

YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNION. OF THE PRESBYTERY OF TORONTO.

(Continued from last week.)

HOW TO RAISE THE STANDARD OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IN OUR SOCIETIES AND WORK.

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There are not many conferences at the present time in which this question does not come up in some form or other. It indicates



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that in the experience of most Christians the spiritual life is not what it ought to be, and it also suggests that if the spiritual standard is to be raised in any society or congregation it must be by leading individual believers into a higher, or deeper, or larger Christian experience.

I. The necessity for a higher Spiritual Life. It is useless to discuss this subject with self-satisfied Christians. It is like offering water to a man who is not thirsty, or offering advice to one who thinks he knows more than anybody else. This is the condition of Israel in the days of Malachi. So when the

prophet comes with reproof and correction they ask "Wherein?"—"Wherein have we displeased thy name?" "Wherein have we wearied Him?" "Wherein have we robbed thee?" But the attitude of most of our young people, and many of our older people too, is one of intense yearning for higher and better things. But what is the actual experience? There has been many an honest effort to live a God-honoring Christian life—a regular use of the Word of God and the ordinances and means of Grace—many a resolve to be more devoted to the work of Christ, and yet what has been the result? In regard to sin it has been defeat rather than victory. The old habits of sin have reasserted themselves and have had the mastery. In regard to service it has been failure rather than success, and the soul has often asked the question those perplexed disciples asked at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, "Why could not we cast him out?" In regard to Christian growth there is still the milk fed childhood where there ought to be strong manhood, and in regard to Christlikeness there is only the dimmest outline where there ought to be a clear unmistakable reproduction. Many an honest, longing heart will say—that is just my condition—is there any way out of it? Is there any higher and better life for me at present?

II. The possibility of a Higher Spiritual Life.—There may be a necessity without a possibility. A traveller may be perishing in the desert from lack of water. The water is a necessity if he is to live but it may not be a possibility. Let this be clearly understood for there are many tired, weary, disappointed Christians who do not believe that a life of victory, and peace, and faithfulness is a possibility to them. We have only to turn to the words of Christ to see clearly the possibility as implied in the provision "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." Jno. x. 10. It is easy to see in the natural sphere the difference between life and abundant life. Here is one man in the last stage of consumption. His blood is thin and impoverished—his body is reduced to a mere skeleton. To him every physical effort is a weariness and he is at the mercy of all changes of temperature and outward condition. He has life but it is a very feeble life. There is another with strong frame, lion muscles and rich blood. He is overflowing with animal spirits and exertion is a delight to him. Why? Because he has abundance of life. Apply this to the spiritual life and you have in the provision of Christ unlimited possibility. Then follow this out in detail in other Scriptures and the possibility becomes even more evident. (1) As to sin, Rom. vi. 14. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." It can not keep you in bondage for its lordship or dominion is broken by Christ. (2) Fitness for service is promised, Acts i. 8. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and ye shall be witness unto me." (3) Is it fruitfulness in life and service we seek. "Ye did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that ye should go and bear fruit and that your fruit

should abide," Jno. x. 16. (4) Christian growth is also a glorious possibility, for the Apostle Paul writing to the Thessalonian Christians says, "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, even as it is meet, for your faith groweth exceedingly and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth." Then too the majority of Christians have seen and heard persons or heard or read of them who conspicuously possessed a higher or larger Christian life. Why should this be exceptional? Simply because it is not thought possible for them. One says I have a very peculiar temperament. Another gives as an excuse that his circumstances are of such a nature that a higher life is not possible to him. Another still is the victim of some habit to which he is being brought into bondage. There are differences of gifts and differences in the service to which believers are called, but the "more abundant" life of which Christ speaks is the heritage of every Child of God. It is sad indeed to see necessity without possibility, but it is almost sadder to see both necessity and possibility, and yet the needy ones are not availing themselves of the abundant provision made for them. There is no more pathetic picture in the Old Testament than that of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness of Beersheba. The scanty supply of water is soon spent. Then the mother, when she can bear the cries no longer, lays the lad under a shrub and goes off as it were a bowshot, to try and get a little relief from her trouble and in her utter helplessness lifts up her voice and weeps. There you have the picture of many a distressed and discouraged Christian who has laid aside some Christian service and has gone away in despair. Then Hagar heard God's voice saying "What aileth thee Hagar?" Who might have said my child was dying in my hands and I could not bear it. You have said the work was dying in my hands and I gave it up in discouragement. Then God says "Fear not for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is." It is not the weeping of the discouraged mother but the cry of the dying child God hears. God has not forgotten or forsaken our work, if we have, He hears the cry of need. Then came the command "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in thine hand." Go back and take up the service you have laid aside. When Hagar had done this God opened her eyes and she saw right beside her a well of water and she procured it and gave the lad a drink and he lived. Think of that lad dying with thirst and that mother weeping out her sorrow and despair and all within a stone's throw of an abundant supply of water. O, that the blind eyes of discouraged, weary, thirsty Christians might be opened to see that Christ is that fountain of living water.

III. The method by which the believer obtains this "more abundant" or higher Christian life. Of Christ it was said "In Him was life" and again "He that hath the Son hath the life." We must clearly recognize that Christ is the exhaustless fountain of life and blessing. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to make real to the Christian experience all the privileges that are his in Christ Jesus. As Rev. Andrew Murray expresses it "The Holy Spirit is the conveyancer who makes over to the believer all the possessions and privileges that are procured for him in Christ Jesus."

There is a practical heresy of which many Christians are guilty, and which is more injurious to the believer's life than even many of the doctrinal heresies. It is that we must be saved by Christ and we cannot get the pardon of our sins except through Him. But once saved we must live the Christian life by our own effort—of course getting help from the Lord now and again. The believer will not enter the "more abundant" life until he sees that he is as absolutely dependent on Christ for sanctification as for justification for Christian growth as for a new nature, for fitness for service here as for God's presence hereafter. Christ in everything must be "all in all."

(1) This is true in regard to victory over sin. In Rom. viii. 2, "The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death." It is this law of sin and death in the believer that is bringing defeat. How is it to be overcome? By self effort? This is like a man trying to lift himself up by tugging at his boot tops. It is the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that brings us to the place of victory. We can see this in a familiar illustration. Suppose I wished to get to the upper story of one of our high buildings and there is no stairway. I try to leap up, but there is a law of nature that has hold of me and draws me down again—that is the law of gravitation. Sometimes I may leap a little higher but this law is too strong for me. Must I give up in despair? Is not that the conclusion of many Christians. This law of sin and death is too strong for me, and I must wait till I reach heaven and get forever beyond its power, to obtain victory. But that is not what one would do in the case we suppose, for here in one corner is an elevator, I step into it—a new law is set in operation and in a few seconds I am where I wished to be. Did the law of gravitation cease when I went into