

Symposium.

How to get Young People Interested in the Work of the Church.

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THE question of interesting our young people in the Church's work is a live question, and has been for some years. That this is recognized by older members of the Church, especially by office bearers, is itself a sign of spiritual quickening, which is cheering, and augurs well for the future of the Church of Christ, in its many branches. For a long time, far too long indeed, the Church seemed unaware of the immense power for good which was latent among her young people. She appeared to have forgotten that the old prophecy of spiritual enlargement was for the younger, as well as the older, members of her fold. "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." And, as a consequence, this spiritual power being unemployed had no result. But these later years have witnessed a very great change. The younger members of the Church are now receiving every attention and care, with a view to their being trained for the Christian life, and for the service of Christ. Here is the Christian Endeavor movement, the Order of the King's Daughters, and of the King's Sons, the Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip, etc., all of which are doing much good. And we wish them all God speed in every good word and work. But there is a very, very large number of young people not reached by any or all of these agencies, and the burning question is, how they may be saved from falling into indifference, and brought into touch with the life and work of the Church.

The answer to this question does not, in our opinion, call for the formation of any new society, with attractive name, and novel devices. In fact, while we welcome the co-operation of societies, which have for their object the drawing of young people from the ranks of worldlings, and enlisting their sympathy in the Christian life, and in good works, we have no hesitation in affirming our conviction of the entire sufficiency of the Church and her ordinances to accomplish everything aimed at by all the newer organizations of recent years. The only thing needful is wise administration and adaptation, combined with careful and prayerful oversight, on the part of the sessions.

The best organization, and the most effectual means whereby our young people can be interested in the Church's work is the Sabbath school, which may be called, in a sense, the children's church. This institution, which is now more than one hundred years old, has been, and is being, greatly owned and blessed of the Lord, in the spiritual enlightenment of the young. Indeed, the possibilities of the Sabbath school, as an agency for the instruction and quickening of the spiritual life of the young, can hardly be over-estimated. Of course, it is implied that the Sabbath school is efficiently conducted. Examples of this could be multiplied. A couple will suffice. The late Dr. James Robertson, of Edinburgh, was wont to relate, even to his dying day, how, "through God's mercy, he received from his Sabbath school teacher, the first sacred impressions he could recall of the tremendous importance of the Gospel, and the necessity of a real, vital union with the Saviour it reveals; and how, in after years, he used to go and sit on her grave, and think about it with grateful emotion." Some years ago, a mother had much trouble with a son, who attended a Sabbath school in Montreal. In the end he ran away from home, when not more than fourteen years of age, and took to a sea-faring life. When sailing in the Mediterranean he used to pace the deck, night after night, thinking of the hymns and lessons he learned in the Sabbath school. He is now in the Christian ministry. Neither his mother nor his teacher ever dreamed of such a happy issue. But the Spirit had sealed the truth in his heart, and the result was sure.

We do not wish in thus speaking to convey the impression that the Sabbath school is the only, or even the chief, means of impressing these young people. Parental instruction, the faithful fulfilment of baptismal obligations, is the divinely ordained means for rearing the young in the fear

of God. Nor is the kindly oversight, nor pulpit ministrations of the pastor without great effect. All are needful, and helpful, and potent, and, together with God's help, should go far, surely, in saving our young people to the Church.

It is not at all difficult to keep the younger scholars in the Sabbath school fold. But when they grow older, they appear to become restive, and impatient of restraint. It will be generally conceded, we think, that if our young people can be kept attached to the Sabbath school during their "teens," they will most likely be preserved from a careless life, and become useful members of the Church. Now, how shall this be done? We take the liberty of suggesting some directions which may contribute thereto.

1. A senior class should be formed in every school, into which scholars of fifteen years of age and upward can be drafted. With boys more especially, the whole question hinges upon bigness. They conceive the idea that the Sabbath School is for children, and that when they reach the stature of five feet or so, it is inconsistent with their dignity to remain, consequently they go. And, alas, too often all they have learned, and all the good impressions they have hitherto received seem to be like "the morning cloud, and the dew that goeth early away." They are too old to mingle with the junior classes, and too young for the adult class, and there being no place for them, they leave the school. Now, the senior class is the missing link. And, moreover, it is the most difficult link to supply. The teacher of a senior class will have the hardest post in the school. To hold restless boys in their teens requires a man of very special gifts. One gift of the greatest importance is a ready sympathy. He must be able to understand the thoughts and aspirations of youth, to identify himself with them so far that they will trust him and follow his counsels. He must be a man of quick perception, of fact, with a character which is stainless. The scholars will be quick to discern whether the man is behind his words. And he must be somewhat of an enthusiast, for youth likes enthusiasm, which, directed in the proper channel, is thus made a power for good.

2. An adult class should also be formed, into which these seniors could go, once they arrive at the age of twenty or twenty-two. This forms a natural and easy gradation, which is at once pleasing and attractive to the young. It gives them something to look forward to: they feel they are making progress.

3. Again, the character and method of instruction are most important. Very young children must be taught differently from juniors, and juniors from seniors. The teaching must be adapted to the capacity of the scholar, should be of the most practical character, replete with appropriate illustration.

4. Impress upon them the fact of their membership in the Church, that as members they are "subject to its government and discipline." Do not make use of the unmeaning tautology of "joining the Church," of which they were made members at baptism. But urge them, at the proper time, to enter "into full communion with the Church."

5. Let the young people be clearly informed of the work their Church is doing at home and abroad. In this way they will become intelligent, loyal, and interested members.

6. Give them some specific Christian work to do. Do you ask what they can do? Almost anything, is the answer. A little girl scarce nine years of age, in Ottawa, used to take some warm soup, and other nourishment, to a poor labourer's wife near her home, on her little winter sled. She also got a dress for a poor girl to attend the Sabbath school.

The weakest point in all our Sabbath school work has been just at the age at which our young people leave the school. Let us make that strong, the strongest of all, and we shall keep our young people within the Church fold, and interest them in its work. We have really left them unprovided for: and that is the reason they have gone. Let us make amends for the past, and promptly lay our hand upon the weak spot and strengthen it. And, ever in utter dependence upon the spirit of truth, we shall have the joy of seeing our young people consecrating themselves early to the Lord, and thus becoming a strength and a glory to the Church.