

# The Epworth League as a Spiritual Force

REV. J. E. PETERS, DREHAM CENTRE, ONT.

(NOTE: In an address on this important theme, given at the Newark District Epworth League Convention, some time ago, Mr. Peters reminded the young people of the essentially spiritual purpose of League work, in part as this article sets forth. His message is timely and merits careful study by all our workers.—E. P.)

**I**N the directly spiritual work of the League all the forces developed elsewhere are to be exerted. The social activities aim at widening the acquaintance of the members, strengthening their friendships, giving them a larger knowledge of human nature, teaching them the art of personally reaching their fellows; but the end in all is that they may win others to Christ. The literary work aims to introduce elevating and ennobling influences from the great realms of literature, science and art, to develop a wholesome mental discipline, to train the young speaker in powers of expression, that he may acquire self-command by practice and be able to give a pleasing and profitable statement of his ideas; but all this, too, that as a student he may be able to come to the Word of God with increasing ability to study, and then as a worker go forth with helpful ministry to others because of the knowledge and spirit thus acquired.

Here we lay the emphasis. The great object that underlaid all the thought and plans of those who called the League into existence was that it might be a spiritual force. Falling in this it fails absolutely as an Epworth League.

But how is this force to make its constraining and restraining power manifest?

We must look first to the individual member. All the good in him must be made to move. If he is to be a Christian worker, he must be born from above, and his whole life must be one of faith working by love. The character, rather than the brilliancy or enthusiasm of the worker, is the essential. If we want to lead others to Christ we must have been to Christ ourselves; if we want to help others we must have tried the methods of relief that we commend; if we want to get others to work we must say, "Come," not "Go!" Always, and everywhere, we must be what we expect others to be,—we must feel the love of Christ *constraining* us.

And what of the *restraining* power of spiritual force? How much there is in us that must be made to stop. One is easily offended if she is not sufficiently noticed; another will do nothing if he cannot have his own way; another engages in questionable amusements. These faults are visible, but there are more within us which are hidden by Omnipotence. There is a spiritual force that, applied to all the faults and blemishes in our characters, will act as an emergency brake and stop them, sometimes with a sudden jar, and again more slowly. Stopped they must be, however if we are to be forceful units in an Epworth League.

An Epworth League is a union of such individual members, qualified for service by the constraining and restraining power of spiritual force. How and where is this force to manifest itself in the union?

**1. The young people's Prayer-meeting.** Here we need bright and thoughtful singing; the singing of hymns that have "go" in them, and yet hymns that will go with us to the end of the journey because they possess that which is not only a pleasant fancy, but which is true to the feelings and aspirations of universal Christendom. We need prayers

from as many members as possible; occasionally sentence prayers for variety, but the more regular form of prayer ottener. That League will be the greatest spiritual force that has the largest number of members who, in private and in public, are gifted in prayer. All cannot sing, all cannot speak to edification, but all may have power with God and with man, by means of the fervent prayer of the righteous.

**2. The monthly Consecration meeting.** This should never be allowed to become formal, to degenerate into a mere calling of the roll and the hazzard hunting up of some verse of Scripture or



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THE EVENING OF LIFE.

of a hymn, that may be in no way true to the member's experience, or a real expression of his desires. This meeting is essentially the members' meeting; after it is once opened the leader can have but little to do with making it a success. It must be planned for each individual. He must strive to be present, must send an appropriate verse if he is forced to be absent, must arrange to say or quote,—not read,—something that is really an expression of his experience or his aspirations. He must be alert to catch some ideas or inspiration from what others say, and, above all, he must realize that his response to his name is a solemn renewal of all his vows to God.

**3. Look-out work.** Those who undertake to work here must be devoted, enthusiastic and persistent. Each member must constitute himself his brother's keeper whenever he sees that a word fifty spoken would be helpful. Let those of us who are in the inner circle of the active members be especially busy. Our work will be all the more effective for being planned. Let the Look-out Committee take time to consider carefully every case that needs attention, and let different members be appointed to see that person on different days. When such an one finds that so many are interested in him that he will be more likely to take their solicitations to heart, and yield to their wishes. It is morally certain that no League can long continue to be a spiritual force that allows its members to be indiffer-

ent to their duties without making an earnest effort to reclaim such, and that is not on the look-out for new members, both active and associate.

**4. Missionary Work.** The watchwords of the Forward Movement, "Pray, Study, Give," are at once a practical and a spiritual force. Left to itself the local League can make but a cursory, cursive objective, but linked with the other Leagues of the District it has a distinct interest in the missionary that it is helping to support in some far-away field. Day by day, in addition to the power received in answer to our missionary's own prayers, will be the increased power that comes to him in answer to ours. But our sphere of influence is not limited to him. We must pray for those amongst whom he works, receive his message. There is a subtle fascination in the idea that we can project our spiritual force as a District League so far afield, and that in so projecting it we do not dissipate, but conserve it. We are not to be merely a financial force in the mission field,—we must be a spiritual force as well; the possibility of large financial support may not be ours, but the possibility of our spiritual support is based upon the omnipotence and the omnipresence of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**5. The regular services of the church.** The type for the church to copy is the family, not the boarding school. As it is best for children and for parents that they be found living together where their mutual influence will act and react, so in the church. To draw a sharp line of demarcation between services for the young people and for the old people is particularly unfortunate for both classes. The weekly prayer-meeting is a place where the leaguers may be a very effective spiritual force. Who better than the young people can get to the service when the night is dark, or cold, or stormy? Who better than they can help in the service of song? Who will better encourage those who are bearing the burdens of the church than the young people who cheerfully come up to the help of the Lord? When Leaguers can so effectively hearten their pastor and the fathers and mothers in Israel by a reasonably regular attendance upon all the means of grace,—Sabbath days and week days,—by participation in the quarterly love feast and the sacramental service, surely they will not thoughtlessly or wilfully neglect such splendid spheres of influence.

The light that enters by one window of this church blends so completely with the light that enters by the other windows, that no one can tell where its particular sphere of influence may be restricted,—the whole church is lighted. In like manner the spiritual force of each League can be so blended with the spiritual force exerted by all other organizations of the church at large, that all shall be resolved into a unit in hastening on that glorious consummation when Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.

You must be sure of two things—you must love your work and not be always looking over the edge of it, wanting your play to begin; you must not be ashamed of your work and wanting to be doing something else.—George Eliot.