

THE TRAINING OF YOUNG LIFE FOR THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH.

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I HAVE been asked by the Editor to write an article on some branch of Parochial work. After some thought I have chosen that which I feel to be the most important of all our work to-day, viz., that amongst our Young People, those over school age, say between 15 and 25. I can only write of what I know from experience; but, contrary to what is often said, I believe that never were young people more ready to respond to real sympathy, and to a clear call to service for the Master. There must be real sympathy, and a real desire to see things from their point of view. Their outlook is quite a different one from that of a generation ago. Good folk then would have been shocked at the dress and freedom of speech of our young people to-day. We have to remember the new environment in which they have been brought up, and to realize that things which seem strange to us are quite natural to them. The freedom of to-day, however, has its dangers; and our younger folk have, I think, a much harder fight in many ways than their parents had at the same age. Human nature, however, remains the same; and the natural inclinations of the heart, with their special temptations, are the same; and if we feel that some safeguards have been broken down by the freedom of intercourse since the War, then we must realize that our younger folk need our sympathy and help and guidance more than they otherwise would. I believe they are ready to respond to such when wisely given.

There is one other point I would urge. We are constantly told that, if we want to reach our younger people, we must cater for their amusements, and seek to influence them in this way. I would say at once, from my experience, that while we must not neglect this side of things, and while we must be interested in all that concerns young lives, yet we do not thus win them for the service of the Church. Worldly methods—whist drives, dances, and such like, ostensibly to get money for Church needs, are doing immense harm to the Church's spiritual work to-day, and are a sign of weakness and failure, and I am sure our young people feel that there is "a more excellent way" than this.

I have chosen as my subject "The training of young life for the service of the Church." This word "service" is one to conjure with to-day. If we want to hold our young people we must give them something to do. We must give them some outlet for their energies, and make them feel that they are wanted by the Church, and can be of some use. Their feeling is expressed by the words of their hymn, written by a leader of the Young Life Campaign:—

"We who are young are the hope of the future,
We who are young must be willing to share
All that our nation demands of our service,
All that our young hearts are able to bear."

Then, when the call and claims of Christ and His Church are put before them, and they feel that He, too, needs their best ; and when they see that He is a great reality to their leaders, they will go on to say:—

“ We who are young are the hope of the future,
 We who are young must take Christ as our King ;
 Never ashamed to confess Him to others,
 Never afraid of the Cross it may bring.”

In our work amongst our younger folk there are two main ideas to keep well to the front. We must seek to give outlets for their abounding energy, and we must keep our work on a high level of spirituality. We must “ Seek first the Kingdom of God.” We must let them see that if they want to do real work in the world, as followers of Christ, they must be “ out and out.” There must be no doubt as to “ Whose they are, and Whom they serve.” They must be ready to “ endure hardness, as good soldiers of Christ.” The leader who wants to win them for the service of Christ and the Church must himself be unmistakably consistent and sincere, and a real “ man of God.” The young people of to-day have no use for anything that savours of unreality.

Now let me turn to some methods of “ Parochial Work ” by which we can give scope to their energies, and which I hope are not too commonplace. Of course if we want to hold our younger people, we must begin with them at a much earlier age than that we are considering. I give some ways which we have proved to be successful.

1. We have found a “ Young People’s Demonstration ” to be of great advantage in bringing before our Churchpeople generally the work done amongst the young. The first year, our Demonstration filled to overflowing the largest public hall in the town. The next year we repeated the programme the following night, and both times the hall was filled. We had, taking part in it, our Church Day Schools, both elder children and Infants ; our Sunday Schools likewise ; our Choir Boys ; our Guides, Scouts and Brownies ; Band of Hope ; Young People’s Missionary Union ; G.F.S., and Bible Classes. Their programme consisted of Songs, Action Songs, Recitations, a Missionary Sketch, a varied display by the Scouts, Drill and Ambulance by the Guides, and Maypole by the Infants. As each party came upon the platform, one of its members stepped forward and announced what it stood for, and the work it was doing.

We kept the right tone throughout. We began with a hymn by the united performers ; we had a short talk in the middle ; and we ended in the same way each year with the hymn “ Lord, it is eventide,” and prayer, and last of all, “ God save the King.” These demonstrations not only gave our young people something to do, but let them feel they were materially helping the funds of their different organizations.

