

The Evangelistic Work of the Church.¹

III. THE MAN AND HIS METHODS.

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THE new age whose dawning we are privileged to see will be an age of great convulsions. We have been hearing of "the message" to-day—the story of the Cross, the old belief in an incarnate and atoning Saviour, by *it* we *hold fast*, or rather by *Him*. But we stand for revolution as well as the old faith. Christianity is not in possession. The Church has failed to reach the masses with her message. The masses stand outside her influence. There is a general indifference to religion, as we present it. Yet the people are not irreligious, and not without some experience of God. The miracles at the front prove this. The kingdom of man looms large. The Kingdom of Christ seems very small. Materialism is booming, and the Church, the only real bulwark to save it from running riot, is impotent. The Church is in a rut. A rut only differs from a grave in depth.

Yet I cannot join in the *much-too-easy* confession of the Church's failure. It takes a big man to confess failure. Failure means a consciousness of power—power to construct. After all, up to a point education has failed, Parliament has failed, Socialism has failed. The Church shares her failure with all such forces. It is easy to write a chapter on the success of the Church. But there is failure—failure in the Church, failure in the Christian ministry, where failure means more than in any other calling in the world. Failure, when thus saith the great Shepherd of the sheep, "I will require my flock at their hand." "Failure in effective Christian witness" is a main feature of the Report on evangelization. Gibbon tells us that in the early days of the Church her members realized "that it became the most sacred duty of a convert to diffuse among his friends the inestimable blessings which he had received." A man is enlisted in his baptism as a soldier to fight, and win others for Christ. "The primary work of the Church is to make converts." I quote the Report. "We are to expect conversions." We are

¹ A paper read at the Southwark Evangelical Conference on October 17.

to win the unconverted. Do we? Is the emphasis of our work laid here? Is this our objective? Stately churches, orderly services, beautiful music, elaborate machinery, halls, clubs, schools we have, but few conversions. Yet conversions must be the measure of success. There has been a neglect of the counsel "to do the work of an evangelist": *that* has been left to the special missionary, the Church, or Salvation Army, or the preacher at the street corner, left moreover with inadequate backing up, with inadequate munitions, with inadequate reserves. We too seldom see the man who stands, as Baxter said, at the church door to call men in. The Church is busy tending the flock, very little time and means are given to seeking and saving the lost.

I think of the deeds of the Apostles, under the most adverse circumstances, in the face of opposition from men, converts were added *daily*, and this without the aid of the vast machinery we have at our disposal. Wherein lay their success? Preaching the word, *in the power of the Holy Ghost*. Conversions and living Churches followed the preaching of these men, and, I conclude, and I think it is a fair conclusion, that the men, their message and their methods were the causes.

Of the message for to-day others have spoken here. Of the man and his methods I am to try and add something.

What do we see occurring over and over again in our parishes? *Here* is a man of no special ability, with no great gifts of speech, or originality of mind, and placed in a parish of considerable difficulty as regards its position and its people, and yet quietly and steadily a great work of God is going forward as a result of his ministry. *There*, close to him, we find a man eloquent, able, scholarly and yet a complete *failure* as regards any ingathering of souls for his Lord and Saviour. The fault cannot be in the surroundings, it must somehow be connected with the ministry of the man himself. Says Napoleon: "It was not the Roman legions that conquered the Gauls, but Cæsar; it was not the Carthaginian soldiers who made Rome tremble, but Hannibal." Without the commander, no battle, no victory, sums up his view. Says a little Handbook on Revivals—"It is not what are called personalities that are wanted, *persons* will do—persons who are ready to surrender themselves utterly to the great personality of God. God is waiting for men and women who are *real*, who have the freshness of per-

sonal conviction, whose prayer is a strong laying hold of His power, who care more for the things of His Kingdom than for anything else in the world, and who are willing to give anything, even life itself: even, which is often a harder sacrifice, the daily obedience in little things, if thereby they can set forward the Kingdom of God." A man! Christ gloried in the title Son of Man. God created man in His own image. Evangelization is the work of a man. "Ye shall be My witnesses." Sometimes there is an addition which is a subtraction—"a man" is greater even than a clergyman. *The new age will need a man.* Officialism will count for little. "Vicar of the parish," "Canon" will mean very little. Professionalism will count for nothing. Useless, absolutely useless, will be the sounding brass, and tinkling cymbal, the mumble, the drawl, the uttering of sacred words, the enunciation of solemn truths without ourselves being touched to the very depths of the soul by what we are saying.

