

## Symposium.

### The Church and the Young.

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THOUGH all ministers have not the same facility for gathering the young about them and inspiring them with a love of Christian service, there are very few who are not thoughtfully anxious to do what in them lies to attract, hold and edify the young—to prepare them to bear the heat and burden of the day when the older members of the Church drop out.

Likewise, there are few congregations who do not recognize the importance of awakening and retaining the interest of the young in the work of the Church. I have repeatedly heard elderly Church members say "We older people are likely to remain connected with the Church all our lives anyway, but in a few years we pass out and the young people of to-day must take our places. The whole future of the congregation depends upon us keeping hold of them." It is to be doubted whether there ever was a vacant congregation looking for a pastor that did not say plainly, "We want some one who will attract the young." In fact so great is the desire to retain the young, that it sometimes becomes a source of weakness to the congregation concerned.

As some parents think the only way to retain the affections of their children is to let them have all their own way, so there are congregations who seem to think that the young people must be consulted and pleased in everything if they are to remain attached to the Church. Is it the choice of the pastor? Then must the call be given to one who will please the young people? Is it the introducing of an organ or of paid singers into the choir? Then, although many of the oldest and most respected members may object, the convincing argument is forthcoming: "the other churches have them, and if we don't our young people will leave us." Is it proposed to have a series of popular entertainments? Then though some think it outside the Church's province to provide amusement for the people the magic word is uttered, "but the young people," and the question is settled.

No one will claim that these things, and others which might be mentioned, are necessarily wrong or even unwise, but the point is that congregations have no right to make innovations and adopt methods that do not commend themselves on their own merits, simply because they will attract the young.

Right-thinking people must always oppose the effort to hold young people by constant appeals to their selfishness and love of pleasure, or even to their esthetic natures. The Church need never hope to compete with the world on its own terms. The world can make appeals to the pleasure-loving, can present fascinations and visions of delightful indulgence to the natural mind that the Church need never hope to equal. But even could we succeed in keeping the young in our churches by means such as these, we would do them harm instead of good. If we can hold them only by appealing to that in them which is not of the Father but of the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life—better let them go. Better have ten consecrated young men in a church who are there because they love Christ a people and Christ's service, than one hundred who are there simply because the church is more fashionable and the organ more costly and the singing more artistic, and the crowd greater than the church around the corner. The young people who occupy a position of importance in the Church, and upon whom the future success of the Church depends are not those who are kept by lowering the spiritual tone and standard, but those who have a personal attachment to the Lord Jesus and who are drawn together by a bond of Christian love and sympathy.

The only thing that will attract permanently, and that will bless and elevate as it attracts, is a warm Christ-like spirit of loving sympathy and unselfish effort for the good of others. The great question to be answered is: Do our churches attract all those young people whom Christ would attract were He here in person? If so, we may rejoice that our Church is fulfilling its mission among the young,

even though some wander off and prove that the carnal mind is still enmity against God.

It is right and necessary to seek out and adopt wisest methods of interesting and occupying the young in the services and work of the Church, and doubtless some in the course of this Symposium will make practical suggestions in this line. But all methods and efforts will accomplish little apart from Holy Ghost power, and a freer, happier spirit of Christian love within the Church life. The Christian Endeavor Societies have taught us once for all, that distinctively religious meetings, distinctively Christian fellowship and distinctively Christ-like work are more permanently attractive to our serious-minded, whole-hearted young people than aught else.

Unless the Spirit of God has so wrought in the hearts of young people that before they reach the age of eighteen or twenty they have a personal interest in Christ—and therefore an interest in His Word and an attachment to His Church, for their own sake—it is little use trying to retain them in the active religious life of the congregation. They will go where the inclination is strongest.

The only sure way to retain the young people in the life and activities of the Church is to win them to a personal interest in Christ while they are children, and then as they grow older they will elect to stay of their own accord.

One reason why so many of our young people have drifted away, is that we have expected them to drift away and then be brought back at a later stage,—we have practically denied our doctrine of infant baptism. In many cases young people born in Christian families, dedicated to God and recognized by the Church in baptism, have been allowed to grow up with the idea that they were not members of the Church until they became communicants. Considering themselves outside of the Church they have felt a certain freedom to live for the world, to go off in sin. I believe the phrase "joining the Church," and the whole train of thought it implies, is to no small extent responsible for the frequency with which young people in Christian homes say to themselves, "The time has not come for me to be connected with the Church and personally interested in religion. I can go off and enjoy myself in the world for a time, and then by and by when I am converted, I'll join the Church and take my share in Church work." But alas, too often that time never comes. The young person once divorced from the Church, never returns.

Should we not as a Church be more definite in teaching our children that they are already members of the Church by baptism, and are expected to live for God and have a place and work in the Church from the first.

When Christian parents present their children for baptism, they say in effect:—"We accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour and the Saviour of our children. We present our children that they may be baptized unto Jesus Christ, that with Him they may die to sin, and with Him be quickened into newness of life. We desire our young people to grow up in Christ Jesus, in his Church." This expressed desire and claim of the parents' faith is registered and sealed by the Church through her ordained ministers in the act of baptism.

Thus being so, the young people of our Presbyterian congregations have grown up in the Church and presumably in Christ, and should be expected just as soon as they come to years of full responsibility to confirm the membership which they have in baptism by publicly confessing Christ as their personal Saviour and entering into full communion with the Church. We must teach the children that they are the Lord's now, that for them to wander away is to give the lie to the baptismal vows taken by their parents, that for them not to freely and openly identify themselves with Christ and His Church is in a special sense to trample under foot the blood of Christ and do despite unto the spirit of grace.

If we are to hold the young people we must begin with the children. What we need most is faith to claim each baptized child for Christ and the Church, right instruction of the children as to their Church relation and responsibility, and so much of Christ's Spirit in the congregational life and work that all young people in whom that same spirit is awakening, will be attracted.