

## The Place of the Junior Epworth League

THAT the relation of the Junior League to the Church for the nurture and care of our children, has not been fully realized, nor its purpose clearly understood, by our ministers generally, is the conviction of the writer. What is it, and what the minister's duty toward it? Before answering these questions it is necessary to state just what obligation the Church lays upon her ministers in this matter of child culture, and the clearest way in which to do this is to quote the disciplinary paragraph in question, No. 75, viz.—

"It shall be the duty of the Superintendent of the Circuit to obtain the names of the children of his congregation and form them into catechumen classes for the purpose of giving them religious instruction. He shall instruct them regularly himself, as his other duties will allow, and appoint a suitable leader for each class, who shall teach them in his absence. He shall give each member of the catechumen class an annual ticket, and save for his successor a correct list of each class with the name of the leader. It shall be the aim of the pastor and his class also in all our Sunday School classes, to bring the members thereof to true repentance and decision for Christ, and the exercise of saving faith. At least once in each year, all the young people, five and under, of each attainment, shall, after examination by the pastor, be publicly received into the membership of the Church, furnished with our rules, and enrolled in a class."

The main purport of this paragraph is evident, and if its provisions were observed there would be approximately as many catechumen classes as there are Sunday Schools. But there are whole Districts in our Church that report not a single catechumen, and in thousands of our Churches no attempt is made to impart such instruction as the above paragraph calls for.

Now, see where the Junior League is intended to fit in with the pastor's work as outlined above. The constitution says regarding its purpose—

"The object of the Junior League shall be to systematize the work and assist the pastor and those appointed by him in the instruction and nurture of the catechumen classes, as provided in Discipline, and to promote in its members an earnest and intelligent spiritual life, and train them in works of mercy and help. The Junior League shall be so managed as to contribute to the interests both of the Sunday School and the ordinary juvenile Church classes."

The place of the Junior League, therefore, is not simply the primary section or branch of the regular Epworth League, but is vitally within the constitutional machinery of the Church, and its purpose is primarily the salvation of the boys and girls to Christ and the Church. The existence of a Junior League is not conditional to the will or caprice of any minister or Epworth League, but is part of the obligation resting upon the minister himself. He is responsible for having a Catechumen Class or its equivalent in a Junior League, and on him rests the obligation to teach and train the members or to appoint some other person so to do. The Junior League Superintendent is to be the pastor, or some "overseer appointed by him," and this person so appointed is ex-officio the 5th Vice-president of the Epworth League.

The important work of nurturing the Juniors does not rest with the Epworth League, but with the pastor, and whenever he can do it personally he should consider it his most important duty. Others may assist him in the various activities of the Junior League, but he is the one responsible officer for the work in hand, and if good reasons exist for his non-attendance at the meetings of his boys and girls, he must see to it that they are being intelligently and carefully tutored in Christian truth

and properly trained for Christian service by others, whom he has appointed to the work.

No substitute can be offered for the Catechumen Class but the Junior League. The Sunday School makes no provision generally for relating the scholars to the Church and their preparation for active and practical membership therein. Indeed, Decision Day in the Sunday School often utterly fails to realize permanent good because it is considered and treated as an end in itself. Better have no Decision Day than have it without subsequent pastoral oversight and care of the young people who have signed cards or otherwise manifested a desire to love and follow Christ. Many have been lost to the Church because of this sad lack of spiritual shepherding after Decision Day has been held.

A Mission Band is no sufficient substitute for a Catechumen Class or Junior League. The main objects of a mission band are to impart missionary information and to raise missionary money, according to the plans and methods of work in the W. M. S. Both of these are good; but at best only a part of what the Church owes the children. We may use our children for the good of the heathen and miss the one vital point that relates to their own salvation and spiritual welfare. Too many of our boys and girls, interested in sending the gospel to others, are themselves outside the Church and never become members.

Let our ministers ponder these things and if the cause of the children of their congregations does not press heavily on their hearts something must be wrong. One thing is sure, we cannot afford to keep on forever losing our youth, and unless we stop the loss somehow a heavy account will roll up against us and be presented some day. Gather the children, band them together, teach them, train them, enroll them, use them, make Church membership and loving Christian service real to them now, and the future will be more fruitful. For all this let there be a Catechumen Class or a Junior League in every congregation.

### A Case in Point

Since writing the foregoing, it has been my privilege to spend some days in Ottawa. On the 24th of March, I preached in the Bell Street Church, the morning service. I was delighted to see a large representation of Juniors present, not sitting in a body, for no special display had been arranged on my account; but scattered all through the congregation. I congratulated Dr. Mavety on this feature of his audience, and asked if it is a regular event. I was assured that there were only the usual number of juveniles present. On further investigation, I found that the girls and boys meet regularly in class before the morning service, and this, in addition to the Junior League on Wednesday evening at 7 o'clock. At the Sunday

School session on the afternoon of the day named, I asked Dr. Mavety if he would quietly pass the word around that I would like to meet the girls and boys (members of these Sunday morning classes), on Monday afternoon, after 4 o'clock at the School-room. A number came, and while the Institute session was in progress inside, I took the accompanying photograph outside. There were more persons than I could well include with the small camera I used, so the 23 fine boys who were there are not shown in the accompanying picture, but I have them in a group by themselves. At the evening session of our Institute, Bro. Cairns, the S. S. Supt. of Bell St., publicly stated that it had been a revelation to some of them as they saw the responsiveness of the girls and boys to their pastor's appeals, and how readily they yielded to his leadership in becoming vitally related to the Church. I could not but breathe the prayer that Methodism might have a pastorate ever careful of the little ones. Would that my observations everywhere showed a similar proportion of children actually enrolled in our churches and being regularly taught and trained for the happy privileges of adult church membership.



YOUNG METHODISTS OF BELL ST. CHURCH, OTTAWA.

Is there any good reason, think you, for the deplorable lack of children at the ordinary church service? For the absence of children's classes in the local churches? or for the Sunday School session being considered, as too often it is, as a substitute for the usual public worship? In my honest judgment, until the practice, as I saw it in Bell St. Church, becomes the general procedure in all our churches, Methodism will continue to lose a large proportion of her most valuable asset—the children growing into youth. How is it in your church? "Save the little ones to Jesus!"

### The League Topic List

The value of our regular uniform topics is being demonstrated more and more clearly, as the days go by. The unsatisfactory character of a number of lists, locally arranged, must be just as evident, when one considers the disconnected and wholly scrappy nature of many of them. During the past few months I have examined quite a number that are supposed to be an improvement on the official list sent out from the General Office. How our Leagues can be satisfied with some that I have seen is a mystery to me. In many of them there is no plan, no connected purpose, no apparent aim but to entertain, and that