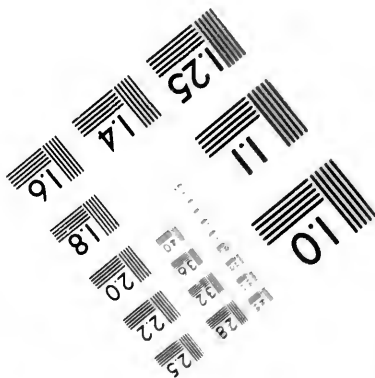
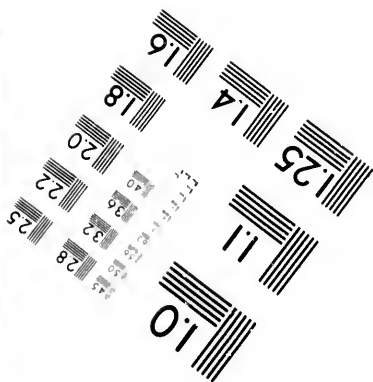
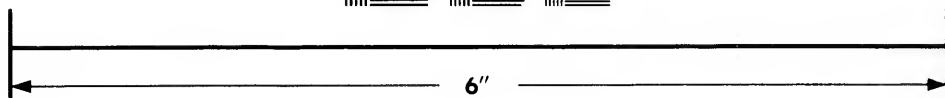
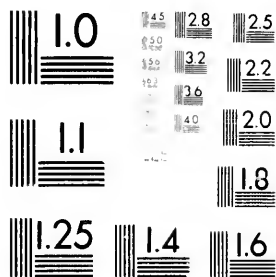


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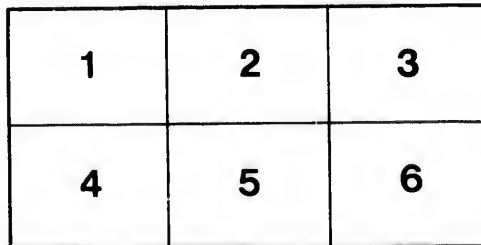
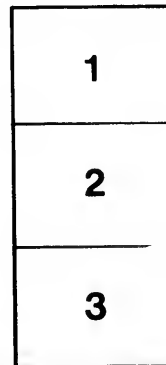
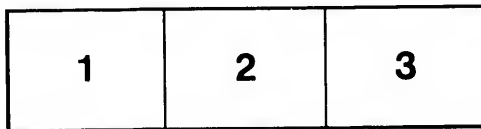
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THE
CHURCH AND THE BOYS

BY

REV. J. V. SMITH

"Knowing the great, continued and progressing work among THE BOYS in Dundas Street Centre Methodist Church, London, Ontario, during the three years' pastorate of the Rev. J. V. Smith, and believing that what has been done in one place can, by God's blessing upon earnest intelligent endeavor, be done in another, we, with others, have requested him to furnish in the following pages an account of this marvellous work, which we commend to boys, pastors, parents and all interested in youth. Many ask, 'How shall we reach the young men?' This question can be satisfactorily solved by answering the question, as has been done by the author and his church, '*How shall we reach the boys?*'

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THE CHURCH AND THE BOYS.

OBJECT.

THE object for which these pages are written is to emphasize the duty of the Church to promote, in every possible way, the spiritual welfare of "The Boys." At the outset we wish it to be distinctly understood that every argument and fact which may be brought forward in these pages will apply with equal force to the conversion and religious nurture of the girls as well as the boys, yet, for special reasons, we call the attention of the Christian Church to the latter, as their early conversion and training in the things of God will, unquestionably, lay the foundation for glorious results in the immediate future.

The great Edmund Burke exhibited the sagacity of a philosopher, as well as that of a statesman, when, on advocating an educational reform before Parliament, he said:—"We must begin with the children themselves; though the mind of a child is as impressionable as wax, when an impression is once made there it is as durable as if it were made upon iron. Teach

the truth to the children of the realm, and, ere long, all the people will love the truth." These noble words do honor to the illustrious man who uttered them. Let the Church of God teach the truth as it is in Jesus to the boys of this country, and, ere long, they will be "living epistles, known and read of all men."

LATENT SCEPTICISM.

