

WILSON CARLILE (1847-1942), FOUNDER OF THE CHURCH ARMY

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THE human agent immediately responsible for Wilson Carlile's conversion was an aunt, a devout member of the Brethren, who in the early 1870's used to send him a copy of *The Christian* every Thursday. (He always burnt it, he said later, for fear he or his wife should be 'contaminated'.) After he had suffered a severe business reverse his aunt began urging him by letters, and in person, to find happiness in a surrender of his life to Christ. Eventually she gave him Mackay's tract, *Grace and Truth*. 'At the beginning of the chapter', Carlile confessed, 'I was a rank outsider. Before I got to the end, I had thrown myself at the feet of Christ, and cried, "My Lord, and my God" '.

Soon afterwards he sought out a small company of Brethren who worshipped at Blackfriars. He was led to them partly out of admiration for his aunt's life and character, developed among the Brethren, and partly through reading of some practical work they were carrying on among local lads.

One evening he asked the leader of this work whether he could help. The good people were at first suspicious of this smartly dressed young man with a glossy silk hat, a flower in his frock coat, and rather unorthodox religious phraseology. Since he seemed in earnest, and begged to be allowed to help with the worst people they came into contact with, they encouraged him. He was therefore put in charge of the 'hooligan class'. On the first night he plunged into the story of the prodigal son, the only Bible story he then knew. They were so moved that they stole his Bible as a memento. But he did make contact and did win his hearers. For some time both he and his wife worked with the Brethren at Blackfriars, attending several evenings in the week and most of Sunday.

'Wilson Carlile owed to the Brethren his introduction to Christian work; and, curiously enough, he also owed to them views which made him an upholder of the position of the strictest school in the Anglican Church on the question of the Holy Communion'. Thus A. E. Reffold who went on to explain: Carlile found the 'Breaking of the [*sic*] Bread' the great service of praise. When he became a churchman, he longed to see the Lord's Supper given more prominence. 'The ordinary eleven o'clock Sunday service, consisting of Matins and Litany or Communion Service, he frankly recognised as a weariness of the flesh. His ideal for most churches was a choral celebration of the Holy Communion at about 9 a.m. as the chief service of the day, leaving the rest of the time clear for something short, bright, and more aggressive to attract the bulk of the people'.

He did not remain long with Brethren. His father attended Holy Trinity Church, Richmond, where the Rev. Evan Hopkins was then vicar. Delighted at his son's interest in religious matters, his father asked him to accompany him to Holy Communion. Wilson gladly went. This came to the ears of the elders at Blackfriars, who sadly denounced him as a

'disorderly brother', and forbade him to break bread with them again. For a time he continued some of the work he had been doing in connection with the assembly; but gradually he drifted away. Soon afterwards he and his wife were confirmed at Clapham Parish Church, and devoted their spare time to youth work at Holy Trinity, Richmond.

At a night school at Richmond his chief helper was a Miss Elmslie, who did wonders in handling the lads until an unknown medical man, just starting similar work, came along and carried her off as his wife. That man, too, had also 'began with Brethren': Thomas John Barnardo.¹

¹Source: A. E. Reffold, *Wilson Carlile and the Church Army* (Church Army Bookshop) 1956, 5th ed. The whole book is worth reading; only pp. 26-39 are specifically relevant to Brethrenism. Carlile entered the London College of Divinity in 1878, aged 31, became ordained in 1880, and served an assistant curacy in Kensington. In 1882 he founded the Church Army in the slums of Westminster on the model of the Salvation Army and against similar mob opposition. He took part in its administration until a few weeks before his death in 1942.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR EVANGELISM?

DEDUCTIONS FROM A SURVEY OF ASSEMBLIES

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I—INTRODUCTION

THE survey asked church leaders to assess which of their evangelistic activities had been effective and which were for the most part ineffective.

One of the objectives of the survey was to locate those churches which were having more success than the average in evangelism. Having done this, their evangelistic activities were examined to see if particularly fruitful areas of opportunity could be isolated.

The only common thread in the more successful assemblies was the enthusiastic concern on the part of those responsible for the effective activities. In some cases it might be difficult to separate cause and effect, but this cannot be true of all churches. On the other hand success will not come if enthusiasm is the only asset we bring to revitalise our evangelism. It will not necessarily bring in new contacts nor make our message relevant of itself.

II—GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON REPLIES

There are two extremes in the spectrum of response to the question 'What should we do to become more effective'. The first is to rely entirely on prayer. Several assembly leaders said 'more prayer is required', another said:

'Unless the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of both saved and sinner alike the work will not prosper!'

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