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Tenth Anniversary Memorial

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHRISTIAN UNION

OF THE

United Presbyterian and Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches

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“ Whose I Am and Whom I Serve ”

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

CHAPTER VI.

The Young People's Movement—Results and the Outlook.

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1. What of the results of the movement? What contribution has it made to the cause of Christ? What has it achieved for the youth of the Church?

1. It has contributed to their practical piety. It has emphasized the fact that religion is a practical thing, a matter of experience, a power in the heart and life. "Whose we are and Whom we serve," expresses the thought which has been dominant in the whole movement. It has insisted that while youth is the time for instruction, for seed-sowing, for foundation-laying, for instilling the principles of things, the theories of life, the doctrines of grace, yet the immediate as well as the ultimate aim is to secure life and godliness, Christian living and doing. The Church has always, with more or less urgency, held this fact before the mind of its youth. But this movement gives great emphasis to the thought. It is an effort to realize it. It says, "Learn the truth, but also obey the truth. Lay carefully the foundation, but begin at once to build thereon, and take heed how ye build thereupon." And the result has manifestly been an increase in practical godliness.

2. It has awakened a sense of personal responsibility. Hitherto, being "under tutors and governors," with no call or opportunity to share in the counsels or burdens of active service, the whole work of the Church being in the hands of their seniors, it was quite natural that the young should feel very little interest in the progress of the kingdom. They accepted the teaching that age and experience must do the work and bear the responsibility, while youth must wait and bide its time. This movement asserts that there is a place, a work, a service for the young man and the young woman, even for the little child. And with this comes a sense of obligation, duty, responsibility. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," is the gospel call through this movement.

3. It has given an impulse to practical Bible study. It has sent the young to the Bible, not merely to discharge a Christian duty, or to per-

form a necessary work, but to learn what is the will of God concerning them. Calling them to act for God, to enter into actual service, it has constrained them to search the Scriptures to ascertain what that service is, and how to perform it. It has thus made the Bible a practical necessity, as the manual of instruction and direction in their Christian service. The claims of the service have disclosed to them their ignorance and weakness, and have turned their minds earnestly and longingly to the Word, as to "a lamp unto their feet and a light to their path." This is one very marked and blessed result of the movement.

4. It has given training and discipline for future service. While very wisely, counsel has been taken with the more mature in the Church, as to plans and methods, yet this is a young people's movement. Its work and activities have been in the hands of the young. Upon them have rested the responsibilities of its service. And in leading its meetings, taking part in their exercises, doing the work assigned to committees, and devising ways and means for carrying on its work, large numbers of the youth in the Church have learned how to work for Christ. They have passed a somewhat efficient apprenticeship. Talents have been evoked, powers of mind and heart have been developed and disciplined, skill and efficiency have been acquired, which cannot but tell mightily upon the future progress of the Church. It is difficult to conceive of any other agency which could have accomplished this work.

5. It has inspired the youth with a missionary spirit. From the very inception of the movement, the work of missions has had a prominent place in its teachings and efforts. The great commission, the terrible need, the open doors, the call in divine providence, the agencies already established, the resources in the hands of the Church, the methods of work, the splendid achievements of the past, the certainty of the outcome, and the present duty of all, have been the themes of constant study, discussion and exhortation. In the weekly meetings the cause of Missions has its regular place. In the Presbyterian Conventions it is always on the program. And the interest of the annual conventions usually culminates with the missionary service. The result is, that to-day the youth of the Church constitute its advance guard in the work of missions. They are the best informed, the most profoundly impressed, the most deeply interested, and the most zealous in the cause of missions, of the entire membership of the Church.

6. It has developed a Scriptural Christian beneficence. It has given special attention to this subject. It has magnified the importance of it. It has made earnest endeavor to ascertain the Divine teaching with refer-

ence to it. It has studied it, discussed it, written upon it, urged it, believe in it, and made an honest effort to practice it. Its Tithe Committee in every Society, its Tithe Secretary, its Tithe column in the Christian Union Herald have borne witness to its high estimate of the importance of the subject. And from all this earnest effort, a somewhat clear, full and Scriptural doctrine of Christian giving has emerged, and entered into the faith and practice of the youth of the Church. It has been established to the conviction of the great majority that Christian giving is both a privilege and a duty, that it is an element of worship, that it is the outworking of a grace of Christian character, that it should be systematic and proportionate, and that the Tithe is at least the minimum of requirement. And a constantly increasing number are acting upon these teachings.

7. It has done much for the cause of Christian Citizenship. It has placed the crown on the Head of Christ as the King of Nations. It has insisted upon His right to the whole service of His people. It accepts the doctrine that He is King of righteousness as well as King of saints, and that to be loyal to Him requires political as well as personal righteousness. It has refused to believe that men can be with Christ in the Church, and with His enemies in the State. It has, therefore, arrayed itself solidly against those corruptions in politics, and evils in society which are so hostile to truth and righteousness, but which are encouraged and supported at the polls by so large a portion of the voting Church. It has thus contributed already much to the furtherance of that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and has educated a great host for leadership in the conflict which is sooner or later to come in this land of ours.

