

WHY NOT A SUNDAY QUEUE LIKE THIS AT EVERY CHURCH?

It's the Tilehurst Youth Centre



If you are a lad between the ages of fourteen and twenty, and if you were directed by the Ministry of Labour to work in Tilehurst, Reading, it would be a safe bet, I think, that you would not be there a week before someone would hand you a card inviting you to join the Tilehurst Boys' Club. On that card you would read:—

"We have just about every activity you could wish for. Cricket, Swimming, Hiking, Cycling, Football, Boating, Handicrafts, Table Tennis, Billiards, Club Rag, a host of quiet games, even a Brains Trust. Refreshments always on the spot. A Drama Group, affiliated to the British Drama League, which produces anything from crime to comedy."

Except that there are not many clubs which are able to include boating in their programme, there is nothing, perhaps, particularly exceptional about that invitation. But Tilehurst is an exceptional club. It is quite the most exceptional club it has yet been my privilege to visit, just as Tilehurst Church is one of the most remarkable churches in Methodism.

It is quite impossible to write about the Tilehurst Youth Centre without writing about the Tilehurst Church. On this page will be found photographs of members of the Centre as they play table-tennis on Thursday evening and as they queue outside their church for Sunday evening worship. Here is a church which is crowded every Sunday—so crowded that not uncommonly the church secretary asks all church members to leave in order to make room for strangers. No less than two hundred people have been received into the membership of the church during the last four years. Every Saturday evening there is a Prayer Fellowship, which is attended by fifty young people; and, throughout the past twelve months, each Sunday evening service has been followed by a Boys' Prayer Meeting which is attended by about forty members of the Boys' Club.

And do not run away with the idea that these boys are unnatural long-faced pious prigs. Far from it. For several years now they have come home with the

Championship Cup awarded at a Reading Inter-Club Sports Meeting, while the latest Club syllabus includes some events which appear to be as skatty as any Itman could wish, with the invitation: "Come and help us to blow the gaff."

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THE Tilehurst Methodist Church believes in youth work. Under the leadership of its remarkable minister, the Rev. William Gowland, this church has spent £3,000 on youth work during the past five years. No less than seventeen youth organisations attached to the church include a Boys' Brigade, Life Boys, G.L.B., Boys, Girls' and Mixed Clubs, a Children's Church, a Youth Church, a fully-graded Sunday school, a Sunday afternoon Youth Forum, a Boys' Bugle and Drum Band, and a Girls' Fife and Drum Band. These numerous youth organisations are all constituent members of the Tilehurst Youth Centre, with a total membership of about five hundred young people. The activities of the Centre are directed by a Cabinet, which consists of the leader and secretary of each organisation, and by a quarterly Youth Centre Parliament.

The procedure and pageantry of the Parliament is modelled on that of Westminster, and it has its Speaker, Prime Minister, Chaplain, Black Rod, twenty Ministers and sixty duly elected members. Ministers give their Reports, face a barrage of questions, and encounter the vigorous and constructive criticism of an officially appointed Opposition. The quarterly business being done, the House proceeds to a full-dress debate on the Order

of the Day. The two most recent debates were on the motions:—

"That in the opinion of this House, youth is too undisciplined to rebuild the world." (Decisively rejected.)

"That in the opinion of this House, the majority of modern films are largely responsible for the decline in the morals of to-day." (Very divided vote.)

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A RECENT writer in the METHODIST RECORDER declared that "youth organisations attached to churches whose worship they despise and never attend are doing as much harm as good."—This assertion, I think, was most unfortunate, because if a church only starts a club in the selfish hope that club-members may help to fill its empty pews it deserves to fail. What we must admit, however, is that in some of our clubs religion has not yet been given its rightful central place.

The Tilehurst Youth Centre does put first things first. Among its many committees it has a Board of Religious Directors, which is responsible for all the religious activities and all the religious propaganda of the Centre. Twenty of its members have become local preachers, several are candidates for the Methodist ministry, while there is a team of about thirty "Ambassadors" who go out to give their testimony in nearby country chapels. What kind of testimony do they give? Well, this is what one of them, Katharine Harding, says:—

"Since I became a member of the Tilehurst Youth Centre my whole life has been completely revolutionised. When I left school, I was like so many others of my generation—drifting and aimless. When I joined the Youth Centre I was introduced to a hundred and one new activities. It was not long before I discovered that there was in the lives of the leaders a power which I did not

In Darkest Germany THE DISEASES OF DEFEAT

[This is the first of two articles by the Rev. E. Gordon Rupp, who recently accompanied the Bishop of Chichester on a 2,500 mile tour of the French, British, and American Zones of Occupation, and Berlin. The next article will deal with The German Church.]

TO drive along the autobahn from Frankfurt was to be reminded that the first act of a grim chronicle play had already been enacted in the huge event of the destruction of the Wehrmacht—blown and toppled bridges, here and there a burned out tank, an .88 gun pointing across the sky, two yellow unexploded bombs, small groups of shuffling tramps in what were once greatcoats, these are the wayside relics. The effects of that event persist, for when the Nazis destroyed communications in the last retreat they put grave obstacles in the way of those who seek to feed the German people this winter. Moreover, the bulk of virile man power is still in the prison camps, and there are innumerable homes uncertain whether father, husband, sweetheart, son, is alive or no, from whom they have had no line or penny since the spring.

The second fact is the destruction of almost every notable German city to an extent which makes the English blitzes (though not Warsaw or Stalingrad) appear trivial. You emerge from the autumn loveliness of the Black Forest into Pforzheim, block after block of silent, red,

unsurpassed even in this dark age. We must allow for exaggeration and rumour (twelve years of violent anti-Russian propaganda has left its mark on every German mind), but enough evidence, irrefutable and convincing, remains of things which do not differ in kind, and hardly in degree, from the evil things done by the Nazis. Had they been wrought on S.S. guards or the warders of Belsen they would still be shocking, though the hatred felt by Poles and Russians would have been intelligible. But the burden of savage retribution is falling on old women and little children.

The pitiful scenes at the main Berlin stations have stopped (at the expense of their being enacted elsewhere). Attempts to deal with the situation are baffled by the size of the problem. I saw 5,000 of the lucky ones (they are on their way home) fed with a fistful of bread and a jug of soup (even this work has been hindered by sabotage in the kitchens by local Communists), while a doctor and two second-year students tried to cope with two hundred new cases of sickness with a medical chest two-thirds empty (a nurse had dealt with the violated and diseased women until her health gave way). Old people who have lost everything, yellow and white faced children who have lost their parents, mingle with the sick and well in what resembles an awful caricature of some East End air raid shelter during the blitz. That this happened in

