

The Pastor and the Young Men's Bible Class

By Rev. W. D. Reid, B.D.

There is no denying the fact that young men are a very scarce commodity in the Sunday School of to-day. The majority of the teachers are ladies, and the Bible Classes are largely composed of the same sex. It has been suggested that, while we find about three young ladies to each young man in the Sunday Schools, we discover three men to each woman in the jails and penitentiaries. Undoubtedly there is some connection between the facts.

While I do not for a moment imagine that I am competent to solve the problem of the "Young Man and the Sabbath School," yet in my work I have observed a few things that may be useful to others. I take it for granted that there is a Young Men's Bible Class in every Sunday School, and that its teacher is the pastor.

1. Let the pastor be always the same with his scholars. There is a man known to me, who, when he meets a young man in the Sunday School, is all smiles, the very soul of cordiality, but during the week, when teacher and scholar meet on the street, simply a cold bow is exchanged. Often have I been told by Bible class boys that Mr. So-and-So has a "Sunday School face" and a "Sunday School greeting" and a "Sunday School hand shake" entirely different from those of the week. The effect of this treatment upon the young man is that he feels that he is being "worked" for Sunday School purposes, and naturally he becomes disgusted.

Again, we sometimes find that when questions are asked by the scholars, passages are brought forward for explanation and the teacher, with an owl-like gravity, posing as a sort of "Know-all," undertakes to solve all mysteries, dissolve all doubts, and explain all problems. The solution may be far from satisfactory, but the air of the one giving the explanation indicates clearly that it must be correct because he has pronounced upon it. Of this kind

of thing the young man soon becomes tired, and he goes away feeling that there has been a lack of honesty on the part of the teacher. I have always found it a wise policy, when any question has arisen that I could not answer satisfactorily, to throw all the light possible upon it, but to frankly and candidly admit the difficulty, and my inability to offer an adequate explanation. It pays to be honest and straightforward and transparent with young men.

2. The minister should always be courageous in his dealing with the young men. There is nothing a young man admires more than courage, and nothing he despises more heartily in any shape or form than cowardice. The successful teacher of young men must never allow them to think for one moment that he is afraid of them in any way. He must, by personal work among them, show that he has sufficient courage to speak to each one alone as plainly as he does to the assembled class. I have found that by far the most effective way of keeping the Bible Class full is to deal with the young men singly. When on a bicycle ride together or while rowing on the river, or while having a "constitutional" walk together, I have drawn the young man out, and when we became confidential, I have asked him plainly but lovingly why he did not give up his sins and become a Christian, and I have invariably found that deep down in his heart there was an earnest, responsive answer.

3. Again, it is good thing to put oneself on a level with the young man and enter into his life as fully as possible. There are some ministers who are continually "talking down" to the young men. This style of teaching, "the deep-drawn ministerial tone," the mere formal address, have rendered null and void the influence of many a good, earnest minister and have tended to ruin many a class. A successful Bible Class should be a very informal affair. Instead of "lecturing" the young men, the teacher should endeavor by questions to draw them out, get at the particular difficulties and temptations of their lives, and having done so, apply positive teaching. Let the teacher,