In discussing this important subject let me ask a question of practical and far-reaching importance:—Has the Church of Christ to-day an *enthusiastic belief* in the conversion of boys, and is she putting forth honest efforts in that direction? It is to be feared that there is a great deal of latent scepticism in many of our hearts respecting the conversion of a boy. Do we sufficiently realize for *practical purposes* that a boy of eight or ten years of age needs the converting grace of God, unless through early training he has previously been led to trust, love, and obey Christ? And yet this must be the basis of all religious instruction for children as well as adults. Is there not a failure of recognition on the part of the Church of the responsibility of the boy for his early acceptance of Christ, and for which he is already accountable? Is there not a great deal of practical infidelity in this matter, and are we not committing a serious blunder—to use no stronger term—in look-

ing for the conversion of our boys at eighteen rather than at eight? If they are not converted before their hearts are hardened by sin, and while they are surrounded by the salutary influences of home and school, what reason is there to hope that they will be converted after they have passed from under these influences into those of a godless world? Does not reason add its voice to that of revelation, and urge us to make every possible effort to induce them to "lend their youth a sacred clue to find the crucified."

PRESENT STATE OF OPINION.

Opinion in regard to the early conversion of the boy is undergoing what we may term a very gracious modification. The day is not very far gone when religious people looked with a great deal of doubt and misgiving at the manifestation of juvenile piety. It was thought to betoken an early death or a wicked life. That abominable saying, "A young saint, an old devil" was not altogether disbelieved. Thank God, that monstrous doctrine is buried in a grave sevenfold deep without any hope of resurrection. Yet, amid all the evangelical splendor which is glorifying the evening of the nineteenth century, in almost every church there will be found certain individuals calling themselves Christians who are anything but enthusiastic upon the glorious doctrine of "Early Conversion." They think that these little

ones may be the subjects of restraining grace, but it is very questionable if renewing grace can find its way into their hearts. Moreover, it is a most melancholy fact that in these days, when the boy is coming to the front, many Christian parents do not strenuously aim at, nor sincerely expect, the conversion of their children in the days of their youth. How few fathers and mothers try to lead their boys to Christ at once. They imagine that at some future time they may make a better and more intelligent choice, just as if a better choice could be made. And so the boy instinctively discovers that it is not expected, perhaps not desired, that he should become a decided Christian at present; and, as a natural consequence, he begins to take his first lessons in procrastination, and learns the lesson only too well. He begins to resist the gracious strivings of the Spirit; he becomes familiar with saving truth, without any experience of it in his heart, or any desire to embody it in his life, so that that which might have been a savor of life unto life becomes a savor of death unto death.

INQUISITORIAL TESTS.

Again, it has often happened that boys who have given their hearts to God have been almost hopelessly discouraged in their religious life by forcing upon them tests of character that are unsuited to their age. Many an old Christian has, thoughtlessly,

played the role of the inquisitor here. There is an immense injustice done to the boy by Christian parents and others in this matter, who have really no other design than to be faithful. For example: The boy loses his temper in some matter in which he has been crossed, and, forthwith, the conclusion is sprung upon him that he has a bad heart, and is no Christian. It is no part of our programme to apologize for wrong-doing; but we wonder how these very Christians who force such exacting conclusions upon the youthful offender would fare themselves, if tested by the same rule. The sins of children are ingenuous and open; and, on that account, are to be less severely judged. The sins of manhood are sins of gravity, prudence, and self-seeking; but they are not any the more consistent with piety on that account. If a boy be wholly perverse and runs squarely against the claims of duty, if he persistently turns away from all religious things, it will be nothing more than just to tell him that he has forfeited the right to claim the honors of Christian discipleship. But if he loves religious things, and tries to live obedient to the will of God, then it is our duty to show him how tenderly God regards him, how ready and willing He is to forgive him when he stumbles and falls. Let boys be judged as boys, and let them not be totally discouraged in their efforts to live a Christian life, because they falter as older people do, only in a less

grievous way. We may receive it as an axiom that all children need to be reprov'd. Even to those who have been truly converted to God, it may be a proof of the highest kindness to point out their practical errors and faults from day to day; but words of praise and encouragement, fitly spoken, will be found to have a much more salutary effect.

INFIRMITIES.

