulfilled: "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee;" "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children." Otherwise, what is the significance of infant baptism, either as a pledge of the divine mercy on one hand, or an expression of the parents' faith on the other?

* A paper read before the Presbytery of Montreal, by the Rev. D. Paterson, of St. Andrew's, Quebec.

Well, Moderator, this is what we have all preached a hundred or a thousand times. But we know no better way, and we must still preach it and urge it, till men and women hear the word of the Lord and obey it, and do their duty more faithfully to those who are so dear to them, and for whose highest well being God has made them responsible.

The Church, also, in its corporate capacity has a work to do for the young. "Feed My lambs," the Lord said officially, if we may so speak, to Peter when re-instating him in the apostleship. And here we find three departments: the Sabbath school, the ministrations of the pulpit and pastoral superintendence.

In regard to the first two of these I will do little but quote some of the things said in the discussion on this subject at the last Pan Presbyterian Council.

The committee recommended, and the recommendation was adopted, that the entire membership of the Church attend the Sabbath school and Bible class, either as teachers or as scholars, and that the entire membership of the Sabbath schools attend the Church, that they should be under the superintendence of the Session, and the scholars thoroughly instructed in the creed and catechisms of the Church.

Dr. John Hall said. "Teach the children the catechism. . . . Parents often do serious injury to their children by sending them to educational establishments where their own Church is constantly belittled, and then they complain that their Church has no power to hold the young as they would have it do."

Another said. "We want to bring them up along our own lines of thought. . . . teach them that they belong to the Church, that the visible Church is made up of believers and their children." We would add, Teach them something of the history of the Church.

One spoke of the object of the Sabbath school being to save the souls of the children, and another urged the necessity of the Session selecting thoroughly spiritual teachers. "Many teachers of education and culture sit before their classes year after year without witnessing any definite spiritual result, while other teachers with less education, but filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and with a burning desire to save souls, have seen their whole classes brought to the Saviour."

The committee referred to the custom in the United States of setting apart the second Sabbath in June as "the Children's Day," on which the services are especially adapted to the young, a custom imitated now in our own Church.

In reference to the influence of the pulpit on the young; first, Let the children be brought to church as regularly as possible. Don't teach them that the Sabbath school is their church, but accustom them to sit with their parents in the family pew. Let them be encouraged to attend to the sermon by being questioned at home on the text, on the heads of the discourse, etc., according to their capacity. Has this old custom also gone out of fashion? If so, it might be revived with profit to both children and parents. But much depends on the occupant of the pulpit. "Make th' sermon," said Dr. Hall, "such that the children can understand, and put in an illustration here and there, which you say is for the children and the young, and then they will watch for their portion and hear the sermon all through." Dr. Alexander Leod, of Birkenhead, preaches a "sermonette" to the children as a regular part of the morning service.

Dr. Stewart, of New Zealand, has practised for ten years and recommends "a return to the old Reformation custom of making one of the Sabbath services catechetical. An elder said, 'You will disperse the congregation,' but I did not. The children turn up the passages. It is a sort of catechetical lecture; and the result has been that parents and children, young folks and servants, have come to learn how to handle their Bibles."

Dr. Holmes, of Albany, said that the minister should adapt his discourses to the capacity of the youthful members of his flock. "Taking the Son of God as his great exemplar and guide, he is to make the instruction of the young an object of paramount importance. By Biblical preaching, by catechetical instruction, and by pastoral visitation, he is to interest them in religious truth and strengthen them in Christian faith."

In regard to the last point, pastoral superintendence, we have only time further to mention one suggestion; that is: That the young be expected and encouraged to come early into the full communion of the Church. The Scriptures lay down no rule as to age, and neither does the Church. And if children are brought to the knowledge of Christ, if they believe on Him as their Saviour whose blood cleanses them from sin, and give good evidence of true piety, why should they not show forth His death and enjoy the blessings which flow from the believing partaking of His body and blood in the sacrament?

It may be objected that very young persons are not competent to undertake the responsibilities of Church-membership. These are of two kinds, spiritual and ecclesiastical. The latter may not be very capable of fulfilling intelligently such duties as voting on matters of business at congregational meetings, etc., but it would be easy for the Church to modify its rules of government, and to limit the ecclesiastical franchise to persons who had reached mature years. On the other hand the spiritual responsibilities of membership the young may be quite as capable of meeting as grown persons. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb.