

American Methodism and the Young.

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ONE of the most perplexing problems of Methodism, in common with all the other Churches of the United States, is how to keep its own youth. The rising generation of Americans is not specially addicted to church-going. For some reason or other the young people who imagine that they have outgrown the Sabbath-school do not as generally find their way to the public services of the church on Sabbath as could be desired. Some are of opinion that the Sunday-school itself, or the abuse of it, is to some extent responsible for this. The theory which has been only too widely accepted, that the Sunday-school is the children's church, has been found to work well. Children who have been sent ever so regularly to school, but who have not been taken regularly to the church services, have either to form the habit of attending public worship at a time when they are least disposed to learn it, or else they are in great danger of forming habits which will have the effect of putting them practically beyond religious influences altogether. And in an ultra-democratic community, where the idea of authority even in the family exists only in a very shadowy form, as a rule, there is special danger of this.

This danger is increased by the intensity of American life. It is the boast of people here that they live more in a week than the most of other people do in a month. Nothing is done leisurely or by halves. Repose is to be found nowhere. Whether the pursuit of business, of pleasure, of power or place engages the attention and rules the hour, all is flurry and excitement. The Sabbath is not an exception to this rule. The typical cities of the United States are New York and Chicago. And no one that visits either of these cities, and lets himself out on the Sunday to see what is going on, can wonder that hobbledehoyhood is seldom found in churches from choice. There are too many things to be seen, too many forms of excitement and dissipation, to allow this class of the community to find anything particularly fascinating in a quiet, serious, and orderly church service. What wonder, then, that those who have reached this period in life without forming the habit of attending worship are seldom found in church unless it be where the pulpit harlequin succeeds in attracting them by the eccentricities of an oratory but little in harmony with the seriousness of the Gospel and the reverence which is the essential element in Divine worship.

The perplexing question is, What can be done to remedy this evil? The prevailing sentiment, so far as we have been able to gather it from the conversations and discussions which took place at the Centennial Conference, lately held in the city of Baltimore, seems to be that if the danger is to be effectually grappled with, the process must be commenced in the family. In-

stead of allowing the children to be spiritually dry-nursed by Sunday-school teachers, however excellent they may be, parents must more distinctly face the responsibility of religiously instructing and educating them themselves. While gratefully accepting the assistance of the Sunday-school as subsidiary to the family, it must not be allowed to take its place; neither must the instruction which it ministers be taken as an excuse for less thoroughness of instruction and training in the home. It is beginning, apparently, to come home to the hearts of the leading men of Methodism, and probably of all the Churches, that no other agency can, without incalculable loss and mischief, take the place of wise, prudent, and thoroughly Christian fathers and mothers.

Another thought which seems to be forcing itself more and more upon the leading minds of the Church is, that greater prominence requires to be given to the pulpit, as one of the Divinely appointed means for the religious education of childhood. If a child cannot attend both the Sunday-school and the regular church service, the common judgment of the members of the Centennial Conference appeared to be, that the Sunday-school should be given up, not the church service. The Rev. Dr. Vincent, who is one of the most enthusiastic Sabbath-school men on this continent, expressed this sentiment with the utmost emphasis. The same sentiment was repeatedly expressed by others, and as often as it found expression, it was applauded to the echo. Indeed, though some other recommendations were made on this head, the utmost caution was manifested lest anything should even have the appearance of taking the place or trenching upon the function of the family and the pulpit. Both ministers and laymen appeared to have a salutary dread of introducing any sort of machinery that might by any possibility have this effect.

Still, in view of what was felt to be the pressing exigencies of the time, they did venture, after very careful—and there is good reason to believe very prayerful—consideration, to recommend what, if wisely managed, is thought to have in it the possibility of much good. It is nothing less than the formation of a great mutual improvement society, to extend throughout the entire denomination, to be known as the Oxford League.

This league is to have for its object:—"1. The commemoration of the meetings of certain students at Oxford, England, between 1729 and 1787, principally under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley, from which meetings were developed the great religious awakenings and revivals of the last century, by which the doctrine and spirit of the Apostolic Church were again given in their fulness to the world, and the power of the Primitive Church once more established.

"2. The furtherance of the fourfold objects of the original Oxford Club, viz.: (1) The more careful and devout study of the Holy Scriptures; (2) The cultivation of a nobler and purer personal Christian character; (3) The study of