

HOW TO INTEREST CHILDREN IN THE MISSIONARY CAUSE.

An Essay Written for the Chatham District Sunday School Convention by Mrs. Southard, and Read by Her before that Body June 11th, 1879.

That childhood is the most impressive period of life, and that impressions then made are nearly ineffaceable, no one doubts; consequently it is of the utmost importance that those having the care of children resting upon them should see to it that right impressions are stamped upon the tablets of the young minds.

Interest is what we wish to gain. When it is once thoroughly roused in the minds of children, on any subject, it rarely ever dies completely out; on the contrary, it more generally grows with their growth, and is intensified rather than diminished as they approach maturity.

It is much easier to get the young interested in this cause, for the time being, than it is to get the old, but what we want to obtain is something more than a mere passing interest. We want it to be so absorbing that they will not only be interested for the time being, but that they will continue to be interested to purpose all the way along; from childhood to youth; from youth to manhood and womanhood; and from that period to extreme old age, if they should live so long.

How to accomplish this, is the subject under discussion. And in the outset I would say, that whatever interest, in this or any other project is improperly awakened, either from a false premise, or from being founded on an unsound basis, had much better never have been awakened at all.

We should, then, begin our work with children, with very great care; carry it on with even greater care and prayerful watchfulness, and guard it with such care to the very end—rather to the end of our lives, for if the work has been properly begun and so carried on it will not end when we lay life's burden down, nor when our successors shall have done so.

There are scores of ways, each of them legitimate ones, in which children may be interested in this cause, if only an honest effort is made to interest; but do not expect the same method to succeed everywhere. Perhaps what would rouse the children of one section to enthusiasm would not produce the slightest result in another.

But while there are various methods of interesting children in mission work, there must be one plain, in my opinion, precede all others, but by no means supercede them. That plan is a thorough, systematic, course of instruction on the subject. Without instruction the interest awakened will not be intelligent and will not, therefore, be continuous.

If children are accustomed to hear the missionary cause ridiculed at home, or if even not hearing that their parents or friends treat all reference to it with cool indifference, or if the S. Superintendent shows an evident lack of interest in the matter, they will not be likely to take any great interest in it either.

As deeply interested as their seniors. Nor can a S. S. worker excuse himself from this work on the plea that he does not know much about the missions himself and has no tact in imparting what he does know; that he doesn't know how to set about it, &c. If he doesn't know something about missions and missionaries, he ought to. As regards tact, if we are very much in earnest ourselves we can make that earnestness felt by others. We can, and do, talk to children earnestly and simply enough about anything that we are really anxious they should understand; and this is just what we must do if we would have them interested in this good work.

From the commencement of the Christian era till the present, the name of Christianity and the cause of missions have been but different names for the same work; therefore there is not a single Sunday school lesson that does not admit of some incidental mention of missions. Not that I would recommend their being mentioned Sunday. If we follow the course of some of the lessons we have had I think you will see that they bear me out in this assertion. Take for instance, the Acts of the Apostles. It is a history of missionary work throughout inspired, it is true, but a missionary narrative, nevertheless. Have the lessons been, as they are this quarter, in the Old Testament? Even here is plenty of room for illustration. Was not the little captive maiden in far off Syria a veritable missionary? And did she not—like the female missionaries now in the Orient—aim at the healing of the body as well as the soul? Was not Jonah a missionary when he preached to the Ninevites? And thus we might go on with the entire series.

Children can be readily led to see that it would be a "dreadful thing to have to live in a country where there were no churches nor Sunday schools, either because the people were too poor to support them, or because they know nothing about God, and it will not be difficult for them to realize how dreadful it is, that there are many thousands of children so situated now, whom we might help some if we were only willing to make a little sacrifice, or exercise a little self-denial. They will be glad to know that good men and women are taking the gospel to these countries and provinces, and are trying to build churches and start Sunday schools; and they will be correspondingly glad to do what children can to help. The story of some adventure of a member of a missionary's family—as where Bro. Pomeroy's son was overtaken by the "Blizzard;" or an account of the conversion of some heathen child similar to the little Chinese girl who came begging to be taken at the mission house in San Francisco, might be told in short, pithy sentences, with good effect. But in telling these stories two points should be constantly kept in view. Don't get your geography, and the habits of the different heathen mixed; and be sure your stories are true in point of fact. There is no room for the play of the imagination here. The story of an imaginary missionary standing on the unfriendly shores of South America and with a grievous and aching heart watching the cruel Terredeluegan mother casting her shrieking babe into the dark rolling waters of the mighty Ganges, would not have a very salutary effect upon the minds of children of average intelligence. It has been already mentioned that all this oral instruction should come in naturally. It will not do to utterly ignore the subject for 51 out of the 52 Sabbaths of the year and the come on with a talk about the need and benefit of missions and the duty of supporting them, just when you want some money. Like older people, children are apt to think that stories told them are merely told for effect, and not their benefit.

