

Some are gloriously alive, and all may be. The young people are not wholly to blame for lax moral standards or low ideals of character and conduct. It would be easy to establish that, but such is not our present purpose.

We recently visited an Epworth League that is manifestly as much alive spiritually as any we were ever in, and that is saying not a little. The League in question is Westmoreland Avenue, Toronto. We found the spacious lecture-room crowded, and a more hearty or happy meeting of young people we have seldom, if ever, seen. What is the secret? A splendid work of grace has been and still is going on among the young people. Amid the hurry and rush of the city, with baited traps to win them away from the church to places of amusement, in the heat of summer, two hundred and more of them congregate for happy and wholesome religious exercise. The pastor was there with light heart, the president was there with smiling face and the contagion of consecrated good sense and enthusiasm, and everybody seemed to fully enjoy the service, and to be in no hurry to leave at its close.

Yes, there may be a lack of spiritual life, with its attendant activities among the young people, but life more abounding is possible to all, and where a real religious experience is cultivated within the soul it will be manifest in the life and evidenced in the work of the youth. Are we far astray when we express our candid opinion that the greatest and most urgent need of the Methodist Church in all its conferences and among all its people, be they young or old, is a genuine revival of personal and experimental Christianity? If in this we are at all astray, who will put us right? And if the ministers are not the proper persons to lead in such a revival, who are?

Some Present League Problems

The Epworth League at twenty-one presents some problems that are in many regards different from those which existed at the time of its inception. Changed conditions in organized young people's work have given rise to new forces that must be reckoned with, and have developed questions as to organization and methods of work that call for consideration.

During the past score of years there has been evolved within the Church a number and variety of societies that all, in a greater or less degree, compete for the possession of the youth. This is not necessarily an unhealthy state of affairs, but it does call for wise discernment and judicious handling, lest an unwholesome atmosphere be created and consequent harm result. It would hardly be either wise or judicious to let the situation bring its own correction, and on the principle of "the survival of the fittest" allow these competing societies to work out their own destiny for either weal or woe.

There are those among us who see in the larger sphere of Sunday-school activity and usefulness what they consider the solution of the whole problem of the young people. They freely say that they prefer the organized Adult Bible Class to the Epworth League. Far be it from us to belittle this most important movement, but knowing the Adult Class work as we do, we are free to say that it will have to be very much enlarged and improved in ordinary practice before it meets what we consider the vital and imperative needs of the great body of our youth. The capabilities of the class are great, its possibilities varied; but hundreds of classes will go the way that hundreds of Leagues have gone, and will die, because the organization is considered an end in itself, and the members rest satisfied therewith. The "Secret Service" is to the Class what the evangelistic spirit is to the League, and yet scores of so-called organized Classes do not even know that such a work exists.

Others write quite content with the Mission Circles and Bands that have come into being among our young people during the lifetime of the League. With these societies we have the utmost sympathy; but they do not even purpose to do at most more than a small part of the work set forth in the Epworth League Constitution. To hold either a Circle or Band as sufficient for the whole duty of the Church to the young, is either to mislead the avowed objects of the W. M. S. in relation to the children and girls, or to compromise the Church's duty and obligation to her youth. Missionary education is good, but it is not all, and too many are content to judge the success or failure of young people's work by the amount of missionary money raised.

Young Men's Societies, Clubs, Brotherhoods, and similar organizations have been and are operated. Boys' Clubs, Guards, Brigades, Scouts and other good but ephemeral societies have been inaugurated to make the most of the boys. A letter is before us in which an experienced worker, writing from Winnipeg on the multiplication of these, says: "It is always just beginnings. . . . No boys and girls can belong to so many things and do wise. We think she is right; but there are the facts. . . . novel forms of study, service and play are bidding for the possession and control of our children. We rejoice that the boys and girls are esteemed of such high value, of such paramount importance; and whatever the form or name of the organization that can most successfully grow in them a Christ-like character and win them to a life of

unselfish devotion to the kingdom of God, we welcome it, and wish it success. We will hail the day with delight, if it ever dawns, when, in Methodism at least, there shall be our procedure in the retention and training of our children within and for the Church.

