

EPWORTH LEAGUE TOPICS

N.B.—The Topic for the Third Department, for April, is treated fully on the opening pages of this number.

Conscientiousness

CITIZENSHIP TOPIC FOR APRIL.

Scripture References—Jer. 31: 31-34;
Rom. 2: 11-16; 14: 13-23; 1 Cor.
8: 1-13; 1 Cor. 10: 23-33.

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Conscientiousness is the attitude of obedience to the dictates of Conscience. What is Conscience? It is not merely a feeling. Feelings are changeable and susceptible to outward influences. The demands of conscience are abiding and permanent, becoming more stringent as it is enlightened.

Conscience is not the same as reason. To follow the judgment of reason alone, would lead to a spirit of ruthless justice, devoid of mercy and compassion. The law of conscience is broader in its vision of life than the rational interpretation of life.

Again, conscience is more than the mere will of man. Very often we will do what conscience condemns. Conscience underlies all these human faculties, and gives them their proper objective.

Every form of life has its own laws by which it grows and develops. The physical body of man must obey the laws of its own nature, in order to thrive. The physicians did not make these laws, they only discovered them by observation and experiment.

Likewise, our mind must act according to certain innate laws. We cannot calculate correctly unless we obey the principles of arithmetic. Our thinking and judging will be false if we disregard the rules of logic. By education we are not given these laws, but they are awakened within us.

In like manner our moral and spiritual nature is governed by the laws of conscience. The capacity to discern right and wrong is inherent in human nature. "In creation it is written as a light to direct and convict; in regeneration it is awakened as a power to govern and transform."

Man has in himself, not as a full revelation, but in a rudimentary form, an interpreting power, by which he accuses or excuses his conduct. The Law and the Gospel are not superadditions to nature, but the revelation of principles of conduct inherent in human nature. These great laws of life—physical, mental, moral and spiritual—are not local, temporal or individual. They are eternal, universal and divine. Conscience is twofold in its function. Through it the Spirit of God speaks to the soul of man, and the spirit of humanity makes its appeal to our life.

THE VOICE OF GOD.

God has never left man without a witness of Himself. He implanted in him the Divine law, and an ideal of life and conduct. A noted heathen writer once said, "I know and approve the better, and yet follow the worse." He admits the existence of an innate moral law, by which we are judged. This corresponds very closely with the confession of St. Paul, "For that which I do, I allow not; for that I would, that I do not, but what I hate, that I do."

Conscience is impartial and supreme in its decisions. Socrates spoke of the unwritten laws which were laid in every mind. Since these laws are universally recognized they are not the result of human legislation, but are ordained by the gods. Sophocles referred to the "unwritten and indelible laws of the gods in the heart of man." These heathen writers agree with St. Paul, that the great cardinal principles of morality are in every man's soul, and that the decalogue is only the transcript of them. St. Paul shows that the heathen are responsible to obey these laws written in their own being. They shall be judged on that basis, and must give an account of themselves accordingly. They cannot excuse themselves on the ground that they had not the fuller revelation. In the same way, many to-day will have no excuse, because they have not taken a definite stand for Christ.

Some think they are not responsible to live up to the Christian ideal, until they openly confess Christ. As soon as they know how the Christian should live, they become responsible to live up to that ideal. "Judge not that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." We shall be judged by the highest ideals, that are revealed to us in our inner life. God did not leave us without some revelation of these ideals. He gave us a concrete example of a human being, who realized all the highest ideals of human life. The ideals, which Jesus fulfilled, correspond with the ideals implanted by the Divine hand in our conscience.

RELATION TO OTHERS.

Conscientiousness has to do also with our obligation to others. St. Paul gave us the fullest exposition of this question. He enunciated the general principle in the question of eating meat offered to idols. He lays more emphasis on the influence exerted on others than upon the inherent wrong of eating meat offered to idols. All meats are lawful, but it is not expedient to eat them when it becomes a stumbling block to others. The responsibility does not end when we have decided it is no harm to ourselves.

It is not merely my conscience that must be satisfied; we are judged of another man's conscience (1 Cor. 10:28). St. Paul goes so far as to claim that where we make it easy for a weak brother to get astray, we sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:12). He enunciates very explicitly our social responsibility (1 Cor. 8:13; Rom. 14:13, 15, 19). This principle is based on the fact that we are vitally united as the elements of an organism. Our actions are determined as much by their influence on others as by their effect upon our own life.

In how many ways we may apply this rule. If parents indulge in evil habits, and lead their children astray thereby, are they not sinning against Christ, when they identified Himself with the welfare of children? Can young people justify themselves participating in questionable amusements by saying, "I cannot see any harm in it?" Not until we, as Christians, are prepared to surrender every evil indulgence and pleasure, every selfish ambition and desire, for the sake of our children, and those upon whom we exert an influence, will we attain the true Christian spirit.

Jesus sets us the true example when He says, "For their sakes I am sanctifying myself." So many young people cannot see that they are responsible for another's fall. Should not the leadership of the Church be constructive and progressive enough to help them take a more sympathetic attitude to this question? The Church should not prohibit certain questionable amusements and leave the young people exposed to the influence of those that will exploit their honor and self-respect. Because our Church has withdrawn the footnote concerning questionable amusements, many young people think they are justified to indulge. Does it mean that our Church has retreated from her former position of antagonism to such amusements, or does she recognize the right of individual conscience?

For the sake of our young people knowing what is the attitude of the Methodist Church on this question, we quote the note at the conclusion of the Rules: "Forasmuch as these Rules are to be interpreted by the enlightened Christian conscience, according to the principles of Christian liberty revealed in God's Word, our members are earnestly admonished that they guard with great care their reputations as servants of Christ. And in the case of those amusements and practices which are of a hurtful or questionable tendency, that they engage in none injurious to their spiritual life, or incompatible with their allegiance to Jesus Christ the Master."

Our Record—What Shall We Make It?

MISSIONARY TOPIC FOR MAY.

Suggested Scripture Reading, Matthew 6: 1-21.

MRS. F. C. STEPHENSON.

With this meeting we begin our new year. The general theme of our Mission Study is, "A View of the World's Mission Fields." As never before "The world is my parish." The war has driven everyone to study geography, history, social conditions and international relationships. The fact of the interdependence of the nations is being emphasized over and over again as we follow world movements in these stressful times.

Our May meeting is one of the most important of the year. We shall look back upon what we have done in the year just closed, and the new officers of the Missionary Department will announce their plans for the coming year. Unitedly we will work to make this year the best for Missions in our history, and aim to have every member of our League or Young People's Society a living link in the Forward Movement chain for missions.

There are three things essential to make our Missionary Department successful: First, a plan of work; second, a Missionary Committee to work the plan; third, adequate equipment.

OUR RECORD.

As Methodist young people, our missionary record began with the organization of the Forward Movement for Missions in 1895. In 1896, the first report of our work was presented to the General Board of Missions. Our motto, "Pray, Study, Give," has been a rally cry down through the years. Our methods have been adapted and adopted by many denominations in many lands. In our own Canadian Methodism the contributions through the Forward Movement from the Epworth Leagues, Sunday Schools and Juvenile Offerings total \$1,281,823. During the past four years