

and asks its parents for should be granted, as to say that conscientiously asking God's blessing on our actions will make them right. I suppose that the Apostle Paul, who "lived in all good conscience," and was always a devout and God-fearing man, asked God's blessing upon his work while persecuting the early Christians. Yet would such conscientious asking render his actions justifiable? I cannot see that it would change the right or wrong of the matter an iota. The writer then goes on to say: "It is a matter of conscience, and what may be wrong in the eyes of one man is innocent and desirable in the view of another man. So it is very often in regard to things of this world, the right or wrong of which is a debatable subject. They are right for some and wrong for others. It is largely a matter of conscience." According to this doctrine one might hold the persecution of the early Protestants by the Catholic church, the sacrifice in heathen lands by parents of their children, and the tenacity with which the Jews hold to the old covenant, or Mosaic laws, is right if it is or was done conscientiously, as indeed much of it has been done. And how would such a belief stand in secular affairs? If a man violates a law, is he allowed to plead in court that he was entirely ignorant of the existence of such a law, that he was sincere, and conscientiously believed that what he did was right? No. The judge or court would not listen to such a plea, and the prisoner will be told that he cannot plead that he firmly believed he was doing what was right, or even that he had very reasonable grounds for believing he was right, that he must never rely upon his own reasoning, but must examine the laws themselves, and that nothing will be an excuse for violating them.

I might give further illustrations, but these examples will answer my purpose. Can right be such a fluctuating principle as the above quotations would make it appear, only ruled by time, circumstances, surroundings, and the reason of the person who is to be governed by it? I cannot see that it is. To lay down such a rule would mean that there is no fixed standard of right. Right would be a principle that could be made to suit all the varied ideas and inclinations of man. Instead of setting up one standard for all mankind to aim at, it would create a different standard in every person. Such a position, and there can be doubt that that is the meaning of the words quoted, as well as to be gathered from the article itself, is, I think, illogical, unphilosophical and untenable. And then to what mischief would it lead to? A person might do a thing in good conscience, without even giving the question any consideration. A person who acts conscientiously, or who believes he does, if influenced by such a doctrine as this, might not care to investigate the truth. Then how often do people take a wrong foundation or starting point and conscientiously hold to a view which is manifestly against the teachings of Christ. How often do persons, through continually pursuing and practising a certain act, become convinced by their conscience that they are right? Yet would it be proper, on that ground, to say that they are right? And again, a person may, by placing confidence in some person or persons, believe that a certain matter or action is right. Yet would such conscientious belief make, of itself, the matter right? I cannot see that in any of these cases that such a belief would make the action right, or even excuse it. But are there any circumstances under which a person may be excused, not on the ground of a conscientious belief, but through any circumstances which will excuse such belief? I think there may be. When a person is placed, by circumstances, in such a position that he does not know, nor has any means by which he can find out, what is right, then if he does the best he can and conscientiously believes that it is the best that can be done, I think he will be excused for holding what might

otherwise be a erroneous view. But I cannot see that the rule can be extended any further. To trust in ourselves without such a full unprejudiced examination of the truth would be to make the mind or reason of man infallible. We have no right to accept any opinion or theory of our own without a full, fair and impartial investigation. And yet are not many persons' consciences satisfied with a good deal less? The mode of judging the right or wrong of actions, as I have laid down above, is, I think, especially true of Christianity and the dogmas connected with it.

Christianity contains truths and doctrines, about which the conscience of man could never tell him of, and of which he must remain ignorant with reference to unless he seeks the right source. Such principles can only be gathered from God's word. While holding that, under peculiar circumstances, there may be an excuse for a conscientious belief, I do not wish to be understood as saying that such belief makes the matter right. A wrong act is wrong and can never be made right by reason of the person performing it being innocent of the wrong. It is my belief, also, that in a country where the word of God has such free course and where the knowledge of the truth is so easy to be obtained, as ours is, that there is very little, if any, room for even this excuse. The right or wrong of any action can only be judged by a thorough, honest and unbiased investigation of God's word, and not by any impulse or prompting from within.