It is admitted on all hands that there are, even in adult believers, what some are pleas'd to call "sins of infirmity," that is to say, acts which are to be blamed and avoided, but yet are not altogether inconsistent with a state of general peace and acceptance with God. Either this principle must be admitted, or we shall fill the minds of many of the excellent of the earth with perplexity, doubt, and fear. Are we, then, to look for a type of piety in the boy in which no infirmity will appear? That would be discriminating, with a vengeance, against the piety of childhood. Religion was never intended to make a boy a grave, sedate, and calculating man. Much of that which is set down as improper in his character is the natural result of the buoyancy and flow of his animal spirits, his limited information, and almost total want of experience. All these faults are to be corrected, not by a carping, censorious, uncharitable spirit, making the service of God

as repulsive and the road to heaven as rough as possible, not by withholding from them the consolations and hopes of the Gospel ; but by a faith which works by love, a charity which looks after their interests with unceasing vigilance, and a sympathy which pours into their minds floods of evangelical light, until in understanding they become men, and are led to "put away childish things."

PLAYGROUND AND PRAYER-MEETING.

It would have saved a world of misconception and doubt if the people of God had only stopped to think that the religion of the boy, when genuine and healthy, will differ in some respects from that of the man of mature years. The grace of God ought not, and will not, divorce the boy from the boy. It was never intended to rob him of the very bloom and crown of life's young morning—the happy, bounding life which knows no care, and "takes no thought of the morrow." It is a mischievous blunder to think that there is nothing good in a boy if he is without the thoughtfulness of the sage and the gravity of the prophet. The trend of such ignorant prejudice has been to repress the Godward aspirations of the soul, and lead the young mind to think that only sick people, and quiet, orderly, elderly people can practise religion. If your boy be healthy and happy in his feelings he will want to run and leap, and shout and

sing ; and if he is to grow up into a strong, robust manhood, physically and mentally, he must do so. But all this is perfectly compatible with the love of the Saviour and a good conscience. There is no necessary antagonism between the playground and the prayer-meeting. The one is just as necessary for physical, as the other is for spiritual, growth. By all means don't crib, cabin and confine the irrepres- sible vivacity of the boy. Give him the liberty which youthful blood honestly claims ; let him under- stand that religion will make him happier and better in all the relations of life ; direct the outrushing energies of his soul into every legitimate channel of recreation and work, and he will love God and the cause of God all the more.

ONLY A BOY.

If these things are so, how is it that the Church is not making a *supreme effort* for the conversion of the boys, and seeking, by *special oversight and care*, to train them for valiant service in the cause of Christ ? No work would give more satisfactory and glorious results. Any one who has given the subject any practical attention, knows that it is much easier to lead a boy ten years of age to Christ than it is to lead a young man of twenty. In our evangelistic services we think that a great thing has been done when a young man has been induced to give his

heart to God—and so it is ; but if a boy ten years of age presents himself as a seeker of religion, the too general verdict is, “O it’s only a boy; he doesn’t count for much! It’s the grown-up men and women we are after. They are the best fruits of a revival. A revival that begins and ends with children don’t amount to much.” If there be a doctrine of the devil under the sun, surely it is the wicked maxim we often hear that a converted boy of eight or ten years of age don’t amount to much. “Only a boy converted,” you say, giving us the impression that he who labors specifically for the conversion of a boy will not stand a good chance of having his name blazoned on the archives of time as being mighty in Christian achievement—what a miserable misconception of the splendid possibilities wrapped up in consecrated youth. I am persuaded that no work will appear more important in the light of eternity, when “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”

A SUGGESTIVE SUPPOSITION.

Supposing Francis Voltaire, Thomas Paine, David Hume, or any of the dark infidel horde, whose works have flung the shadow of despair over thousands of lives, had been converted when boys, what a “multitude of sins would have been covered,” and how many now lost might have been standing without

fault before the throne of God. And yet, if Tom Paine had been converted at ten years of age, some one would have shrugged his shoulders and said, "O it's only a boy that has been converted; he doesn't amount to much!" What right has any man to so enormously discount the value of early conversion? Is it not, in many instances, a miserable expedient to evade the Master's plain and positive command, "Feed My lambs?" Do your duty by that young convert, and you will not be long in discovering what a stupid blunder you made in saying, "'Tis only a boy; he doesn't amount to much." Nothing will amount to much, I admit, which comes into being weak and helpless, unless it receives the nurture and care which its circumstances demand. Here is a boy converted at ten years of age; give him as many more years of solid care and training in God's service, and, all other things being equal, he will, for stability of character and Christian service, be worth half-a-dozen of your young men converted at twenty-one. Moreover, the very effort put forth in caring for the boy will be a blessed means of grace to the Church in general, and to those who have direct charge of that work in particular. "Only a boy," you say; just so, but Joseph, and Samuel, and Josiah, and Daniel, and Timothy were boys, yet what magnificent men they became.