There are those high in official position among us who consider the Epworth League unfitted to the needs of the youth, and out of harmony with the spirit of the age. We have letters from chairmen of districts to this effect. If it be by all means let us readjust our machinery so that it may be of use to us, not compromised. Not less than the League now stands for, but more, must be undertaken. We have repeatedly said that we do not suppose for one moment that the present Constitution represents the ultimate form of young people's work. But we want to see something better before we drop what we now have, and we notice that not many skilled architects have arisen to show us how to build a more glorious temple, though some destructive critics would fain have the present edifice crumble and fall.

New occasions teach new duties, and because the opening sentence of this article is true, it devolves on the General Conference to give to this subject of the young people its best thought and most prayerful study.

The question is greater than the Epworth League as an organization. It has always been an important one; but perhaps never more so than now. The Epworth League as devised twenty-one years ago may not be the best form of work to-day. But all that the Epworth League stands for must be maintained. In whatever ultimate form legislation may place our young people's societies, there must always be held high before the youth lofty standards of holy character, practical avenues of personal usefulness, and combined activity for the good of the country and the salvation of the whole world.

The Minister and His Young People

"Dr. Fred C. Stephenson, Toronto, Secretary of the Methodist Young People's F-ward Movement, also addressed the Conference, urging greater support from ministers in the work of the Epworth League."

This sentence appeared in the report of one of our annual conferences as given in the Toronto *Globe* of June 7th, and when we had read it we inwardly breathed a fervent "Amen." For, while we would not for a moment entertain the suggestion of resigning the *For*, while we would not for a moment entertain the suggestion of resigning the Methodist Ministry for lack of sympathy with the Epworth League and kindred societies, it is very apparent that in many places our Young People's work is suffering from insufficient or inefficient pastoral leadership.

Is it the minister's business to act the part of shepherd to the young people of his congregation? One district chairman writes: "Unless the minister makes a business of the League, the young people are handicapped." Another just as plainly says of the League: "It is only adding another burden on the minister." Just look at those words "business" and "burden." How do they impress you? That the minister is expected to teach and train, to guide and guard, to feed and fold the young of his flock is both scriptural and reasonable. Such, as far as the young are concerned, is manifestly his "business." In our opinion it should never be a "burden." If it be, then is he an hireling and not a shepherd.

We have gleaned from a wide correspondence a number of evident facts about ministers in relation to the young people, some of which, briefly stated, are:

1. To many pastors communion and leadership of their young people are a pleasure and a joy. With them the League flourishes and does excellent service. It is perennially fruitful.
2. Others look upon the fellowship of the young people as a necessary duty, connected with the round of their professional tasks. With them the League merely exists, and usually creeps on in dreary routine until it goes to sleep from sheer monotony.
3. Some shut themselves out completely from association and co-operation with their youth, and if the League lives at all, it is in spite of the frigid indifference or ill-concealed opposition of the minister; but it generally lags in an ever lengthening and weary course until it dies from exhaustion or paralysis.
4. Congregations where flourishing Leagues prosper and grow have, almost without exception, the hearty sympathy and practical co-operation of the minister in charge, who does not consider the general supervision of his young people's work in any sense a "burden," but a delightful privilege that helps to make his "business" both pleasant and profitable to all concerned. These societies become an inspiration and a delight to all connected with them.
5. Now that so many circuits are changing ministers and so many ministers are changing circuits, we might well wish that every new pastor would, with more zeal than ever, study his young people and make a "business" of meeting their needs. A League with a pastor who does this will not be "handicapped," but helped. A pastor with such a League will find most excellent help in the assistance of its members.

"A man who always does what he wants is seldom wanted for what he does."