O. B. STOCKFORD.

#### A PLEA

FOR SYSTEMATIC TRAINING OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF OUR CHURCHES WITHOUT FORMING A SOCIETY WITH AN EXCLUSIVE CONSTITUTION AND PLEDGE

For some time Endeavor leaders have been seeking to adapt its methods to work among the older members of the church. The name for such an advanced society as is proposed is the subject of some discussion. Dr. Clark has suggested the name of "Affiliated Society of Christian Endeavor." Rev. W. F. Wood, in the last number of the *Golden Rule*, votes for "Senior Society of Christian Endeavor." This is certainly a descriptive name, and one which seems in every way practicable. By all means, let's have it.

The foregoing paragraph, copied from the *Young People's Standard*, a paper devoted to the interests of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor of the Christian Churches, is full of significance.

It suggests first, that the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor has had a mission in this nineteenth century. It has taught the young people in the churches that Christ has a work for them to do. It has taught them that they can do this work if they will. It has taught the Christian world, and especially the denominations, that there is strength in union.

While it is painfully apparent to all careful observers, and especially to those who superintend the work of the societies, that the number of careless, thoughtless and inactive church members, whose names lengthen the roll-call of a society, frequently equals and often exceeds the number of consecrated members; still, it is unquestionably true that to the true and earnest young disciple just entering upon the Christian life, the path of duty is more clearly defined and the energies stimulated to activity in the cause of Christ by the methods of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor than by any previously adopted methods of work.

The Y. P. S. C. E. movement has taught us something. There is a bright side to the picture called up in our minds by the paragraph quoted above.

Let us receive the brightness into our lives and remove the shadows, some of which we must consider. This organization, which has succeeded in

drawing more closely together the young people of a divided Christendom, has not hesitated to make division in the local churches. The society does not come to the young people of a congregation, saying, Because you are a follower of Christ, an endeavorer for His cause, you are a member of the Christian Endeavor Society. No, the primary object of the society is to divide. It comes with an exclusive constitution and pledge and excludes from fellowship and work with its members those who for any reason refuse to comply with its demands. Not infrequently it happens that the most earnest and consecrated young people of a congregation, seeing this dividing tendency as a result of thus introducing a test of fellowship formulated by men, will not sanction such an organization. Unhesitatingly the society turns from such, declaring that those who will not acknowledge the superiority of the requirements of the *Christian Endeavor Society* when compared with Christ's simple and well defined commands are not *Christian Endeavorers*.

More frequently, perhaps, the fathers and mothers, pastors and elders of a congregation object to this exclusive organization of the young people of the church. It is our place, they say, to decide who of the members of the church shall be withdrawn from, if there be any who walk not in the footsteps of Christ. Still the answer is the same. Those who will not sign the constitution and pledge of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor are not Christian Endeavorers. And here is the dark side of the picture, growing more densely dark when the proposition comes to apply this test to the senior members of the church. Those of us who have possessed our souls in patience while the young people have been trained by this pledge system, must rise up and remonstrate against such a proposition. Let us render unto the Christian Endeavor Society its due. Let us honor its leaders, because they have shown Christian young people the pathway of duty leading away from idleness and selfishness, even as we honor the authors of the many creeds of Protestant churches, because they taught us to protest against the corruption of Rome. But let us avoid the mistakes of both. Let us accept nothing as a test of fellowship among the young people of the different churches, but obedience to Christ. Let the young people be trained, not in a distinct society in the church, but as the young people of the church—each young person, because he is a child of God, being a worker in this department. And do not let us make the mistake of supposing that the young people in the church are any more capable of superintending their own work than are the young in the home. The pastor should have an especial care for the young people of the church, even as do the parents over the young in the family. If the pastor is over-worked or otherwise unable to personally direct the work of the young people, the most judicious and consecrated member of the church should be chosen as superintendent.

Let the young in the family of God be trained in a special department, even as the young of our families are trained in the nursery until they are strong. Let them have special meetings and special duties for each, that all things may be done in order. Certainly the committee system adopted by the Y. P. S. C. E. is an admirable one, and one which we can safely adopt.

Brothers of the Maritime Provinces, you have been called conservative, selfish, slow, because you have refused to divide the church into societies. Will you not advance in this emergency and prove to the world that constitutions and pledges, formulated by men, are not the moving force of Christian people. When Christians unite, they will not unite in the Y. P. S. C. E., but in the church of Christ. Those who stop in the Y. P. S. C. E. will have one step more to take.