FACTS WORTH KNOWING.

Three boys were converted in Yorkshire: one eight, one nine, and another eleven years of age. Only three boys, I admit, and small boys at that, but look at these boys to-day; John Walton, a distinguished missionary of the Cross, and now one of the ex-Presidents of the great Wesleyan Conference in England; Joseph Spencer, an eminent minister, whose memory is fragrant in spiritual achievement; Charles Fish, an honored member of the Toronto Conference of the Methodist Church, who has been specially honored of God in the marvellous success which has attended his ministry in leading multitudes of souls to Christ. Supposing that these three lads had been discouraged by the Church, and allowed to drift into a life of sin, what a wealth of Christian service would have been lost to the Church and the world.

WHAT CAN AND WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE.

If an honest effort be put forth, I know of no reason why every boy in our Sunday-schools should not be soundly converted to God. I am sure that if an effort were made worthy of the glorious results that would follow, we would have multitudes of boys and girls inquiring the way to Zion. And if these were cared for as God demands that they should be, it would not be many years before we should have

such an army of soul-winners as the world has never seen. This is no vision of a disordered brain, but a glorious possibility, which is already being partially realized by the Church. Now, here are a number of young boys who desire to be Christians; their hearts have been touched with the love of God. What shall we do with them? How can we best husband the good work begun in these youthful hearts? There are, no doubt, many ways by which we can help them in their religious life; but, somehow, we are often biased by our early experiences, especially if that experience was satisfactory, and as these pages are written from the standpoint of a Methodist minister, it is not necessary to offer any apology for advocating a means of religious oversight which has been attended with such gracious results during the whole of our history as a Church.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

When a boy about twelve, the writer was making rapid strides in the school of sin.

“I was a wandering sheep,
And would not be controlled;”

but at that time some evangelistic services were being conducted in the church which I attended. Very soon some of my associates were converted. After much entreaty and prayer on their part, and

also on the part of others, I resolved to "turn over a new leaf" and give myself to Christ. The services closed, and a number of boys, ten to thirteen years of age, were gathered into a class. That simple act conserved and consolidated the good work begun in the hearts of those lads, without which, in all probability, their religious impressions would have been ephemeral, and would have passed away, like the morning cloud and the early dew. Some four years ago, while on a visit to the land of my fathers, I came across my old class-leader, and, in the course of a conversation about our early relations, he said, "I often felt much discouraged in looking after you lads. Sometimes I felt tempted to give up the work, for doubts would creep into my mind as to whether anything would ever come out of it or not. It seemed such a long time to watch and care for you until you became young men. But I want to say, now that I have seen what kind of men most of you have become, that I never, in all my Christian life, put in work for God which has given me greater satisfaction, and, apparently, done more for the cause of Christ than when I was looking after you lads." To the leader of that class I owe an unspeakable debt of gratitude. He was my Joshua who led me into the Canaan of Christian manhood. Feeling, as I do, that such methods of faithful Christian oversight were the means of unspeakable blessing to myself,

as well as to others equally young and inexperienced, it is no wonder that I look to that particular method as one of the very best means of grace for conserving and developing Christian life in the boy.

CLASS NO. 13.

For months the writer has been importuned, by a number of ministers and others, to give to the public a plain, unvarnished account of a very gracious work which is going on among the boys of this church—Dundas Street Centre, Methodist, London—where he is now winding up his pastoral term; and probably the record will come in here as appropriately as anywhere else. Three years ago, at the close of a successful series of special services held in this church, conducted by the well-known evangelists Revs. H. T. Crossley and J. E. Hunter, a class of boys, such as I have already described, was organized, and at the first meeting exactly ten boys were present. Their names could be given, if necessary. The class, which is known in this church as "Class No. 13," has just finished the third year of its life; and, as its record is so remarkable and instructive, no apology is needed for pointing out some of the things which have, unquestionably, contributed to its wonderful success. At the end of the first year the average attendance was twenty-one; at the end of the second year the average attendance had risen to seventy-five,

and now, at the end of its third year, the average attendance has gone up to one hundred, whilst a supplementary class has been established, with an average attendance of twenty-eight.

THE KIND OF MAN WANTED.