But oral instruction ought to be supplemented by reliable missionary intelligence in the shape of attractive missionary reading. There is a sad lack here in nearly all our schools. Indeed there is not a large supply of books of the kind to be obtained as there ought to be. True there are in nearly every school, if not every one—two or three small volumes of narratives of mission work, either in foreign lands or nearer home; but they are printed in equally small type that it is a trial to the eyes, if not of friendship, to read them; and then I think the most of them were written by that very voluminous author, Dr. Dry-as-dust, or some of his kindred. If you want children to read books you must have them written in an attractive style, printed in good sized type and tolerably well bound. There are excellent biographies of Harriet Neville, and Ann Hasseltine, and Sarah Boardman—the two latter the first and second wives of Dr. Judson, the famous missionary to India. There is a biography of the last wife of Dr. Judson, but it is not so well written and at any rate the ground is covered by the first two. And, in addition to this, there are several biographical sketches of eminent Methodist missionaries, both men and women, which ought to be in every Sunday school library.

Young children, however, would care for these larger works, but they ought to be supplied with reading on the subject, suited to their comprehension. It would be well, too, I think for each school to subscribe for a monthly missionary paper—say the "Heathen Woman's Friend," a very interesting paper indeed. The children instructed, the next step is to get them to work. You will, I think, find them willing enough to begin if you only show them what you want them to do, and how to do it. The children's mite boxes and other collections have formed a considerable factor in raising money for carrying on general mission work, for several years past. In one year alone, in a sister body, within the bounds of Ontario, the juvenile collections amounted to \$11,000. In England I think children have done even more than in Ontario. Generally they are zealous workers; but there are a great diversity of opinion among wise and good men and women concerning the advisability of thus employing young children, or half-grown boys and girls—particularly girls. It is urged by the advocates of the plan, that it is good practice for the children, teaches them business habits, makes them more self-reliant, and accurate, and gives them a stronger interest in the mission work to so employ them, and in addition to this, that they gather up hundreds, if not thousands of dollars, which would not otherwise be obtained. But it is urged by those who disapprove of the plan that allowing children to circulate mite boxes and subscription cards has an injurious effect upon the children, that it is ruinous to their manners, and had even to their morals; that its tendency with girls is to make them flippant and forward, and with boys to make them unbearably impudent. It is claimed that where this plan is carried out to any great extent, as in large towns and cities, it becomes an absolute nuisance; that from the time the cards or boxes are given out till they are called in, one can scarcely see or speak to a child on the street over seven without being dunned for five or ten cents. Indeed that you can scarcely call on the most casual acquaintance without the process being repeated in the house, and that it is a vexation tax upon those who have already given liberally. I have known numbers of earnest Christian mothers who would not suffer their little daughters to have a mite-box, or circulate a card, for these reasons given. I think this view rather an exaggerated one, but yet I know that there is a good deal of truth in it, too. Another and perhaps a better plan of interesting children and securing their co-operation in this work is the organization of juvenile missionary circles, officered by the children themselves, but under the general supervision of some judicious grown person. Let the little people manage their own affairs—subject to advice. Let them do all their own work, keeping the records, and having charge of their own money; give them receipts for every cent they pay either to the Missionary Society or for incidentals; encourage them to hold monthly concerts, and let it be the business of their seniors to supply the circles with reliable intelligence from the mission they are helping. Has the money they have last sent been applied on the church at Marias, or at Morris, or elsewhere? Tell them so. Thenceforth they will feel a sort of proprietorship in that church, and take more interest in helping to sustain it. Try, in every proper way, to have them make their concert a success so far as the carrying out of a good programme is concerned. Encourage and help them in making it a financial success, by your presence at them and liberal contributions to the collection which they will take up at the close. Don't, for your own sake and the children's, permit Alexander the coppersmith to occupy any of the seats appropriated to the grown up people. Then there are in every locality timid children, who would like to do something in an unobtrusive way, but who could not be persuaded to circulate a subscription or take any active part in a circle, and who, from timidity, would fail if they tried. Give them some easy work, suited to their years and sex, which they may do in the hours allotted to amusement, and pay them honest prices for the work so done. There are numbers of little girls so sensitive that they would rather earn ten cents than solicit five; and their extreme sensitiveness out not to be ridiculed. There are none too many retiring children in this age. I have only briefly suggested to you an outline of a few of the many plans which might be adopted in, first, gaining the interest of the children of the church in missionary work, and afterward retaining that interest. I have not referred to any of the plans for this object which will be carried out in the observance of "Children's Day;" for these plans are as yet not perfected, and it would, therefore, be unwise to discuss them. In conclusion, then, I would say it would have the children truly interested in the missionary cause, we must so present the fundamental truths contained in each Sunday's lesson, as to lead each child to have an earnest desire for his or her own personal salvation. If the children are once truly converted—not merely led to say, or sing, that they "love Jesus"—every S. S. child does, in an accommodated sense, love Jesus, but if their little hearts are really renewed, and if their conversion is followed by judicious watch-care on the part of those under whose charge they are, we need not fear for their continued interest in this department of christian work; it will follow as naturally as summer follows spring.

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