

Devotional Service

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SEPT. 11.—"EPWORTH LEAGUE READING COURSE."

1 Tim. 4, 13.

The Epworth League, ever since its inception, has stood for intellectual culture. The Reading Course, under its auspices, from year to year, has furnished books of the first order, and those who have regularly pursued the reading will have secured a vast store of information which will be valuable for a lifetime. And more than this, and even better than this, the members of Reading Circles will have obtained a mental training and an elevated taste for good literature which will enrich the years as they come and go.

READING—A DUTY.

Members of the Epworth League, if true to the purposes of the League, cannot be neglectful of the Christian duty of proper attention to books and reading. It is a Christian duty. "Add to your faith knowledge," says the apostle. Primarily, no doubt, this word "knowledge" refers to a knowledge of divine things, a familiarity with biblical truth. But the term may be understood in a wider sense to include a search for all truth and the consequent mental attainment. Paul urges his young friend and co-worker, Timothy, to "give attendance to reading," a piece of counsel which referred to a study of the sacred books as they were then known, and probably any other books which might throw light thereon. And the wise man in the Proverbs (see Prov. 3, 13-17) makes an appeal equivalent to an imperative demand that "wisdom" and "knowledge" must be sought and found, otherwise existence is darkness, and life a puzzle.

A GUIDING PRINCIPLE.

"The great scriptural terms, 'wisdom,' 'understanding,' 'knowledge,' 'intelligence to reading,' bring us into the presence of revealed religion and spiritual culture and indicate an experimental knowledge of the one, and a permanent possession and enjoyment of the other. Hence our reading should be so directed as to comprehend an increase of knowledge of religious truths on the one hand, and an enlargement of spiritual culture on the other. Here, then, is a safe and general principle for our guidance in ranging over the great kingdom of books.

WHAT KIND OF BOOKS?

"Oh, just what I thought," says some one, "we can't read anything but the Bible and a few sacred books." Not so fast, my young friend. Even if your reading were confined to these, you would have an uncommonly liberal education. But if this is the conclusion you have reached, you have quite misunderstood our general principle just laid down. Read it carefully and you will see that it covers a wide field. Indeed, it will be found to include all the good books of all the ages, as well as the best literature of our own times and of the coming generations. It means to begin with an adequate knowledge of the greatest book in the world, the book that is able to make us wise unto salvation, and prepare us for all that is good and great—the Bible. But it means more. It points to the laudable endeavor of becoming familiar with all literature that will contribute to our highest good; and this embraces the best in the realms of theology, history, poetry, biography, science, philosophy, fiction, travel and adventure. Now, revel in this rich mental pasture. By such reading, the intellectual powers

are enlarged, the sympathies widened, knowledge increased, and the possibilities of usefulness multiplied, all of which is a contribution to spiritual culture at once direct, ennobling and abiding.

HOW TO SELECT BOOKS?

In earlier days it was difficult to procure books of any kind. Nowadays the perplexity is what to select. Not what to read, but what to leave unread, is the problem. What shall we do?

1. Avoid bad books. As you would not take poisonous food into your body, so take no tainted thoughts into your mind.

2. Pass by commonplace books. The good, strong, inspiring books are so numerous that life is too short to squander any moments on weak, diluted, trashy literature.

3. Read the best books in each department of letters. Commune with the great minds of the ages, mingle in the companionship of the best men and women. This is what we are doing when we make a wise selection of the books we read. For books are not dead, but pulsing volumes of immortal thoughts that live while there is a mind to apprehend and a soul to be inspired.

4. Enjoy the reward of such discrimination. It may be expressed in the words of Hershel when he says: "If I were to pray for a taste which should stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances, and by a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me through life, and a shield against its ills, however things go amiss, and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. Give a man this taste and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making a happy man."

A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION.