It is unnecessary to say that the success of this work depends, very largely, upon the character and fitness of the man in charge. The question is often asked, What kind of a man is best fitted for the work? What are the essential qualities which ought to predominate in his character? It is easier to ask than answer such questions, but proceeding upon what experience and observation has taught me, I would say:—He must, first of all, be a man whose piety and Christian integrity cannot, for a moment, be called in question. Boys have proverbially sharp eyes, and can quickly detect a weakness or a flaw in Christian character. He must be a man of strong common sense, for he will often be called upon to express an opinion on questions of great practical importance, and his opinion may have a far-reaching influence upon the character and lives of the boys to whom he ministers. He must have a genuine sympathy with youthful life, and a keen appreciation of the temptations and dangers peculiar to boyhood, so that his admonitions, warnings and encouragements may all tend to the most satisfactory results. He must

be able to present clear, clean-cut statements of what Christ requires from those who profess to be His followers. If there be any time when Christian ethics and dogmatic theology can be taught to advantage, it is to the boy of from ten to fifteen years of age. He must be a strict disciplinarian, and must insist on the maintenance of such deportment during the service as becomes the followers of Christ. The Apostolic injunction, "Let everything be done decently and in order" has special application to the proper and successful management of a class of fifty or one hundred boys. He must be prompt, bright and wide-awake in conducting the meetings from week to week. Nature does not abhor a vacuum more than a boy does a dull, prosaic service. He must be able to guide and direct the energies of the boys into appropriate spheres of Christian endeavor. Youth is ambitious, and when the spirit to "do something" is judiciously encouraged and directed, blessed results are sure to follow. Lastly, he must have an enthusiastic belief in the magnificent possibilities wrapped up in a boy, so that in hours of discouragement he will neither waver nor weary in his work. But, you say, such men are few and far between, and in many a church not one could be found. Perhaps so, but so much the worse for the church. I am persuaded, however, that there are dozens of men among the thousands of our Israel

who are well fitted for a work of this kind, than which I know of nothing grander. Whether Mr. Fred. W. Matthews, who has charge of the work here, possesses all the qualifications I have enumerated, is not for me to say. If I were writing his *obituary* I might be more explicit. The settlement of that question can very well be left to those who know the man and his work. He proceeds, however, upon the principle that no valuable results can be attained without lots of hard work, and is not slow to adopt any means which sanctified common sense may suggest as tending to promote the religious welfare of the boys.

METHODS.

In leading the class no names are called; all "experiences" are *voluntary*, and all "experiences" are *up to date*. Their testimony for Christ comes "bubbling up fresh and warm, like a geyser in the soul." Members of the class who are not able to attend through press of business, or other circumstances, are encouraged to put their experiences in writing; these are read to the class, thereby securing the next best substitute for the member's presence. By this method the absent member is benefited in "taking stock" of his religious condition, whilst the class has the benefit of his written testimony. If such a system were resorted to in many of our adult classes,

where absentees are generally in the majority, it would not be without very marked results for good. The correspondence of the leader with the boys sums up to about 1,000 communications in a year. These letters are not alone to absentees, but, in very many instances, they are to members who need encouragement, advice or admonition. A letter is often of more value in its immediate results upon the religious life of a boy than a casual word by the way. He will read it over and think it over again and again, and generally it will be a savor of life unto life. Boys connected with this class who have removed to various towns and cities in this country and the adjoining Republic are not lost sight of. Communication is still kept up with them to a greater or lesser extent, and their correspondence to the leader, which is generally of a religious nature, describing how they are succeeding in the Christian life, is read to the class, and forms a very interesting part of the service, the boys at home being stimulated by the clear, ringing testimonies of the boys abroad. The class is divided into sections, chiefly for visiting purposes. Each section has a leader, whose duty it is to look after the member of his section, and to see that, as far as possible, they are present at this particular means of grace, the leader of the class, however, maintaining a general oversight of the whole. A factor that must not be lost sight of is the

encouragement which the leader has received from the officers and members of the church, and, more particularly, from the young-men portion of the class, than whom there are none more faithful in their allegiance to their class-leader. They can be relied upon with certainty to be present at the meetings, and have always exhibited a willingness to sacrifice self and the demands of social pleasure for the privilege of enjoying and helping on this particular means of grace which they thus so heartily support. Each member is also expected to sign a pledge promising to abstain from the use of tobacco and all kinds of intoxicating liquors. A duplicate of this pledge is kept by the leader.* A very important feature of this work is the prayer-meeting, which is held on an average of about once in two weeks during the Fall and Winter months, at the residence of the leader. This meeting does not take the place of the class-meeting, but is an extra service for a *special purpose*. As the room is limited, the boys come to the meeting by personal invitation, and just as many are invited as can be comfortably accommodated. The specific object of these meetings is to

