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## Sunday School Banner

W. H. WITHROW, D.D., Editor

TORONTO, SEPTEMBER, 1903.

### The Teacher's Opportunity.

SOME time ago, in one of our cities in the East, a Methodist Preachers' Meeting, on a Monday morning, was discussing the subject of preaching, and deploring the apparent fruitlessness of much of the labor of the pulpit. In the course of the discussion, one of the members present, a man of long experience and wide influence, rose to his feet and said: "Brethren, you are preaching to the wrong people. Your sermons are composed and delivered with a view primarily and almost exclusively to their effect upon the grown-up portion of your audience. Your arguments and appeals are addressed to men and women in mature and in advanced life. Their notions are set, their ideas formed, their habits settled, the circumstances of their lives largely fixed, their characters good or bad, tending to permanency, or already permanent. If they are not already Christians, it is not likely, it is against

the law of averages, that anything you say, however clear in statement, however strong in argument, however pungent in appeal, will influence them savingly and lead them to religious decision. They have become, many of them, actually Gospel-hardened. They have resisted the strivings of the Spirit of God so often that now, if He has not ceased to strive with them, their ears have become deaf to His voice, and their consciences seared to His appeals. Many of these people are, to all intents and purposes, lost—even while they still live. It is a terrific thing to think or to say; but they have really long passed the favorable opportunity, and have virtually sinned away the day of grace. But there is another class in your congregations, that you largely ignore, that you seldom address specifically, that you certainly do not expend your strength upon, or make the objects of your intensest thought, your closest study, and your most constant and most loving appeals. And yet that is the class at once the most important and the most certain to be moved by your discourses to embrace the Christian life. That class is composed of the young people. Their consciences are tender, their judgments unworped by sin, their emotions readily touched, their will docile. They have no prejudices blinding them to the truth, no settled evil habits, like invisible cables, binding them hand and foot, and holding them back when they would fain be free from the domination of sin. Brethren, you are preaching to the wrong people. Preach to the young. Save the young. Devote the energy you now consume in the fruitless, or almost fruitless, effort to savingly influence the mature and the aged, and you may expect to win large harvests where now you mourn over disheartening barrenness, and sadly complain that you have spent your strength for naught."

The advice was good and widely applicable. The light thrown on the subject by the publication of such books as Professor Coe's volume on "The Spiritual Life," has resulted in an eminently healthy reaction from the apathetic attitude which, all too long, the Church generally maintained on the tremendous question of the early conversion of the young. A perusal of that volume, nay, a conscientious study of it, would do every preacher, every Sunday School and day school teacher, every father and mother, great good. The average age of conversion, as shown by careful ques-

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