To aid our young people in the difficult task of selecting profitable as well as interesting books, the Epworth League Reading Course is prepared. It consists of three books, well-chosen from the myriads of volumes that cater to the public taste. Every League should organize a Reading Circle, and every member should read the books. The reading will furnish a most delightful season's mental enjoyment and profit, and the books will be the nucleus of a valuable library which can be enlarged from time to time.

WORTH REMEMBERING.

A collection of books is a real university—Carlyle.

In books we have the choicest thoughts of the ablest men in their best dress.—Alkin.

A library is true fairyland, a very palace of delight, a haven of repose from the storms and troubles of the world.—Anon.

The love of reading was a main element of happiness in one of the happiest lives that it has ever fallen to the lot of the biographer to record.—Trevelyan of Lord Macaulay.

Whoever acknowledges himself to be a zealous follower of truth, of happiness, of wisdom, of science, or even of the faith, must of necessity make himself a lover of books.—Richard de Bury.

A little library, growing larger every year, is an honorable part of a man's history. It is a man's duty to have books. A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessities of life.—Henry Ward Beecher.

Oh for a book and a shade nook
E'ther in doore or out:
With the grene leaves whispering overhead.

Or the streets crys all about,
Where I may reade all at my ease,

Both of the newe and old;
For a jollie goode booke whereon to looke,
Is better to me than golde.

—Old English song.

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

At this meeting try to show the pleasure and necessity of every young Christian reading good books, persistently, systematically. Send for a set of the new reading course (Wm. Briggs, D.D., The Book Room, Toronto), and have it on hand to show it to the League at this meeting. Talk it up beforehand, and make every effort to organize a Reading Circle. Write to the General Secretary, Rev. A. C. Crews, D.D., Wesley Buildings, Toronto, for the pamphlet, "How to Organize a Reading Circle." It will be sent free of charge. Thus equipped, begin the organization of your Reading Circle at this meeting, and be ready to begin work on the first week in October. Have some one prepare a paper or address on "The Delights of Reading." Ask your pastor to be present at this meeting and give you a helping hand in the purpose you have in view.

SEPT. 18.—"THE SYMPATHY OF JESUS."

John 11, 31-36.

The word "sympathy" means literally to feel with another. If one is joyful, feel with him, and be joyful. If one is sorrowful, feel with him and be sorrowful. The idea is expressed in Paul's letter to the Romans when he says, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." There is a tendency to limit the sympathy of Jesus to occasions of sorrow, forgetting that he was as much at home at a wedding feast as he was at the grave. If we are Christ's followers, he feels for us, and with us in all earthly events, enhancing our gladness, assuaging our sadness, and giving an inspiration to every scene. Our topic Scripture leads us to a consideration of the sympathy of Jesus in sorrow.

SYMPATHY IN SORROW.

Jesus is ever near his people in their sorrow. Though he had delayed to come immediately to Bethany when told of the sickness of Lazarus, it was only that the glory of God might be more fully manifested. But when the time had come, he hastened with sympathetic feeling to comfort his sorrowing friends, "to give the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Meeting with Martha beyond the village confines, he strengthened her weak faith and sent her to call her sister to him in order that he might comfort her also. And as we view Mary coming weeping to him, followed by a wailing crowd of friends, Jesus himself becoming troubled at the sight of this grief, lessons of divine comfort and sympathy spring to the mind.

GRIEF OF THE MOURNERS.

It was natural and Jesus did not rebuke the grief of the mourning friends at the departure of a loved one. He does not forbid his people not to mourn in the hours of sorrow and bereavement. What he does require of them is "not to sorrow as those who have no hope." (1 Thess. 4, 13.)

SYMPATHY OF FRIENDS.

After the Eastern custom, many friends and acquaintances had come from Jerusalem to comfort the sorrowing sisters and wait at the grave. The majority were, no doubt, sincere in their sympathy. But how little can friends do in such an hour, although often their presence soothes the feelings of the bereaved, showing their attention to other things. But some of those present were apparently merely formal in their sympathy (vs. 38-46). At the feigned sorrow of these, Jesus was displeased. All shams were hateful to him; and where