

Symposium.

How can we Interest and Retain our Young People.

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To be helpful, anything that may be said in an article of this kind must be practical.

My endeavor will be to give some points that will be profitable to others in the work.

Some one has said that the Sunday-school is "the biggest thing in the world." All may not be willing to accept the statement, but Christian men will admit that work among young people, including of course the scholars of our Sunday-schools, is the most promising field in the Christian Church. No other is so full of hope. We are sowing for the twentieth century, "what shall the harvest be?" Teaching in the Sunday-school was never so well done as at the present, but because this is so, we must not fold our arms in contentment, while so many young people are slipping away from Church influences.

The question is well asked—how shall we interest and retain our young people?

All will acknowledge that it is not difficult to interest children up to the age of twelve or perhaps fourteen, during these tender years of a child's life we have comparatively no trouble attracting them to the Sunday-school, and in interesting them in its life and work.

It is when they have passed the ages mentioned, we find increasing difficulty in retaining them. Why is this so? The answer is two-fold. In the first place we fail to fully improve the golden opportunity of these years of childhood. We only half do the work which should form the basis of Christian education for life.

In the primary departments of the Sunday-school of Protestant Canada, is there one in twenty where every advantage is being taken of the precious opportunity offered to thoroughly lay the foundation of the Christian lives of the children? The average Sunday-school boy or girl of twelve ought to know much of the Bible, ought to be so well grounded therein that he or she would be interested in the continuation of the study. Would not this be accomplished if every primary teacher used the best methods?

As a matter of fact, children, as a rule, know so little of the Bible, that they are careless whether they know more or not. There is a time in the life of a boy when he awakens to the fact that he has enough knowledge to whet his appetite for the pursuit of more. There is a time in the life of a painter when he awakens to the fact that he has some knowledge of his art. Our object should be to have the children so thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of the Bible that when they arrive at the age where they begin to think for themselves, they will desire to continue the study of the Word, and instead of wishing to sever their connection with the Sunday-school, will desire rather to retain it.

When the young people have arrived at the age of independent thought and action, and we have succeeded in planting within them a love for the Bible and Church will this be sufficient to retain them? Where children have Christian homes, and are surrounded by loving care and guidance, it may be. We may feel that under the ordinary administration of the Church, with its Sunday-school, young people's societies, and other possible organizations, these can be retained. The Christian home is of course the first God-given institution for child training.

Those whom we can persuade to give their hearts to Jesus Christ and confess Him, will not need the same influences, as others who do not take this stand. Around them all we must throw influences that attract, interest, instruct, and help, until through the agency of teaching, or preaching of the gospel, or faithful personal work, we

can bring them to Jesus, and help them on in their Christian life. We must remember our young people are not old people. We must attract them, we must win them; we must either go to them at their homes, at their work, or on the street, or we must draw them to the Church.

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties personal workers have, is to obtain suitable opportunities for conversation with young people on religious subjects. Sunday is such a busy day that those who desire to work for the Master in a personal way, find the many opportunities which naturally present themselves on that day cannot be taken advantage of, and if we have not the means of attracting the young people again during the week, how can we influence them? If we cannot draw them into the church or church parlors, they will probably be in worse places. Are we to depend upon the public preaching of the Word alone, to save the young? Important as this is, how great is the need for faithful personal work! "Go out into the highways and bid them to come in," is the command, but we must have a place ready for them. Why should our churches, or at any rate our church parlors, be practically closed six days in the week? The Y. M. C. A. only taking a small part of the work to be done; no better means can be taken to retain young Christians, than by giving them personal work to do. Times are changing, the church life is changing, the masses of the people are getting into centers, and the temptations that allure young people are increasing. Shall the methods of church work remain the same, notwithstanding the changes in the world around? Rev. Dr. Rainsford said to his brethren of the Episcopal Church in New York a few days ago, "We are fast asleep locked in the slumber of fixed opinions." The theory of the Christian church getting on her knees and consecrating herself completely to Christ is the ideal; but in the changes of life and circumstances we must not make this a pillow for indolence.

How far a church may go in using means, other than those strictly spiritual, must be decided by each church for itself, according to its circumstances, and those of the people whom it desires to reach and uplift. Normal classes will help to retain our Christian young people. Set them to work. Give them plenty of study. Let them have an object to study for. Normal work is most interesting, and it is not necessary to have a trained teacher for it, notwithstanding the popular idea to the contrary.

Space will not permit me to speak of the regular work of the church, its faithful pastors, teachers, and elders, its Y. P. S. C. E., with all its helpful influences. If we would interest our young people we must:

1. Begin when they are very young.
2. Employ trained and capable teachers for these very young children.
3. We must build and equip our primary rooms in the best possible manner, giving the little folk the best instead of the worst.
4. We must encourage in some localities, gymnasiums, industrial educational classes, and kindred branches, of "the institutional church."
5. We must have classes in all our churches for training personal workers.
6. We must have regularly organized Normal Bible classes.
7. Until such time as primary teachers can be trained, it would be helpful for each church body to have one or more travelling instructors in primary methods.

Above all, we must, like the Saviour himself, have hearts full of tender love for the children.

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that Grace can restore,
Touched by a loving heart."

But it must be a loving heart, none other can help a man, most certainly, none else a boy or girl.