

## Junior Department

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### The Junior League and its Value to the Church.

An Address Delivered at the Detroit International Epworth League Convention.

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In beginning this talk I am going to do what I often do in teaching, serve the dessert before the soup—enlarge upon the value of this department before discussing the methods of conducting it.

In considering the value of Junior Leagues to our church, we must first consider the value of the juniors, without the Leagues! Just exactly the same value as children are to their parents. No less, and as far as keeping up the life of the church is concerned, far more. An official member of a Methodist Church, in Ontario, after ten years' absence, said that more than half the members and adherents of that church were strangers to him! How did this come about in only ten years? One by one, the older members had dropped by the way, or been moved by life's changes to other spheres. What are going to be the Methodists of to-morrow? The children of to-day. And I say it solemnly our first and greatest duty—before even our great missionary obligation, is the training of our own children up for God and mankind, in such a way that when the tasks drop from our nervous fingers, they may be able to think and speak and act for God and home, and church and country, better than we have done before them. This is the true evolution of the church.

In considering our juniors we must place ourselves in the position of parents, or at least of big brothers and sisters, who are helping in the development, education and training of the younger members of this family.

Now all up-to-date nineteenth century parents (to say nothing of the twentieth century) know that their children are possessed of a three-fold nature—physical, mental and spiritual. Also all men and women of understanding know that in the development of a noble, normal man or woman, each of these three sides of our wonderful, complex, God-given nature, must receive its due share of care, else the result is a deformed specimen. The day has gone by when any intelligent parent thinks that the physical development of his child may be left to nature—or rather he realizes that, in these days of effete civilization, "Mother nature" does not have a "fair show," and that he must spend time and intelligence and money to surround his child with all that will conduce to the natural healthy development of his physique.

On this point I have somewhat to say against the lethargy of the church. She is only beginning to awake to the fact that unless she lends a hand and joins with some of the more progressive organizations in providing righteous room for the exercise and development of the young animals committed to her care, they will seek it elsewhere, even in questionable places. And this will be the beginning of the rift, between the boy and the church, which is so apt to grow and enlarge until it becomes a chasm too deep and too wide for anything short of a volcanic eruption to fill in. And then the poor, short-sighted church does try—does make herculean efforts to provide the volcanic eruption in the shape of revival services, professional evangelists, etc., etc., and often weeps bitter

tears because of her lack of success. When all the time if she had only acted with hearing ears, the sound of the hammer driving in ever such a tiny way, ever such a thin-edge wedge, the bitter tears on her part, and the wasted years on the part of her children, might have been avoided.

This being interpreted, is plea number one, for the Junior Department.

For the mental development of her children, our church has always stood in front ranks. And yet even here, there is room for improvement. Even with all the noble work done in our colleges and schools—even with all our reading circles, and well-chosen reading courses, even with all our literary departments, there are still some, who, between many stools, fall to the ground.

And one of these is the boy. He is getting plenty of mental food it is true—often more than he can digest in the public and high schools of our villages and towns. But he should not be allowed to feel that the church has overlooked this side of his nature. Too often his teachers in the Sunday-school are not up to the average of his thinkers in the day school, and being a thinking animal, he soon gets the two together and forms his hasty young opinion of the church's mental status. And again I hear the stroke of that hammer, widening the rift between the child and the church. Which is plea number two for the Junior League.

In the spiritual development of her children, I claim that the church has, most of all, need of the Junior League. To be sure I have heard good men and true who ought to have known better, being among the ministry of the Canadian Methodist Church, speak with but small enthusiasm of the value of the Junior League, with passing mention of "five wheels," and the like. I should like to whisper to these good friends that, as errors and weaknesses, which are not found in our pure and noble English language, often appear in English "as she is spoke,"—so, much that is useless does not belong to the Junior League in itself, but to some Junior Leagues, as they are run. We do not abstain from all food, because some may be injurious, and we do not condemn all books because some are lowering. No more should we criticize all organizations because some are failures.

But these good people tell us that we have the Sunday-school where the children get their spiritual food, as milk, properly diluted, and in quantities, to suit their age and strength. And later they look at the regular church services, where there is abundance of stronger food. All this I grant. The home teaching, the Sunday-school, and the church services may answer all the purposes which the primary, intermediate, high school, and colleges do, in the mental life of our land but what about all these industrial and technical schools, and departments of schools, springing up all over the civilized world? How is it that schools having no department of manual training are looked upon as at least, "behind the times"? Is it not because we are at last awakening to two facts.

In all the machinery of our church, we have no place where what may be termed the "manual training" of our children can be carried on, except the Junior League.

They are taught spiritual truths, and taught to study God's word, at home, let us say, and at church services, and at Sunday-school. At home, if they come from Christian homes, and at school, if they have Christian teachers they are guided and helped to put these principles into practice. But this is in individual daily life. There is something more needed to form the habit of philanthropy

—to form habits of thinking and working, spending time and money, on those outside the home circle—say even outside the circle of personal friendship. They must learn to work harmoniously as a part of the whole—to go in double harness.

To my mind a well-managed junior missionary department will do as much towards solving the missionary problem of the next generation, as even our Forward Movement. Show me a boy or girl who has been in a live Junior League from ten to sixteen years of age, and I will show you one who will never sadden the hearts of pastors and collectors by his ignorance of, and indifference towards the needs of, our heathen brothers and sisters, crying in the dark, and with no language but a cry.

A Junior League must necessarily fill the need better than a Mission Band, because broader and more general in its aims and interests. A properly managed Junior League can reach its members not by home study God's word, but how to help others to study that word; not only the principles of righteous living, but how to put those principles into practice; not only to have pity and sympathy for others, but how to translate that pity and sympathy into such capable action that desert lives shall blossom as the rose; not only to pray for the conversion of sinners but how to lead them to Christ in such wise and tender way that they may be won to the beauty of holiness.

They will learn in this way as in no other, for one of the fundamental principles of true education, is that we only learn to do by doing. All this, and much more, even to aiding in the physical and mental development of our children, comes within the province of the Junior Department.

Have I justified my plea that the church has need of it—not as any fifth wheel, but as at least some of the spokes, in her most important wheel?

### Weekly Topic Study.

August 9th.—"What I may learn from a queen who took a journey."—1 Kings 10: 1-9, Matt. 12: 42.

King Solomon's fame spread fast and far. To all people he has become known as rich, powerful, and wise king. His great wisdom is especially talked about. Far away to the south lives a distinguished queen whose visit to Israel's king is the subject of our study to-day. Mark (1) She heard (2) She came to find out for herself. (3) She saw Solomon and talked with him. (4) She was convinced of the truth of all she had heard about him. (5) She acknowledged his greatness. (6) She glorified God who had given her such wisdom, riches, and power. (7) She made very rich presents to Solomon to show her gratitude. The Old Testament story fully illustrates these points. In the New Testament Text we find our Lord commending the queen, and condemning the people of his day. Why? Because he (Christ) was a wise teacher and a greater king than Solomon, and the people rejected him. He is the source of wisdom. (1) We have all heard of him. (2) We should go to him to see for ourselves. (3) If we come to him, he will teach us. (4) His truth will convert us. (5) Like the Queen of Sheba with Solomon, we with Christ, will be led to confess him. (6) Worship. (7) Present our gifts.

Summarize the lesson thus: The queen wanted to find wisdom. She investigated for herself. Solomon taught her. Her doubts fled. She opened her heart to him and then offered her presents, and magnified the God of Israel.