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THE EPWORTH LEAGUE AND ITS SILVER JUBILEE



THE Epworth League is the latest, not the initial, movement of Canadian Methodism to promote the highest possible culture and usefulness among the young people for whose particular benefit it exists. Long before 1889—in which year the Epworth League was organized—there were in operation various societies in the local churches for the promotion of the interests of the young folk of the congregations; but these were of varying types, and lacked both unity and strength in the connexional life. Mutual improvement societies, literary circles, reading clubs, singing schools, debating classes, and others of similar character, abounded and remained for a little while in the several localities where they were formed; but not until the Epworth League was introduced was there anything like a unifying connexional society for the practical training of the young people of Methodism in church work.

In the United States there had been a number of separately organized young people's societies at work for several years. In May, 1889, representatives of the most prominent of these assembled in Cleveland, Ohio, and as the result of their careful and prayerful deliberations the Epworth League was brought into being, all the other societies being merged into it. In October of the same year the first Epworth League was formed in Canada. The first three Epworth Leagues of which we have knowledge in our own Church were formed by Rev. R. N. Burns in Barrie, Rev. S. J. Allin in London, and Rev. G. N. Hazen in Dorchester, Ont.

During the quarter-century past the Epworth League has been an active agency in the development of thousands of young lives, and many hundreds of men and women will readily bear witness to its uplifting influence. Its work has necessarily been constructive in character, and its chief power has been operative in the inner life of individuals rather than in the outer life of the community. But these boys and girls of a quarter-century ago are men and women now, and thousands of them are more active citizens, as well as better Christians, because of their training in the League. And, whatever may be said of the uplift given by the League to thousands of young folk personally, it is very evident that it has awakened and developed a social consciousness so that by the older men and women of to-day there is being brought to bear on the public life of the community a concerted influence that cannot but make for righteousness in the nation. Our young people are learning that there is something more for them than to hold quiet and happy prayer-meetings among themselves, or than to contribute a penny a week for missions. The call of the community has been heard, the need of the

nation has been felt, and in response thereto hundreds of studious minds, and hundreds more of willing hands, have been united in intelligent thought and hearty service for the good of the whole people.

The Epworth League has helped train for public service some of the most useful men and women in Canada to-day; but more than that, it has developed a sense of responsibility for righteous government and honest administration in thousands of young people who will never occupy the spot light of publicity in high places among their fellows. And even more than that, it has helped train thousands of loyal and true Methodists for practical work through the machinery of their Church as no other young people's society ever did or could have done. And it has, in common with similar young people's societies, helped elevate the standards and reconstruct the methods of the larger organization—the Sunday school. The introduction of organized class methods, the utilization of committees, the better adaptation of lesson study, and other similar forms of what we call modern Sunday-school work, have in large measure come into use because of the demonstration of their value first given by the organized young people's societies of the Churches. Whatever else the Epworth League and sister societies may not have done, they certainly have shown that emphasis must be laid on the expressional activities of young people themselves, that young minds are not as empty vessels to be filled from the overflow of other and wiser minds, that the powers of consecrated young Christians may be utilized in constructive labor for the extension of the kingdom of God, and that the Church cannot afford to treat her youth as little children to be forever spoon-fed, but must meet them as virile and active souls with possibilities for service of which in generations gone by the Church never dreamed, and for the actual employment of which she made no adequate provision. The Sunday school is becoming more and more every year a school of industry, and that it is so is largely the result of the influence of the adolescent life of the Church which has demonstrated in its young people's societies its ability, and has demanded fuller provision for its powers of service in the larger work of the Church.

The Epworth League has not been all that its first general officers hoped it would be; it has not fulfilled the exalted expectations of some of its earliest members—we admit these and other similar facts regarding it; but rather than deplore what it has *not* been, or mourn over what it has *not* done, we thank God for what it *has* been and for what it *has* done. There are *not* lacking among us to-day men who dolefully point to the apparent decadence of spirituality in the Church, who refer to the good old days of long ago, and who are rather inclined, we think, to magnify the defects of the present in comparison; but