*LONDON.....18

I,, a member of Class No. 13, Dundas Street Centre Methodist Church, do hereby promise that I will, from the above date, abstain, by the help of Almighty God, from the use of spirituous liquors as a beverage, and also from the use of tobacco.

win souls for Christ ; boys who are seriously disposed are there by special invitation, whilst the leader and others seek, by prayer and a simple exposition of the plan of salvation, to bring them to Christian decision ; and, be it said, to the praise and glory of God, that through this simple means a large number have been led to Christ, and have developed into a steadfast Christian life. In this work the leader has been nobly assisted by his excellent Christian wife, who is one of the "elect ladies" of Christ's visible Church. On every occasion she extends such a welcome as cannot fail to make every one entirely at ease in her bright, cheerful home, generally offering them refreshments in some pleasant form, before bidding each a hearty good-bye. And here let me say, that such kindly interest will neither be forgotten by the boys, nor by Him who will say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

RESULTS.

So far as the religious character and growth of the class is concerned, having had the privilege of watching it carefully for nearly three years, I must say that on these vital and all-important matters it is no less satisfactory than its numerical growth. It is nothing less than an inspiration to listen to the fresh, bright, clear testimonies which follow each other in

quick succession, from the beginning to the end of the meeting, whilst the heartiness of their singing never fails to stir the better angels of our nature. Out of such a religious firmament as this there will, unquestionably, arise many "a shining light, to chase the gloom of hellish night." The supplementary class, which has recently been established, is largely the garnered result of special services conducted a few months ago by Rev. D. O. Crossley and the pastor. This class is under the management of Mr. W. L. Judson—a man who is fully consecrated to the glorious work he has so cheerfully and hope-fully undertaken; and, no doubt, blessed results will follow his prayerful efforts to feed the lambs of the underfold. It is being conducted on very much the same lines as the one of which we have spoken, and there are already indications that it will bring forth fruit an hundredfold.

A SOLEMN QUESTION.

We are sometimes asked, "How can we save the young men?" This is one of the most solemn questions with which the Church of Christ will have to grapple before the days of millennial glory will dawn upon her. But I reply, Is not this work here among the boys, and the means by which it is accomplished in these classes, a practical solution of that momentous question? It, certainly, has solved the question

to a very great extent in this Church, and what is being done here can be done everywhere ; and if it *were* done everywhere, I venture to predict that the Church of God would enter upon an era of numerical and spiritual prosperity tenfold more glorious than anything she has ever experienced. If our youth are not saved before they leave their teens—aye, before they are far advanced in their teens—the probability of their conversion becomes exceedingly doubtful. There never was a period in the history of the world when it was more important for a boy to start out with fixed religious principles, and stick to them at all hazards, than the present. The temptations to wrong-doing are so numerous, so subtle, and so strong, that nothing but the grace of God can save them from making a total wreck of life. The great majority of young men to-day are on the down-grade, drifting to moral bankruptcy, and, in not a few cases, have touched the rock-bottom of human depravity.

A BAD SHOWING.

Some time ago, the question was asked in the Republic on our southern border, "What is the severe truth as to the actual condition of morals among our young men, taken as a mass—East, West, North, and South?" In the answer which was furnished to that question by the National Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, we are

told that but five per cent. of the young men throughout the land are members of the Church; that only fifteen per cent. attend the Church with any degree of regularity; and that seventy-five per cent. never attend any church at all. This is not simply a guess of mine; but the careful, sober, and alarming conclusion of that great National Committee. To this very discouraging fact there is another, that of the young men who are in communion with the Church, not more than half of them can be relied upon for active service in evangelical work. Here, then, we have seventy-five out of every hundred who do not attend any church; ninety-five out of every hundred who do not belong to any church; and, at least, ninety-seven out of every hundred who are carrying no cross, and bearing no burden for the salvation of men and the glory of God. There is no doubt but that we could furnish a much better showing in the matter of church membership and church attendance in the Protestant community of Canada, though we have nothing to boast of here; and the most optimistic will admit that there is plenty of room for improvement. But this state of things, which we have described, in a professedly Christian country is simply astounding, and, for the moment, will stagger the most hopeful worker for Christ. If the outlook be sad on the one hand, it is suggestive on the other. Do not these appalling facts *emphasize the supreme*