8. The movement has re-kindled the expiring flame of life on many congregational altars. When it began ten years ago, all over the Church there were congregations which were about to give up the ghost. For many reasons, they had lost heart. Their spiritual life had languished. They were either without pastors, or their pastors themselves had caught the contagion, and were in a dying condition. A few of their youth, perhaps but one or two, heard the call of the young people, listened to catch its meaning, attended its conventions, entered into its spirit, became fired with a new zeal, returned to their homes, organized, prayed, labored and sung the whole congregation into a new life and activity. This is not a fancy sketch. It has its original in more than one congregation in our Church. There are active, prosperous congregations to-day which, under God, owe their present existence to the new life which the young people's organization enkindled upon their altars. This fact is evidence that the movement is of God.

9. It has preserved to the Church a large number of its youth. One of the sad facts connected with our Church life is the loss of many of our young men and women. Held to the Church, by the agency of the Sabbath schools, through childhood, until the opening years of manhood and womanhood, they then become careless, indifferent and restless, and drop out of their places. They find recognition, place, companionship and congenial work, in other circles, and little if any of all this in the church, and they go, where they find what they long for. This movement furnishes them the needed attraction. It recognizes them, calls upon them, lays responsibility upon them, sets them to work, makes them feel that they are a part of the Church organization, gives them companionship in service, elicits the best of their manhood and womanhood, and enlists it in the cause of Christ. This was one of the objects for which the movement was originated. It was to bridge the chasm that exists between the Sabbath school and the congregation. And while it has not proved as successful in the direction as was hoped, it has saved to the Church a large number who would have drifted away.

10. It has increased an intelligent denominational loyalty. By acquainting the youth with their own Church and its work, by enlisting them in actual service along the lines of its activity, thus giving them practical views of its principles and aims, by enabling them to see that its doctrines and practices are not only Scriptural, but also effective in winning souls, by securing a large personal acquaintance of its members one with another, and especially by inspiring them with the beauty, power and effectiveness of their own Psalmody, this movement has instilled into the minds of the youth of the Church, a real faith and a fervent love for their own denomination. And this faith and love are especially strong because they are the fruit of an intelligent apprehension of the true principles of the Church.

11. It has enlarged the vision of the youth of the Church. It has lifted their eyes above the boundaries of the home circle, the Sabbath school, and the congregation, and given them a glimpse of the whole world as the field for Christian service. It has thus given them a higher conception of the majesty of the scheme of human redemption, the magnitude of the work, the mighty obstacles that confront it in this wicked world, its resources in the provisions of grace, and the glory of the final achievement. "The world for Christ," which has been the very watchword of Christian activity, all along the line of this movement, has been a revelation as well as an inspiration to the youth of the Church.

Such are some of the results of this young people's movement, which a single glance over the ten years of its history discloses. And now

II. What of the future? What may it be expected still to accomplish?

1. It may do harm. It is a mighty movement. It has already received a strong momentum. It is fired with zeal. It has a large volume. And like all other great and rapid movements, it is attended with danger. It is a young people's movement. Its rank and file are still immature in judgment and experience, and partake of the volatile character of youth. It furnishes thus a very promising field for the religious crank, the ecclesiastical demagogue, the ambitious seeker for change. If, therefore, it should at any time lose its head, or break loose from its safeguards or become inflated with a sense of its own importance, and attempt to strike out for itself, or to turn the Church in a new pathway, and cease to follow its divinely appointed leadership, it might do great harm. All this is possible. But, in view of its past history the possibility seems to be a very remote one. And hence,

2. It may be expected to carry out to larger and fuller development the blessed results which already appear. Whatever of good it has achieved is still in its incipency. Its lines of service are but just marked out. As the years go on they will be prolonged and the profiting will more clearly appear. As the youth enter upon the full service in the Church, they will certainly show themselves more efficient. Practical piety, missionary zeal, Christian giving, etc., will become the dominant characteristics of the Church life.

3. It may secure a great outpouring of the Spirit on the Church. Is it not preparing for this? Is this not the meaning of this organizing, combining, disciplining of powers for service, and girding on of the armor? May we not confidently expect the fire to come down from heaven, now that the wood is thus laid upon the altar? Is it possible that this great efficient engine, so adapted for service, so ready for action, will have to wait long until the motive power will be given? Is not a great baptism of the Holy Ghost the one thing which is needed, shadowed forth, and almost assured by the very attitude of the youth in this movement? Yes, this is the signification, the hope of the present hour in the movement. The morning light is beginning to send its rays athwart the Eastern skies. Let these anointed ones lift up their eyes, catch a glimpse of the coming glory, seek by prayer, expect, wait for, and prepare to receive, and "He will come down like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth." What then?

4. The whole Church will respond to the Prophet's call, "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean."