

The Juniors

The Church and the Children

Theoretically the Methodist Church places a high value on child life. Practically it very much undervalues it. " . . . It shall be the duty of every superintendent to obtain the names of the children of his congregation, to form them into catechumen classes for the purpose of giving them religious instruction, to instruct them regularly himself, as his other duties will allow; to appoint a suitable leader for each class . . . etc." (par. 78, Discipline). How far is this done? Complete figures are not attainable, but approximately we find that in the Sunday-schools of the six Western Conferences there are some 60,000 children in the Primary Department, and nearly 80,000 more in the Intermediate Section. What a promising host of children! Yet there are only some 7,000 catechumens, and many of these are numbered among the 12,000 Junior Leaguers of the whole Church. It appears that there are only about one in eight of our children that are under religious instruction and training save as they receive it in the short session of the Sunday-school weekly. It may be thought that many of them are already members of the Church. Not so! With a total Sunday-school force (teachers, officers, scholars, all told) of some 300,000, Canadian Methodism has only 75,000 of them in the Church. Think of it! Only one-quarter of our whole magnificent Sunday-school army is in Church membership. Is this as it should be? Undoubtedly not. Nor is it as it would be if every circuit superintendent practically valued the children at their true worth. What is needed? Evidently an entire change of method in many churches in reference to the children. We have them in our Methodist homes and Sunday-schools, but we are not doing our whole duty to them in the light of their future characters and the Church's future needs. Many ministers will plead lack of time, pressure of other duties, etc. If we are to put first things first, the work among the young will be the last to be neglected and duties of less importance will be postponed rather than this one. The wise minister is he, who rather than try to do it all himself, like a good general, directs all portions of the field and sees that the working out of the details is left to the active working forces of his army. Do not neglect the children. Satan will not. Christ would not. We dare not, if we would, fulfil his command and be guiltless in his sight.

The Mission of the Junior League

The Junior League is a good thing. That is, according to the Discipline. But many let it stay there. If after reading par. 78 of the Discipline, every minister would read articles 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Junior Epworth League Constitution, he would realize that the League is intended to be his ally in work among the children. It is the writer's conviction that many ministers of our Church have never read the Junior League Constitution. A prominent minister (since then a President of Conference) once asked if there was a Junior League Constitution, and where he might find it. And at the same time six whole pages of that man's Discipline were given up to the very subject in question. Yes, the Junior League is good, too good, indeed, to stay in the Discipline as a dead thing.

Work it. Give it a place in your Church and see if it does not accomplish its purpose as well as many another institution of Methodism. When we analyze the mission of the Junior League according to the constitution, we find it is intended: 1. "To systematize the work among the pastor and those appointed by him in the instruction and nurture of the catechumen classes, as provided by Discipline." 2. "To promote in the members an earnest and intelligent spiritual life." 3. "To train them in works of mercy and love." 4. "The Junior League is the only society in Methodism that sets out to do this."

It is clearly set forth that the League is not in conflict with the Sunday-school or the ordinary Church classes. It stands in a distinct and separate sphere, there for a definite and necessary work. How is it proposed that this shall be accomplished? (Read article 5.) By 1. Instruction in the Scriptures. 2. In the catechism, doctrines, history and biography of Methodism. 3. In all moral movements. 4. The temperance reform. 5. All that develops and manifests the spirit, manners and practices of Christian life and intercourse. If there is anything lacking for personal religion, intelligent church loyalty, or good citizenship, the "pastor may choose and direct" such subjects. Such an organization is surely good on paper. Is it good in practice? The mission of the Junior League has not been perfectly realized, but it has accomplished its work with as fair a measure of success as any other department of the Church. Indeed, all things considered, the League has done better than many other Church organizations. The Church classes, the Sunday-school, in short, all our organizations are at best partial failures. The Junior League has established its right to live by its success. It has passed the experimental stage. And wherever given a fair opportunity under wise oversight, and with the kindly advice and assistance of the minister, in charge, it will prove itself as good a thing in practice as it seems to be on paper. Try it. Its mission is to help you get a hold on the young for the Master, and to retain that hold despite all the wiles of the devil, the temptations of the flesh, or the allurements of the world.

A Query

"How can I make our Junior League meetings more entertaining?" is the question propounded by a worker. First, we would say do not consider entertainment the first object of your League. It is not. The League has a higher work than to entertain the Juniors. It does this of course, but it does much more. Then we are of the opinion that the highest form of entertainment is possible with the best methods of edification. That is if you are seeking to intelligently instruct and edify your Juniors you will at the same time afford them the most pleasurable form of entertainment. The young are very quick to see your purpose. They do not want to be aimlessly entertained, but they do want to be properly trained in both mind and morals. We think that all who come to your League know its real object, and can pretty correctly determine whether or not the leader is keeping that object in view. We are no advocate of dull or spiritless meetings. The very reverse is true. But a meeting that is arranged simply on the basis of entertainment is bound not to retain any permanent hold on the Juniors. A few suggestions further may not be amiss. As far as possible make your own programmes. Do not slavishly follow anyone's lead. Seek to be original.

Impress your own individuality on your League and its work. Do not think that because something has succeeded somewhere else that it is essential to you or yours. Vary your orders of service. Do not conduct all after the same fashion. Divide the work of the meeting. Do as little as possible for yourself as long as what is done is according to your plan and purpose. Introduce surprises occasionally, i.e., do not let your members know just what is coming every time. Seek for consecutiveness in your meetings. Connect the one meeting with the next by some home link or tie. Do not follow the precise outline of The Era in your topic studies. You can probably arrange something better for yourselves. Above all, keep awake. Plan ahead. Never go to a meeting unprepared. Never have to ask, "Where is the topic to-day?" Select suitable music and have it rendered in as sprightly a manner as possible. Prevent dullness, but do not go to the other extremes and introduce levity. Thus, the more you your League should not be as successful as any other. The personal element and intelligent perseverance will go a long way to make it so. Try again.

Junior Leagues and Mission Bands

Is there any antagonism between them? There ought not to be any. We think there is very little, if any at all. Is it possible to have both a League and a Band? If not, which is the better have? These are sample questions that come to us sometimes. We believe in both. We have both. We would not willingly do away with either. It is the simplest thing in the world to operate both. The League is the union of your League in full working order. Let your Woman's Missionary Auxiliary appoint someone of their number as Mission Band Superintendent or President. Then, let that person assume the full control, in cooperation with the League Superintendent, of the missionary studies, plans, finances of the League. Your Mission Band thus becomes the Missionary Department of the League. It assumes control and direction of a meeting once a month, and the regular League topics and plans of work engage the attention of the Juniors during the rest of the month. Whatever money is raised by the Band, of course, goes to the W.M.S. We have found that few, if any, of the Juniors remain aloof from the Band. The annual fee of 10c. is easily raised, and both the League and Band are better for the cooperation. The plan works well. No friction is possible where pastors and workers are in harmony, and the only question likely to be ever raised is as to which shall get the money. This is too small a question to quarrel over. The League and Band are one in purpose and desire to advance the kingdom, and the W.M.S. will spend the money to the best possible advantage. One meeting a month is not enough for the children; the scope of the League is wider than that of the Band, but the Band will emphasize and direct the missionary studies and operations of the Juniors, so both societies are mutually co-operative, neither is opposed to the other, and by working together the highest possible success is attained by both.

At the pastor's conference, held during the International Sunday-school Convention, the preachers were strongly urged to spend some time every week with the children for instruction and training. It was declared that this was the most valuable work a pastor could do.