

"Our Task and Our Tools"

An Address given at the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Epworth League at Buffalo.

REV. FRANK LANGFORD, B.A.

THE supreme business of the Christian Church in the world, and hence the business to which every department of the Church must contribute, is to establish in this world the kingdom of Jesus; to leave human society with His ideas, to organize it under His law.

Jesus puts the emphasis on a right attitude of spirit manifesting itself in right words, right worship, right relations to the world, right relations to men. The Church, if she would succeed in her mission, must produce conviction in the hearts of her constituency; character in the lives of her people, and leadership out of the ranks of the young people. My conception of the place of the young people's societies is that they are to be the specific means for developing this leadership, without which the Church must utterly fail. And our part in the task of social service and reconstruction is to provide sane, trained, efficient leaders, with the vision and the ideals of Jesus, to be pioneers and directors in all forms of social endeavor.

When Church leaders have caught glimpses of needs of men that are not being met, they have not hesitated to turn their energies to meeting those needs. So the Church became at one time the recognized source of educational light and culture, and the leaders of that day were all trained under Church auspices. But the State has very largely taken over this work, and in our day and land is providing educational material and leadership more effectively than the Church could hope to do. The State is now being aroused to the far-reaching effects of play upon character, and is undertaking to promote and supervise the amusements and recreations of the coming citizens. The cities through their associated charities are providing the relief needed by unfortunates more economically and scientifically than the Church could possibly do. Benevolent, fraternal and trade societies are multiplying, and are meeting more and more the social demands of our lives. All these developments, while they tend to relieve the Church of some of its ancient responsibilities, yet in a deeper sense add the more weight to them.

The Church is no longer responsible for leaders in its own departments only, but it has the unspeakable privilege of supplying leaders in all these other channels of activity in order that they may be rightly directed and developed toward their highest possibilities of good. For politics, philanthropy, education, amusement, and every other activity begotten of the need of modern life the Church must provide leaders trained in the thoughts and ideals of Jesus, and ambitions above all else to make those ideals real in this world.

Three steps in the fulfillment of this task may be indicated here—first, to diagnose the situation; second, to construct a high ideal; and third, to form a programme of work.

THE DIAGNOSIS.

First then, to diagnose the present situation. The initial step would be to get the social viewpoint. From the reading and studying of some of the many excellent books on social problems, those of Rauschenbusch being especially valuable. The mission study classes have been most helpful; why not social study classes as

well? Any Epworth League will find it well worth while to get a small group of its members to spend time and thought on one of these great books.

A study of some of the excellent and suggestive "social surveys" of both city and country life would then be in order. The surveys have been made by experts, and the conclusions drawn by those experts will show the leaguers the possibilities and the value of this line of work. The study might be made by a small committee under the direction of the Citizenship Department, and its results be presented to the whole League. The meeting where this is done will unquestionably be one of great interest and profit, and will perhaps provide an opportunity to launch the plan for a careful social survey of the home community. This should be done in co-operation with other interested organizations or groups where possible, and will be most effective if carried on under the direction of a community council or committee. A staff of five or ten careful, tactful people should be sufficient to undertake the work, and some one person should be director of the scheme.

When the boundaries of the survey are set, a census should be taken of every home within the boundary line. Include every child, every employee, every person permanently residing in the home. Note age, school, church, Sunday School, society, lodge, club, association, library, newspapers, magazines, community events shared in, and everything else that you can get, relating the members of the home to the life of society about them. Then take an organization census, including all schools, Sunday schools, societies, orders, lodges, clubs and such like. Learn all about the social wealth and resources of your community.

Correlate and classify your information, making maps showing the facts you have learned, tables, charts, and whatever other schemes may make the knowledge secured available to the community. What the survey should be is a composite photograph of the community, indicating all the social connections of all the homes from the point of view of the whole. To describe this product of diagnosis may occupy a very few minutes, but to work it out effectively will require many long days and weeks of careful application, and if the undertaking is protracted to years instead of weeks, it will doubtless be all the more beneficial, for the greater our familiarity with our environment, the more surely are we qualified to modify that environment in the interests of the kingdom of Jesus.

CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL.

Second, to construct a high ideal.—We have not reached a place where we are ready with a comprehensive policy of reconstruction. "Christianizing the Social Order" is a big problem, and the man who was daring enough to give such a title to his book had a marvellous faith, a stimulating idealism, in his conception that we can actually humanize our big, brutal business life by religion. When we have seen the photograph of the world as it is, it is time to turn to the vision of the world as God wants it to be. Not that we expect that the new era, the kingdom of Jesus, is to come in a day. Our youth will not all suddenly be inspired with high ideals, our vic-

tims of evil environment will not be immediately made whole; the sanctions of the past will not be replaced by new ones that will immediately have the force of enthusiasm. We may see waves of enthusiasm for righteousness, splendid advances of faith, noble responses to the spiritual appeals of our day, but the meaning of life cannot be seen in its spectacular crises alone. It must be seen in the long reaches of ordinary experience. So our ideal is not a revolution in society, but that every influence arising among youth may be made religious in the broad sense, and that one vital process of education, including every kind of healthy stimulus and worthy activity, may make the men and women that are needed for the tasks of our new day.

That means religious parenthood, involving instruction and education in the duties of that high office, and co-operation of the agency of society and Church, that parenthood may be healthy and hopeful. It means the religious conception of childhood, and the insistence that if theirs is the kingdom of heaven they must have it, and that means in the first place good food, fresh air, plenty of room, joyous self expression, parental love and discipline. And then must follow good schools, organized for self-expression in harmony with the interests of all, and churches where children are not in the way, but are understood and appreciated, are helped and trained for fullest self-realization. It means companionship and mature guidance of youth in the years of self-realization so that a noble devotion to some worthy calling, supplanting mere greed and competition, shall give the business of making a living a high significance. It means a chivalrous respect of man for woman, and a modest, gracious bending of woman toward man, so that young men and women may join hands in work and play and prepare for the life unto that shall last. And it means, through all this and in it all, and natural as breathing, love of God, fellowship and discipleship with Jesus, loyalty to the Church, the experience of religion.

So our ideal in social service, following an earnest, scientific study of social conditions, is a following of truth wherever truth may lead. It involves men of opposing interests trying to get each other's point of view, willing to do right as God gives them to see it. It involves a great passion to save mankind for this world as for the next; to banish poverty and disease, to open the way for life's best values for every human soul. This is a great reaffirmation of the distinction between the sacred and the secular. There is a distinction. Some things are holy, some are very common. Friendship is sacred, selfishness is secular. Ministers, men and women who serve any human need, are sacred, hirelings in any calling are secular. It is not the old distinction, which drew a vertical line through life, putting Church interests on one side and human interests on the other. The line runs horizontal through all life's interests, play, prayer, work, worship, schools, Church, kitchens, factories, market places; through all the ways of business men, artisans, prophets, poets, priests. Everything that is fine and human and good is above that line and is sacred, and all that is selfish and mean is below, and is unsacred. We must teach our boys and girls that everything that is good and clean is sacra-