

SOMETHING ABOUT THE C.E. PLEDGE.

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With many the pledge is a great stumbling block, and so a few words about it may not be out of place and may help some to regard it with more favor.

First let me speak of it historically. Everyone will admit that no society can hold together for any length of time without some bond of union, some common principle, some watchword that has been adopted by all the members. The pledge is the bond of union that all C.E. Societies adopt. But it is not to be regarded as—like the laws of the Medes and Persians—unalterable. It has not always had the form it now has. It is a good example of the scientific doctrine that obtains so widely today,—namely, evolution.

At first it was a very simple thing, hardly worthy of the name of a pledge. It ran: "It is expected that all the members of the society will be present at every meeting unless detained by some absolute necessity, and that each will take some part, however slight, in every meeting." It is merely an expectation.

The first real pledge was drawn up after the societies had multiplied, and ran thus: "As an active member I promise: 1st, To read the Bible every day. 2nd, To pray every day. 3rd, To be present at every regular meeting of the Society unless detained by some absolute necessity, meaning by this, some reason which, with a clear conscience, I can present to God. To take some part in every meeting. If absent from the monthly consecration meeting, to give or send an excuse to the Look Out Committee. 4th, Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do; and just so far as I know how, throughout my whole life, I will endeavor to lead a Christian life."

The second form of the pledge inverts the order of propositions and throws all the four parts of the first into one statement, making some additions, as "pray to Him," "I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present and take some part aside from singing, in every meeting, unless hindered by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master Jesus Christ."

The third form of the pledge has other additions, such as, "I will make it the rule of my life to pray, etc.," and "to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all her regular Sunday and mid-week services, unless prevented by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Saviour," and "send at least a verse of Scripture to be read in response to my name at roll call." Hence, historically, the pledge has been altered four times by additions being made to meet the conditions that have arisen in the churches.

We do not consider it as having attained its final form yet. In a statement that young people are to adopt we do not look with any degree of complacency on the use of the word "like" in reference to Christ. We never read of Christ's likings. That puts Him too much in the attitude of a capricious man or woman. He is a king, and He commands. He is authoritative. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." That should not be overlooked. If the word "like" were left out it would improve the statement by bringing it into harmony with Scripture.

The omission of all reference to Christ's atoning sacrifice and pardon through His blood is a sad lack. We have seen pledges that had both inserted and were, therefore, greatly improved. It may be said, "we can't put everything into a pledge." Very true. But we can put things of prime moment into it, things which will by constant repetition etch themselves into the memory and act upon the mind and heart.

Many object to C.E. because of the character of the pledge. And many adopt all of the C.E. constitution, except that they leave the pledge out altogether. There must be dissatisfaction existing in many quarters with the pledge, because some months ago Secretary Baer sent out to all C.E. editors, circulars with this caption, "Don't tinker the Pledge." One of the weakest papers written by the secretary. One too, of considerable boldness in view of the history of the pledge.

We fear that the pledge has been so loaded up with promises, that it is, in endeavoring to do whatever the different denominations want the young people to do, becoming to a very large extent useless. To test that, ask this question: How many keep it? There is such a thing as laying burdens too heavy to be borne on the young people. Many good men feel this and do not go in with the organization. They think that they must either take this pledge or have nothing to do with Christian Endeavor. That is hardly the case. Epworth Leagues which add C.E. to their name have very often no such pledge, or if they have, their work does not coincide with it.

We, as Presbyterians, who have had so much to do with solemn leagues and covenants ought not to stickle at a pledge, if it be at all Scriptural, and therefore reasonable. A pledge is a help to do what we ought to do in many cases. It keeps matters of moment before the mind. It insists on our giving heed to them. It lays its pressure where pressure is needed. Much may be said in defence of it. We thoroughly believe in a pledge, but we believe also that if the C.E. Society were brought into such close touch with our General Assembly as to form a part of our church organization, the present pledge would be altered, it may be considerably, to bring it into harmony with the genius of our church doctrine.