

## The League as a Social Centre

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THE need of a wholesome social life in the thinly populated provinces of the North West, is not a thing about which there can be much discussion. It is an obvious need. So large a proportion of the population is composed of young people who have left home, and are separated by thousands of miles from the associations to which they have been accustomed, that it is imperative something be done to minister to their social needs.

Young men, living lonely lives in their shacks, isolated from their fellows, are in serious danger of entirely losing their social qualities. They are becoming taciturn, gloomy, uninterested and unenterprising. The monotonous life of the prairie tends to narrowness of outlook and ordinariness of aim. These disadvantages will result in a serious lack in the national character, unless they are remedied in the right way. It is possible for the people to attain great material prosperity and yet be lacking in those qualities through which that prosperity could be made to minister to a richer and fuller life. It is the duty of the Church, and of every organization in connection with the Church, to face the situation and see what it is possible to do to supply the social needs of the community.

In the towns, we cannot ignore the fact that there are certain institutions which constitute social centres. The saloons and pool rooms attract great numbers of men, and provide them with a certain kind of social life. The picture shows and theatres draw large numbers together. They are often crowded. A crowd generates a social spirit of itself, whether there is opportunity for conversation or not.

There is also an artificial social life amongst the ladies, carried on mainly through afternoon calls at proper hours, and on stated days, and recorded with great minuteness in the newspapers. In the country, the general store ministers to the social needs of the community. The weather, the price of wheat, the crop prospects, and the new school teacher, provide topics sufficiently vital to enable all to converse. Dances and card parties are popular, but the social life which they provide is not the most wholesome. Both in town and country, religious services and the various activities of the church, contribute most largely to the prevailing need, though they are not by any means so powerful a factor as they would be if Christian people were seized with a sense of the obligations of the Christian life.

The Epworth League, representing the young life of the Church, should do much to meet the social needs of the people. It should be animated by a social spirit, directed by a social aim, engaged in social activities.

The constitution of the League provides for its being a centre of social life, or rather of a life that is genuinely sociable, and surely this is essential to its welfare. There is no room in our leagues for any stiffness, haughtiness, coldness, formality. Superior people who hold themselves aloof from the generality of the members, are unconsciously but undoubtedly fighting against the highest interests of the League. The condescending individual who patronizes those who have not his attainments or his social position, is a dead weight upon its progress. Anything in the way of a clique—a party who keep themselves to themselves—will prevent the League from fulfilling its social mission. There must be no dissensions amongst the members of the League. Each must work for the good of all, and

all for the good of each. Good fellowship should constitute the prevailing atmosphere; kindness and cheerfulness the constant characteristics. It seems perhaps unnecessary to say all this, for there is no Christian but will agree to it. To say that Christian young people should manifest a Christian spirit; to insist upon such elementary virtues as kindness, courtesy, cordiality, ought to be a work of supererogation. It may be, however, that because these virtues are so elementary, we frequently overlook them. Obviously, to the extent they are overlooked by a particular League, that League is un-Christian, and to the degree

The spirit of sociability should prevail at all the meetings of the League. It is not difficult to manifest it at a "Social." The majority of people manage to thaw out when refreshments are being handed round. But at the ordinary meetings, this spirit should be no less evident. Our big problem is the salvation of the serious meetings of the League. The League will never do its work until the Christian Endeavor and Missionary programmes arouse just as much enthusiasm as the latest device for having a successful social. The great handicap upon the devotional meetings is the tendency to formality, perfunctoriness, and unreality. These blighting characteristics must be eliminated. We must beware of cant. Cant is the expression of unreality. Genuine fervour is spontaneous and refreshing. Conventionality is depressing.

To aid the development of a social spirit in the League, all must have opportunity to participate. Executives must not take too much upon themselves. The chief business of an executive is to get the other members to work. There is danger to the social spirit in the multiplication of committees. Interests which should belong to the whole League are shelved upon two or three. The problems of the League are problems for all the members. They affect the common welfare. They should be dealt with as far as possible by the entire society.

If all are to participate in the meetings, there must be as few set addresses as possible. Particularly is this necessary at the Christian Endeavor and Missionary meetings. The pernicious custom of asking the pastor to address the devotional or missionary meeting, apart from fostering the idea that he is a professional man whose business it is to do such things, prevents the members from taking the part they ought in these meetings. It is generally the easiest way for the head of a department to shirk his or her responsibility, and consequently the most unsatisfactory way. The more we seek to escape responsibility, the more irksome it becomes; to endeavor to discharge it is to gain the secret of enjoying it.

In all the League meetings, the conversational ideal should be aimed at. Anything that tends to draw out discussion strikes at the evil of unsociability. Instead of so many addresses, there should be more short essays, debates, fellowship meetings, etc. The social and prayer meeting struck a far truer social note than is heard, and fostered a far more genuine social atmosphere than is felt, in many of our modern religious gatherings. To those who are trying to be Christians, the Christian life with all its obligations and implications should be a subject of absorbing interest. Discussion of its various phases, in which all have the opportunity to take part, would prove more helpful than set addresses upon it by specially qualified men. When debates are held, it is preferable to have an open discussion, and an open vote, rather than two or three to represent each side, and judges to give an



A CHRISTIAN JAPANESE FAMILY.

that it is un-Christian, it is bound to be unsuccessful.

If the members of an Executive are so busy talking amongst themselves, or have so much executive work to do that they have no time for any but a casual recognition of the stranger that is amongst them, they need not expect to see that stranger in their midst again. It takes more grace than the average man possesses to run the risk of being slighted a second time.

We sometimes hear a man of sociable qualities described as "a good mixer." He has the ability to get on common ground with people of different types and of different social positions. This faculty may simply be the result of a superficial affability, but generally it indicates that its possessor has a real interest in his fellows. He is desirous of understanding the other man's point of view. He aims constantly to help the people with whom he is brought into contact. This is a kind of culture which every member of the League should cultivate. This, indeed, is the only true culture. If the League is to be a social centre, at least its members should be good mixers. They might well take the motto of Paul, to be all things to all men, if by any means they might win some.