I. The new age will demand *reality*. The new age will demand *spirituality*. The new age will demand a man, as Steele describes him, "temperate, generous, valiant, chaste, faithful and honest, who may at the same time with advantage have wit, humour, mirth, good breeding and gallantry." A man highly trained not only in the schools but in human experience and divine truth. A man who can prove himself effective—a man who does not neglect private and personal communion with the source of all spirituality. God is a spirit: man shall not live by bread alone. The best man for the greatest of all work! When the man fails he ceases to win men, and is a stumbling-block to the growth of the Church. If the failure comes through ill health or old age, the Church should have the means to provide for him elsewhere; if he is a square man in a round hole, she should have the power to replace him. There can be no evangelization without real, spiritual, effective men.

II. The Y.M.C.A. lately addressed a letter to the clergy asking them to keep an open eye for discharged men returning to their congregations who might be suitable for hut work. The letter thus describes the man required: "Broad-minded in religious sympathies, and alive to ideals of social service." Such is the Y.M.C.A. view of the man for the message, plus spirituality, reality and effectiveness. The man who will win his fellows cannot stand coldly aloof playing the part of the Priest and Levite. His duty

is not exhausted when he fills the roll of the Good Samaritan. The earliest Christianity was social. The product of early belief was fellowship. The world is out for a big fellowship, bigger than, alas! the Christian Church is. In spite of the formularies about brotherhood, there is very little unity and cohesion, far too much class, party and congregational feeling. This is a tremendous difficulty. Thousands are ostracized by frigidity and starch. The early sense of brotherhood among the members is a method that must be recovered. The man must stretch himself full length upon the masses, as did the prophet of old upon the child. His voice must be heard in social matters affecting the welfare of the people, in temperance legislation, in attempts to charge the relationship of the man to the woman and the basis of the home, in purity and housing questions, in education, in keeping of the day of rest, and a thousand such things. For after all the Church has lost touch with the working classes not by her devotion to the Gospel of the life and Cross of Christ, but by her social exclusiveness, her forms of service which tend to become too stately and ceremonial for simple people, her refusal to speak the language of plain men, and her failure to visit the people in their homes and men in their societies and clubs.

III. A cheerful confidence that we have a real living message and are out to win, is another method necessary for the man in the new age. It is this which thrills the soldier when he first sets foot in France. With him it is never "*if*" we win, but "*when*" we win. His is the cheerfulness which always comes in real work and belief that one is doing his duty. In winning men a cheerful attitude and a confident outlook count for very much. Warm handshaking and ringing laughter are very infectious. The man must speak as if he had something very splendid to say. He must not be sluggish in his evangelistic vitality. He must have an experience which he wants to pass on to others. He must look happier. He must shine. He must be sure that God has spoken to the world and means it, as sure as were the early believers. The Gospel to him is not "*it*" but "*He*." Surely this is the battle-cry of evangelicals? It was in assurance of reconciliation, joy of redemption, freshness of personal conviction, freedom, life, liberty, that our forefathers worked. The man can win no one without faith in God; Who has called him to his work. He must believe in God Almighty, and that He is mighty to save and go forth in

the expectation that he will be used of God and that God will speak through him. As too many of us stand paralysed before the world's devilry we might well hear the reproachful voice from the glorified Lord, "O ye of little faith, bring him hither to Me."

IV. One of the changes in the new age must be in the method of preaching. I am not speaking of the message but of the method—the teeth of the sermon, not the food. Have our sermons teeth? Wherein lay the success of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, or of St. Paul at Ephesus? Not surely in any tricks of eloquence or flowers of rhetoric. Look at that little ugly Jew—perhaps palsied, certainly with some bodily defect, described by himself as "Contemptible in speech," as well as weak in body. "My preaching," he says, "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power." This is the preaching that tells, not physical force, but spiritual power.