importance of the early conversion of the boy, and the still greater importance of watching over him with tireless care after he is converted? Lord Shaftesbury stated in a public meeting in London that, from personal observation, he had ascertained that of the adult male criminals of that city, nearly all had fallen into a course of crime between the ages of eight and sixteen years, and that if a young man lived an honest life up to the time he was twenty years of age, there were forty-nine chances in his favor, and only one against him, of living an honorable life thereafter. From eight to sixteen! Oh, what important years are these! Let a boy start right at eight, or earlier, and keep right through his teens, and I venture to say that the devil's chances are not very bright for catching him after that.

IF NOT CONVERTED, WHAT THEN?

But if our boys are not converted and cared for in the days of their youth, what then? In all likelihood there will be a great deal of the "far country" experience in their lives. They will wander away from Christ and Heaven. Sorrow and shame will follow in the wake of sin, and many a heart will feel the bitterness of death. Let the boys of our more influential families pass through school and college, and enter upon their several professions and avocations in life without experiencing the converting

grace of God, and how comparatively few are won to a life of consecration to the Saviour after that. We hold our special services week after week every year, but how few from the higher callings are gathered into the fold of Christ. In the great majority of cases their culture and service are lost to the Christian Church. If the best talent and the widest social influence embodied in the rising generation are to be secured for Christ and to enrich His spiritual heritage on earth, then the Church of God must not shut her eyes to the day of her opportunity, but must look to the boys of to-day for the men who are to stand at the helm to-morrow. There is no doubt but that it comes within the range of Gospel privilege to be so trained up in the nurture of the Lord that the boy may never know the time when he was not conscious of the love of God shed abroad in his heart. While some have had, happily, an experience of this kind, it must be admitted that it is very exceptional. The great majority of boys grow up into the knowledge of conscious departure from God by acts of voluntary transgression, and, if this tendency of the degenerate heart to "wander wide from the central point of bliss" be not early restrained by the converting grace of God, what reasonable expectation of moral and spiritual reformation can be cherished after the habits of wrong-doing become rooted and grounded in life and character? The adversary of souls is doing

his utmost to usurp possession of the boys, and by a thousand subtle devices he seeks to ensnare and ruin them.

BID THEM WELCOME.

Every Church ought to have for its motto "The Boys for Christ." The noblest efforts of which we are capable ought to be put forth to induce them in early life to become members of the Church militant, and let the Church give them a right-royal welcome. Why not? If the heart of Christ is open to receive them, who has any authority to close the doors of the Church against them? Why have we so many instances of youthful piety in the Bible, if not to assure us, by the most ample and satisfactory evidence, that these boys are entitled to all the rights of Christian citizenship in the Kingdom of Christ; whilst, in addition to Scriptural statement and illustration, the annals of the Church contain a glorious record of youthful biography abounding in examples of personal consecration to Christ? Many good people tell us not to be in too great a hurry in this matter. They say, "Wait awhile, till these 'striplings' understand the plan of salvation better. Give them time to act intelligently. Don't push them into the fold of Christ until they know all about it." There is no such doctrine taught nor advice offered in the Bible. On the contrary, we are

encouraged by many a loving precept and cheering example to preach the glad evangel:—"I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me." And the sooner the better. The Gospel of Christ involves no conditions that a lad of tender years cannot fulfil, nor does it impose any duties that he cannot perform. He can trust its promises, enjoy its blessings, and look joyfully forward to its eternal rewards. It has been very well said that "there are very few children in the primary departments of our Sabbath-schools that do not know more about Christ than the two families first gathered into the Christian Church in Europe, namely, the family of Lydia, and the family of the Philippian jailer, all of whom were baptized after hearing their first gospel sermon." The jailer was a hardened heathen at sunset, a baptized Christian at dawn—so few and simple are the beliefs, about persons and facts, not philosophies, that Paul counted necessary conditions to enter the school of Christ. Thank God for the simplicity of the Gospel. The story of the cross, though it embodies mysteries into which the angels desire to look—mysteries which baffle the profoundest thought of sanctified genius—yet in its clear and simple outline it is capable of being understood by the Samuels and Timothys of every age. If as Protestants we were as wise in our generation as the Church of Rome in looking after the children; if we sought to mould