2. The Guides, Scouts, Brownies and Cubs are appealing very greatly now to our young folk. These organizations give them

"something to do." The most important matter in these is to get the right leaders, who are capable, loyal to their Church, and with high ideals. I would emphasize the word "loyal," otherwise catastrophe may ensue, especially if the Scouts run a Band! The value of Church Parades must not be overlooked, and we should make our regular Church folk feel they are doing a real service to the Kingdom of God by giving up their seats to the young people on the Parade Sundays. We should make the Service itself as impressive as possible, as for instance, by receiving and giving back the Colours. In addition, it is a great thing to get the elder Guides and Scouts to come together, in the early morning of their Parade Sunday, to the Holy Communion. There are many other ways in which the services of the elder Guides and Scouts can be welcomed, by getting their help at the various Parish functions. At present our Guides have undertaken to be responsible for part of the churchyard, to keep it in order, and make it bright with flowers; while the Scouts are earning money for their Summer Camp by cutting regularly the Vicarage lawn!

3. We must give our younger people an important place in our Church Services. In a large Children's Service on Sunday afternoons we let the children take as much part as we possibly can. They have their own sidesmen, and we have variety. The Rev. G. R. Balleine's small book of Children's Services, published by Murray, is up to date and useful; and we also use "Hymns for Church and Home," which has the best of our Church Hymns, and also several short services. This is obtainable from Rev. A. G. Dodderidge, of Stannington Vicarage. We use the small penny Gospels for Scripture, and the children read the passage themselves, alternately boys and girls. When we have read through the Gospel we give the little books to them. We let the children also repeat with us many of the prayers. Occasionally we take a good gramophone to the Service, and give the children some sacred music. They are all registered as they enter the church.

4. In this article, however, we are mostly concerned with the elder ones—the "young people." Our best opportunities are in the Church Services. Our various organizations should have their Corporate Communion. It is an inspiring sight to see a large number of these present together on the first Sunday of the month, at the early Service; and this corporate "Remembrance" is of real help and encouragement to them. With us, the evening Service is largely adapted to these young people, for they are present in such large numbers, but otherwise it is well to have a special Service for them once a month.

The most important Service from their point of view in the whole year is that on the first Sunday evening of the New Year. It is about thirty years ago now since I was present at one of the breakfasts given by Dean Lefroy to the younger clergy of Norwich. He strongly urged us to make much of this Sunday evening, when young people were more impressionable, he said, than at any other time in the year. For thirty years I have advertised this

special Service, and have preached a "Mission Sermon," followed by what I call a "Consecration Service" of about half an hour. Never has a first Sunday evening passed during these thirty years without several young lives being won for Christ. There are many working now at home, and in the Mission Field, who have found Christ as personal Saviour on a first Sunday evening of a New Year. I would strongly urge all who are seeking to be "soul-winners" to make full use of this golden opportunity. Here would I say, that if we want to see real "Conversions," we must aim at them, and expect them, in humble dependence upon God's Holy Spirit.

5. Another most successful way of training our young people for the service of the Church is by means of gatherings run upon "Christian Endeavour" lines. We call our own gathering the "Young Communicants' Guild." Some may prefer the more up-to-date word "Fellowship" to Guild. About fifty of our Communicants, between 15 and 30, are linked together in it, and meet every Monday throughout the year. This is much better than giving up for the summer. They run the gatherings themselves. They have their own Chairman. They themselves take the intercessions, and Scripture Union portion. They sing solos, and are very fond of choruses. They read papers themselves, and at times get other folk to come and address them. They work entirely on spiritual lines. In addition, they have their Tennis Club, and other interests, and help in Sales of Work, etc. They also help in open-air work during the summer months. This Y.C.G. is a capital training ground for Sunday School Teachers and Church Workers. The Secretary has just become a Parochial Lay Reader. In one similar organization, which I know well, four of its members have become Captains in the Church Army.

6. This leads me to speak of the Church Army, which may be of the greatest help in a Parish, by giving young people an outlet for their activities. We have a Church Army Worker in the Parish, and under her lead we circulate about 1,060 Church Army Gazettes every week. This is largely done by our young people. I cannot too warmly commend this excellent little paper, at the moderate cost of a halfpenny. It has a true Gospel ring about it. It has excellent and striking full-page pictures, which are "silent Sermons," and it is so attractively edited that it is read where no other religious periodical would be read. Some of our workers go round to the public-houses on Saturday nights, and sell it to those assembled there, and it is welcomed. Our young people help to take this, week by week, into over a thousand homes.

