

## Symposium.

### How Shall we Interest our Young People in Church Work.

BY REV. JAMES ROSS, MONTREAL.

PASTORS working among people of the same general type naturally find their experience running along parallel lines. I have proved, in actual work, the truth of most of the statements made in the previous articles of this series.

I submitted the question before us to several young men who are most active and successful in Christian work and I shall make free use of their replies as well as of my own experience.

It is unfortunately true that many young persons grow up among us in an atmosphere of such worldliness and practical unbelief, or suffer such unjust treatment from Christians, that they are prejudiced against Christianity from the start. I remember a bright fellow student of mine, while smarting from being mercilessly skinned by a prominent member of the Church, bitterly denounced all religion as a piece of organized hypocrisy. Such a conception is not uncommon, and, while we lament the state of things which has produced it, and do our utmost to remedy it, the problem before us is how shall we change the opinion of those thus wrongly biassed, and so attract and interest them in the Church and her work.

1. We must love those whom we desire to interest. If we approach young persons outside the Church, or careless ones inside of it, merely professionally, or because we wish to strengthen our congregation, they will feel it and resent it. If we deal with them as a matter of duty or because it is necessary to the development of our own spiritual life, they will intuitively divine the element of refined selfishness underneath the effort and set themselves against us. But the secret freemasonry of affection finds some avenue to the heart. It is the nature of love to beget love and of affectionate interest to produce interest in response. There are hardly any young persons but have some noble qualities, and certainly all of them have splendid possibilities before them, which ought to awaken an enthusiastic regard for them in every true soul. Have not most of us met young people who were very much surprised at any interest taken in them? Now, this surprise is an adverse criticism on the general attitude of indifference maintained by Christians towards them, and which they had come to regard as the normal state of things. There are many other signs that there is not among church members in general, that deep solicitude for the souls of men which must ever be the basis of success in this work.

2. There must be personal contact with them. Our affection needs to display itself in finding some bond of union between their souls and ours which shall serve as a connecting link for our influences. For a young man or woman to be interested in a Christian is a step towards being interested in the Christian's Saviour. Like Jesus by Jacob's well, and Paul on Mars' Hill, we must find common standing ground with those whom we wish to interest in higher things. To discover this often needs something like genius, and to use it properly when discovered is no easy matter. One of my correspondents tells how he attracted a number of young men to religious life and work through his special activity and skill in baseball. The respect and admiration awakened on the field brought them to his services and gave them a more favourable opinion of Christianity. The influence thus begun led to eternal life. Another describes how a class of big boys, who had become so unruly in the Sabbath school that they were at the point of being expelled, were thoroughly changed by their teacher inviting them to her home once a week, providing some little treat or entertainment for them, and making a study of their views of things and what interested them. Nearly all of them are now active Christians. Any method which dispenses with the thought and patient continuous effort by which this point of contact must be sought, will prove as futile as the plan of a somewhat dull countryman of mine for mastering the Shorter Catechism. After struggling with its contents for some months in vain he thought to accomplish the end by one supreme exertion; so after his mother had boiled the manual he swallowed it!

3. We must study to make them to feel their influence in Church work. As a means of doing this we must take them into our confidence. There are matters connected with the work and well-being of the congregation on which we might ask their advice. In no other way can the sense of their personal responsibility be so forcibly brought home to them. One of our ministers stimulated many by doing so. He was accustomed to ask the stingiest member of his congregation what means he thought should be employed to awaken the liberality of the people. Not only the congregation but the individual so consulted was much profited by this.

Every Christian worker feels that to get them to engage in some distinctively Christian service is the best way to interest both old and young—the young especially. But the difficulty is to find work for everyone which that one can do well and have joy in the doing of. If the duty we select for him prove a fearful task, the likelihood is that he will be repelled instead of attracted by it. It is now generally believed that everyone ought to take some part in meetings for social worship. But I fear there will be some in every generation who will never be brought to do so. At any rate, there are many on whom this ought not to be forced at first, because it is too difficult for them. We believe in diversities of gifts. Why then should we try to force all Christians to engage in one form of service, when there are so many ways in which their love may find expression?

The insight of the pastor and his helpers will be exerted in discovering the gifts of young persons and employing them. The methods of service which he may suggest to them in his personal conferences with them will be very diverse. It may be carrying a bouquet of flowers to some invalid, or taking care of a baby to allow a careworn mother to attend a service or get a sadly needed rest. It may be canvassing a community in support of some measure of social reform, or collecting missionary or Bible Society moneys, arranging the executive business of a Sabbath school entertainment, or taking charge of its library, or teaching a singing class in some rural district. Only let us be sure that it is something which the individual can do easily and well, so that he may have some exhilaration in the doing of it. And when it is done we may emphasize the other and greater joy which the worker ought to have in the breath of blessing which descends on his heart because he has done something which is pleasing to Christ.

The service at first can hardly be simple and commonplace enough, provided only it be done for the Master's sake. Because things difficult to perform are prescribed to beginners they are discouraged. Another result of such training is that many Christian men and women are longing for the opportunity of some brilliant and almost impossible achievement for Christ, and ignoring the little things well within their reach, in which they might glorify Him hourly. The service which comes to us in the commonplace ways of God's providence ought to be accounted as sacred as that which our ambition strives after with painful effort.

Some declare that conversion must precede service. No doubt that is the natural order; and conversion must be sought, directly and indirectly, as long as there is ground to believe that it has not been experienced. But it is always a question how far such service as they may be able to render to Christ's cause may be a preparation for conversion, in the case of those who believe the truth theoretically, and look on the Church as the best means for leading men to righteousness. Many successful workers plunge them into what has been called the secular work of the Church, and into other work also if they will undertake it. Many a man now a Christian was thus led to feel his own deficiencies, and was forced by the responsibilities he had undertaken to apply to Christ for the necessary spiritual life to enable him to discharge them.

"There is too much preaching that is like the Venus of Milo, very beautiful, but it has no arms, and cannot help a man that is down." This shrewd criticism is akin to that of a sailor on a rose-water sermon: "It may have been good, but there was too little harpoon in it."