their plastic minds according to the Divine pattern which Christ has given us, what an era of prosperity we would enter upon. Cardinal Wiseman was not beside himself, but spoke the words of truth and soberness, when he said, "Give us the children, and you (Protestants) may take the adults." I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I venture to affirm that the Church that is the most active and successful in laying hold of the boys and girls, and training them for the Lord, will be the most powerful Church in the next generation. It is a matter of secondary importance who goes forward in this divine enterprise, so long as the work is done. But, as Methodists, we should have a holy ambition to do our full share of this Christ-like work, and let all the other Churches join hand in hand in the glorious endeavor. The poet Gray, when standing in the village churchyard, and musing on the undeveloped possibilities of many who sleep beneath the green hillocks around him, is led to say,

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire ;
 Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
 Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre ;

"Some village-Hampden, that, with dauntless breast,
 The little tyrant of his fields withstood ;
 Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest,
 Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood."

So as we stand, not amid men and women who have laid down the burden of life and now sleep quietly in the tomb, but amid young immortals who are just taking up the burdens and responsibilities of life, we cannot help thinking that if the moral and spiritual forces locked up in the lives of these converted boys are properly nurtured and directed, what glorious possibilities may lie within the reach of many of them. If in our village churchyards there are sleeping those to-day who, had their opportunities and circumstances been different, would have rivalled the patriotism of Hampden, the courage of Cromwell, or the genius of Milton, may there not be numbers among the ranks of our converted youth who, if their latent powers of thought and action are properly directed, may yet rank with the noblest men the Church of God has ever known?

WHAT MAY BE.

Looking into the faces, and listening to the honest testimonies of these young soldiers of the cross, inspiring thoughts of the future have often blazed and burned, like a glorious vision in the inner sanctuary of my soul. Again and again the question has forced itself upon me, May there not be among these boys a Calvert or a Hunt who turned the wilderness of Fiji into a fruitful field, and converted cannibal ovens into Christian churches? May there not be a Carey,

a Wilson, or a Duff, who will shake the hoary superstitions of India, and point out to her benighted millions the only way to heaven? May there not be a Vanderkemp, a Barnabas Shaw, or a Livingstone, who will lift up the torch of truth, and wave it wide through the moral midnight of the Dark Continent? May there not be a Samuel Marsden or a Samuel Leigh, who will carry the evangel of peace and love to the fierce tribes who riot in bloodshed beneath the Southern Cross? May there not be a Charles Wheeler, who will plant the standard of salvation on the banks of many an ancient river, or a George McDougall, who will live and die for the Indian tribes of the North? Yea, may there not be some who will yet win the double crown of the martyr and the missionary, like John Williams, at Erromanga, Coleridge Pattison, at Nikapu, or Bishop Hannington, at Usoga? God alone can tell; but this we do know:

“The ancient spirit is not dead,
The old times are breathing still;”

and the heroes of the Church who will greet the opening of the twentieth century are somewhere among the boys of to-day. The star of the Church's hope hangs over the consecrated youth of the land, from whom will arise the Joshuas of the future, who will lead the Israel of God into the possession of the

world. Beneath the great, girdling heavens above us, there is nothing which demands at the hands of the Church such prayerful attention, self-denying labor, and constant care as the religious nurture of the boy, and there is no field where seed is sown for Christ which will be more likely to bring forth fruit an hundredfold.

John Wesley says in his Journal, under date of August 25th, 1763: "I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an Apostle without joining together those that are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer." This is strong language, but it is the calm conclusion of a man who knew the meaning of his words, and who was quick to discover any secret of strength in carrying on the work of God. Let us frustrate the murderer's deadly design, by throwing the arms of loving oversight and unremitting care around the lambs of the flock. If we are faithful in this work, unnumbered blessings will rest upon our memory long after we have ceased to work and live.

" In the elder days of art
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part ;
For the gods are everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen ;
Make the house where God may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean."

In this field of holy endeavor, perhaps more than in any other, you will have to wait patiently for God's time of harvest ; but just as sure as the boy is father to the man, so sure will the harvest come. *Have faith in God. Have faith in the boy.* In the prosecution of this work you are obeying one of the most tender commands of the risen Jesus, and you are moulding the character of the men who will mould the ages of the future. Surely this is inspiration enough to do our work wisely and well. If in this department of Christian toil we live up to the full measure of our ability and opportunity, we certainly shall not live in vain, for the ancient promise still declares, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

