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The Association as an Allied Society of the Church

MAUDE HARRISON*

The Young Women's Christian Association seeks "to associate young women in personal loyalty to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; to promote growth in Christian character and service through physical, social, mental and spiritual training; and to become a social force for the extension of the Kingdom of God." The fulfillment of this purpose is sought through organization, adequate equipment, and trained leadership for women that only women can give.

Organization is along departmental lines. The Industrial-Extension Department has to do with all young women in stores, factories, shops, offices, all places of business, organizing them into self-governing clubs through which the four-fold Association purpose runs.

Girls' Work has to do with the younger girls in business, and with high school students. The International Institute has for its object "to befriend, protect and teach foreign-born women and girls"—which is a great Americanization program. All of these great groups of women are offered a comprehensive program that means mental, physical, social and spiritual development—the foundation of successful living. This opportunity is for the girls in the city, in the town and country; for students as well as girls and women in business. This also applies not only to America, but to girls and women all over the world.

No work like this can be adequately carried on without experts in every field of women's activity, who, through investigation, know tendencies and needs, and who, armed with that knowledge, can formulate programs to meet those needs. Through fifty years of experience in the problems and needs of women the Association has produced a leadership expertly equipped, in the very nature of the case as no other organization, to sense situations, to be aware of tendencies before there is any distinct manifestation of their presence among women as a whole, and to interpret life to young women.

The Young Women's Christian Association has become the organization through which the woman movement with its aim of equality of citizenship, equality of opportunity, and economic justice has expression, and it is the centre of the training of leadership. It seeks to hold the balance of relationship between men and women, and has always for its primary object the welfare of young women.

With this brief summary of what the Young Women's Christian Association is, we come to its relation to the great religious force of the

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community, the church, and its relation to the community interests that have to do with religious education. It is conceded that one of the great functions of the church is that of information and inspiration. It is the great spiritual power-house for the energizing of men and women for the task of social redemption. It takes the individual and through a process of training in spiritual perceptions gives him to society to work out social relations with such clearness of vision as he may increasingly acquire through his fundamental relationship with Jesus Christ—the corner-stone of the church.

The Association with its complex interests, its well-knit organization, its four-fold program reaching out into industry, into business and professional life, student life, and into the life of the one-time woman of leisure, affords a training place for leadership in working out social relations. It takes the great teachings of the church and applies them in a specialized way to the problems of young women. It is equipped to try out methods and give results to the church in leadership and in the impetus to combined effort for the accomplishment of far-reaching results. It is the eye that sees at close range the problems and needs of women and girls of all classes and can take steps to meet those needs as the church would meet them if similarly equipped. It is the way by which people of different communions may combine in the community in the task of associating young women for a common end.

Co-operation has become the watch-word of the hour. We have seen the "pooling of interests" for the accomplishment of wonderful results during the war, and the same plan of action is being found effective in peace. The young people identified with the churches in their organized societies need to be welded together in a bond of common interest and common effort. They need to be trained to stand together with intelligence, back of the great social, civic, and industrial problems of the day. They need to see in their own communities the problems on a lesser scale that, when magnified by numbers, trouble the nation, and eventually become issues of international statesmanship. They need to know not only current history, but its interpretation, to become intelligent Christian citizens. This is an object for united action in which the Association as an un-denominational agent can play a part with the churches in formulating a united program.

In the matter of community schools of religious education the Association again in its undenominational position can foster co-operation and offer its resources to this community enterprise of the churches. Because it is undenominational, it can serve as a common meeting-ground and give effective aid in all community effort along the lines of religious education.

There is one line of co-operation that is important, and is, perhaps, in the experimental stage—that of furnishing leadership to groups of younger girls within the church. The Girl Reserve movement, originat-

ing within the Association, has for its slogan, "To face life squarely," for its purpose, "To find and give the best;" and for the heart of its code, "To honor God, country, and community, and to help other girls." The Girl Reserves, whose insignia is the Blue Triangle, are a part of a national and international movement for girls between the ages of ten and eighteen whether they are school girls or young business girls. Their program is diversified and appealing, and most carefully thought out. It can be worked among groups of girls with the church as a meeting place, and can add immeasurably to the interest of all church activities with which it is often difficult to get the teen-age girl allied. It has within it great possibilities of solving some of the problems with which religious educators are confronted when dealing with girls of this age. It also has the advantage of drawing to the church groups of girls who might not otherwise be attracted.

Again the general membership of the Association affords a fine opportunity for church extension, gleaned as it is from all walks of life and all corners of the community. Girls who are strangers drift to the Association on Sunday afternoons, to the library in the evenings, stop to watch a gym class, or drop in to see moving pictures. This is often the beginning of an extended acquaintance with the Association which leads to participation in its various activities and to membership. Committees on church co-operation, especially in the boarding homes of the Association, help to link these girls and women up in some definite way to the church of their choice. The opportunity is many-sided. In just such a simple, friendly way are many girls saved from perilous experience,—for the work of the Association is fundamentally preventive and not reformative.

The opportunity afforded in the educational work of the Association to emphasize the spiritual values of life is a permanent source of satisfaction. The technical training in business, household arts and higher education, not usually otherwise available to girls who work all day, holds in itself great possibility of spiritual development. Instructors are ordinarily of the type to give this side of education tactful and effective attention, with the result that students are trained to think constructively along the line of the fundamentals of all religious life. One commercial school that I know intimately has these significant words of Phillips Brooks on its wall—"The Ideal life, the life of full completion, haunts us all. We feel the thing we ought to be beating beneath the thing we are." I also know that no young woman goes forth from that school without having made a gain that tends toward the permanent enrichment of personality, as well as a gain in technical skill. This is not without its effect in church interest and attendance.

Altogether this, briefly, is what the Association is in a community as an allied society of the church. What has been sketched here is standing the test of experience and is prophetic of still other lines of individual and co-operative effort.