V. The preacher, moreover, must present his message in language, in picture, in terms understood by the people, and all worthy of the great love of God and of his hearers. In preaching as in all his work there must be *sympathy* with the people—that Jesus-felt feeling of compassion for the multitude. Unless his heart is touched even to weeping, when he beholds the people, unless his heart goes out to them in his sermon, hearts will not respond to the heavenly message. This is not mere youthful sentimentality. I know that the older we grow the awful responsibility of our position, as those who stand between the living and the dead, ought to grow more and more upon us. I believe it does. Even such a one as Paul the *aged* wept over his beloved but erring converts. And it was in the *last days* of our Lord's ministry that He lamented with tears and cryings over the City of the Great King. I pity from my very heart the man who can stand *unmoved* at the sight of men and women, men of like passions with himself—women with sons at the front or who have made the great sacrifice—looking up to him with eager eyes and longing hearts, hungering for comfort and the word of life from his lips.

VI. There is only one way in which he can gain true sympathy with the people. He must be *amongst them*, in touch with them, rejoicing with those that do rejoice, and weeping with those that weep. What reality there is in every sentence, what point in every sermon when the preacher comes not only from his knees and desk

in the study, but from the *parish* to the pulpit. There was a depth of meaning in the old Scotchwoman's description of her new minister that she little thought of, when she described him, as being "six days of the week *invisible*, and on the seventh day incomprehensible."

VII. There must be change too not only in the method of our preaching, but also of our services, if we are to win men. Rarely have our services "converting power," says the Report. Services must be simpler, shorter, less mechanical, heartier, more living and congregational. There is too much repetition. There is too little prayer to meet the needs of the hour, and perhaps too much ecclesiastical lore. "A Church," says Preb. Gough, "that has largely adopted the Latin worship of dead order and infallible organization has inevitably failed to penetrate the Anglo-Saxon race with the order of life—the order of a living organism—and largely for this reason, our people have fallen from ideals of service and sacrifice."

VIII. The Report speaks of the ineffectiveness of parochial missions and open-air work. The old methods of the former do seem ineffective in evangelistic results. Have we ever really given open-air work a fair and well-backed-up trial? I think not. The Labour leader finds the open-air very useful for his propaganda. Here it is a revolution in the man and his method that is needed to make his message effective. If the people do not come inside for the message, the man *must* go outside with it. I hope every parish will have an outdoor pulpit, not necessarily in the wall of the parish church, but where people assemble, at the dock gate, in the market square, on the village green, in the park or street, where a man may deal with the real spiritual needs of his brother men assembled there.

I have taken it for granted that you wished me to deal more especially with the man and his method *in parish life* rather than in the Church at large.

The Report, however, speaking of methods, refers to the better adaptation of Church machinery. When the Church wakes to her evangelistic call, she will need to attend to her machinery. Already diocesan and ruri-decanal councils and bands of mission clergy are established in many places. United efforts are thus possible in works, factories, parks and public squares, with services at break-

fast and dinner hours among the workers. The gregarious or gang habits of men call for attention. Men are often ready to come to church as a council, a friendly society, allotment holders, a corporate body, when they will not come individually. I am interested at the present moment in a desire of some hundreds of "Comrades of the Great War" to attend church together monthly. C.E.M.S., C.L.B., B.B., G.G., and all the numerous societies represented by incomprehensible letters provide fields for evangelistic work which the Church must not lose sight of. The great Retreat movement must not be overlooked. The Apostles went out from the Upper Room to conquer the world for Christ. The modern Church needs power to raise the dead and open the eyes of the blind. The cry is, "Master, why could not we cast him out?" The reply, "This kind goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting." The clergy in one diocese for which I can speak were gloriously uplifted before the National Mission by retreats. In a recent book on retreats, the Bishop of Chelmsford says: "The attempt to revive the Retreat movement is one of the most cheering signs of Church life to-day. Was it by chance that, before Belgium faced the terrible ordeal of deciding whether she should cling to her soul or to her soil, the movement so spread throughout her land that in the year previous to the war over 12,000 men went into retreat for meditation and prayer? It will never be known how much Belgium and the world owes to the power wrought through these retreats." Retreats must be the work of the *whole* Church, or the result will be a very stereotyped man. Evangelicals must take their full part in them, in conducting them.

I close on the note with which I began—only striking it now on the individual. "Put first individual witness," says the Report. Our methods may become old and out-of-date, but the Gospel of Christ is ever young and up-to-date, and after all it is the messenger and not his method that really matters. "Let your lights shine."

Arise, shine! "Go out—Oh, wondrous word!" said Dr. Parker, referring to St. Luke xiv. 23—"Go out as far as the Prodigal has strayed. Go out from old methods, old usages, old conventionalities into the highways and hedges and compel men to come in."