Again, we owe very much to the Church Army "Week-ends." From time to time we send a small band of our young people to the Headquarters in Bryanston Street. Here they are led to give their testimonies, and to speak in the open air in Hyde Park, and to seek individually to bring outsiders in to the Gospel meetings. I have been amazed at the way the Church Army Leaders have helped our young and nervous workers. I know nothing like

their methods, and thank God for them. A good many of our young folk go away to some neighbouring parish by charrs-à-banc to a Church Army Rally on Easter Monday, Whit-Monday and other times, and are encouraged in the Master's service themselves, and encourage others. We have our own enthusiastic Rally early in the year, and invite others to come to us. The Church Army is a valuable help in real spiritual work to our younger folk.

7. We find the "Missionary Service League" of the C.M.S. another outlet for service. The Romance and Reality of Missionary work will always appeal to young people, if facts are put before them, and if they are trained to look upon Missionary work as "the foremost work of the Church." Once a month is given up by the members of our Y.C.G. to the wider organization of the M.S.L. They have their own stall at the annual Sale of Work. The most important bit of work in connection with Missions Overseas is done by some of our keen young men. In the autumn they have a set of slides from the C.M.S., illustrative of some mission field. They prepare carefully the accompanying lecture, and then go round to different parishes and villages, where invited by the clergy, to give their lecture to meetings of adults or children; and they take with them, where necessary, their own lantern, sheet, etc. The lecture is divided usually into three parts. One will speak on the country and its people, another perhaps on the customs and religions of the country. A third will speak of Missionary work carried on, and will end with an appeal for prayer and interest and help. To hear a keen Missionary talk from three young men is something out of the common, and arouses much interest. In country parishes this is a bit of work of real value.

8. We should, I am sure, try to impress upon our young people, whom we are seeking to train for the service of the Church, the stewardship of money. Our failure to do this is a source of great weakness and loss to the Church. The duty of systematic and proportionate giving is one which we ought courageously to put before them. To spend several shillings a week on cinemas, chocolates and smoking, and to give a penny in church on Sundays, is all too common among our young folk to-day, who have not had put clearly before them the duty of maintaining their Church Services, and their privilege of helping on God's work in the world. They would not think much of a cinema for which they had only to pay a penny, or even a halfpenny, and they cannot value aright a religion which costs them nothing, and a Church where everything is done for them, so that they think they are doing a favour by coming to church at all. This is the more so, since they are often told that Christianity has, as its basis, self-sacrifice.

We need a revolution in our teaching about the responsibility and privilege of "Christian Giving," and our young people would, I am sure, appreciate this, and it would give them another outlet for service.

What I have written concerns largely a country manufacturing town, with a parish of about 8,000, with no residential people, but

an unusual proportion of young people, engaged in factories and in shops. Many of the things I have said, and suggestions I have made, would not be suitable to other parishes of a different character. Other methods would have to be adopted. The "Crusader" movement gives great scope for any young folk who have a real love for Christ, and who want to reach a class of boys and girls who would never be reached by Sunday Schools. The Summer and Winter Camp movement, such as is carried on by Dr. Fothergill, is reaching a class otherwise largely untouched, and is training many for the service of the Church. I know of others who have been successful in inviting young people for "Fireside Talks" in a quite informal way.

There is abundant scope for our efforts to reach younger people to-day, and they are ready to be helped and influenced, if only they see that those who are out to help them are themselves absolutely sincere and whole hearted, and if they give Christ's call and claims with no uncertain sound, and keep a high spiritual ideal, and are not afraid to demand from them true service which cannot be given without cost and effort.

The Altar on the Hearth, by the Rev. George Townshend, Canon of Clonfert (The Talbot Press, Ltd., 2s. 6d. net), is a book of prayers and meditations which, as Bishop Plunket says in his Introduction, fills a gap because it "strives to uplift the everyday life of home and family towards a definitely spiritual plane." Canon Townshend emphasizes the truth that happiness is only to be attained through conscious communion with God, and he illuminates it and illustrates by a collection of prayers dealing with the needs of life on many sides. They are full of spiritual insight and of deep sympathy with sorrow and suffering.

Messrs. Thynne & Jarvis have issued a verbatim report of the 101st Islington Clerical Conference under the title—*Evangelicals in the Church of England* (1s. net). Those who heard these papers will be glad to have them in this permanent form, and those who did not have the privilege of being present at the Conference will be well advised to read this account of the past work, future prospects and aims of the Evangelical School. It ought to prove an inspiration to fresh effort in the service of Christ, and in consecration to the spread of the Gospel.

Messrs. Chas. J. Thynne & Jarvis issue a third volume of Sacred Poems, by Miss E. Leifchild Hurrell (1s. 6d. net). Dr. Schofield commends them as illustrating the passages of Scripture on which they are based, and being thus invaluable for reference. The poems are inspired by a spirit of deep devotion.