

British American Presbyterian.

Vol 3.—No. 27.]

TORONTO, CANADA, FRIDAY AUGUST 14, 1874

[Whole No. 131

Contributors and Correspondents.

A Plea for Systematic Evangelistic Work.

BY A MEMBER OF THE C. P. CHURCH.

Glad tidings of "Time of Refreshing" reach us from many lands. God is hearing prayer: The old words are having a new fulfillment: "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Unbelieving cavils are receiving an unlooked for an glorious answer; and all the faithful are glad. The church rejoices in multitudes born into the Kingdom of God.

The hearts of God's people in Canada are stirred. Hope an expectation rule the hour. We ask, why should we not also rejoice in the "plentiful rain" wherewith God's heritage is revived in other regions? Can we do nothing to bring this about. We can pray. We have access to the same source of infinite blessing. Our prayers can reach the same ear. And we have the same sure promises which invite and encourage our supplications.

Can we do nothing else? Are there not invaluable lessons taught by the methods pursued in the word of grace in Britain? Methods, which have been, and are now, so distinctly owned and blessed of God. Can we not give ourselves to more earnest and eager evangelistic work? And may we not see in Canada the same results from the more abundant use of God's chosen instrumentality for the saving of men? Is it not time that our church should awake, and make the full use of her noble band of highly trained workers? Is it not time for more persevering and systematic evangelistic work over all the land? We plead for this; and plead for it now. The time is ripe. We have our call, and our encouragement from above, in the wonderful events at present emerging.

Let us give our reasons wherefore we ask the church now to take up this work. And let us show some of the advantages which may be expected to result from Systematic Evangelistic Effort. The discussion can do nothing but good. It directs our minds to the special business we have in hand, under a somewhat new and interesting aspect. The discussion may not convince every one; but some may be won over to try the experiment. And what argument may not do, that experiment will accomplish. An evangelistic effort, carried through in humble faith and prayer, cannot fail. Its sure and blessed result secures a lifelong friend to this method of labour, and prepares another earnest and hopeful worker.

In one of his remarkable lectures on Revivals of Religion, the Rev. C. J. Finney uses the following words. How few persons are to be found, who have ever taken revivals of religion as a subject to be studied and understood. Every body knows that in a revival Christians must pray, and do some things which they are not in the habit of doing. But multitudes know nothing of the reason why they should do this, or why one thing is better than another, and of course they have no principles to guide them; and when anything occurs which they do not expect, they are all at fault, and know not what to do. If men should go to work to build a house of worship, and know as little how to proceed as many ministers and professors know how to build the spiritual temple of God, they never would get up a house in the world. And yet people make themselves believe they are building the church of God, when they know nothing at all what they are about, and are utterly unable to give a reason why they are doing as they do, or why one thing should be done rather than another. There are multitudes in the church who never seem to suppose that the work of promoting revivals of religion is one that requires study, and thought, and knowledge of principles, and skill in applying the word of God, so as to give every one his portion in season. And so they go on, generally doing little or nothing, because they are attempting nothing—and if they ever do awake, go headlong to work, without any system or plan, as if God had left this part of our duty out of the reach of sound judgment and good sense."

These are somewhat hard words. But they are spoken in love by their single minded author. They did, and do yet, characterize a too prevalent fault, one which our discussion may help to correct. The first thing we have to say in favour of Systematic Evangelistic work is

IT HAS BEEN TRIED.

The General Assembly's Scheme of the Free Church of Scotland, which has been in operation ever since the disruption, is just a scheme of Systematic Evangelistic work. It might form a model for work in Canada. The ministers of the church are sent two and two to appointed localities, to spend about three weeks in daily Evangelistic labour.

The scheme arose in this manner: In the Assembly of 1844, Dr. Charles J. Brown preached a memorable impressive sermon. Deep emotion, even to tears, pervaded the whole Assembly. An interesting conversation ensued; and then the following motion was unanimously passed: "The General Assembly being deeply impressed, in the sight of God, with a sense of the sins and shortcomings of the ministers and members of the church in their holy callings, and recognizing the voice of the great head of the church in His providential dealings with her, and in the spirit which He has been pouring out on her, whereby He has been pleased to awaken some measure of concern as regards the past and present state of the ministry, as well as longing prayers for the revival of vital godliness in

the church and land, do desire, with profound humiliation, and in reliance on the great strength of Almighty God, solemnly to devote, dedicate and consecrate anew themselves and their fellow-labourers to the service of God, and His holy purpose of glorifying His great name, in saving souls through the preaching of the truth, and the operation of the Holy Ghost." Scarcely has the power of divine truth been more signally manifested than during Dr. Brown's sermon on that Tuesday. Under the solemn impression produced, the Assembly agreed to this motion.

But it was needful that something practical should follow. That some work should be done. To work, then, the Assembly addressed itself. The scheme for systematic evangelistic effort was devised, and at once set in operation. Selecting those who were deemed fittest for the service of the church sent them abroad over all the land. Summer after summer, these men went forth into the towns and villages, some to the southern borders and some to the Ultima Thule of Scotland, the Shetland Isles; some to the agricultural regions, and some to the mining districts so that all the needy parts of the land might be penetrated by this peculiar and stimulating agency. The fruit of these summer evangelistic excursions has not been small. Much of the awakening which has been manifested subsequently, in many different places throughout the land, has been traced to this evangelistic work as the seed and beginning. For thirty years now this scheme has been in operation. Sometimes as many as eighty different deputations have been sent out in the course of one summer. The field and the labourers were prepared and ready for the great work of grace now holding on its majestic course.

The kindred churches at home have now also begun to give their attention to this evangelistic work, and to carry on systematic operations. The testimony last year with respect to the Presbyterian Church in England, is altogether in favour of these special efforts. It was to this effect. In almost every instance they have met with the most marked success. In the large cities of Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, and others, they were accompanied and followed with the richest spiritual blessing. In London they are carried on largely, and with the most encouraging results. Again, we hear that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, have now also begun, with some vigor and system, to use this means for the furtherance of the interests of religion. And that, at the very outset of their operations, they have been favoured with nothing short of a revival of religion in Belfast, and in some country regions adjacent. All this was before the manifestation of the present wonderful work of grace. But what a special preparation for it this persevering and systematic evangelistic work formed.

Now, these are simple facts. And they surely indicate our course in Canada, and encourage us to enter on it. Even here, in isolated instances, the same work has been followed with the most blessed results. We have ourselves seen, repeatedly, an era of more abundant blessing, open before a congregation, in connection with such a special effort. The body of the people raised to a higher standard of spirituality, and entering on a more active and faithful christian course.

We plead for the church giving herself to this work, because, by so doing, she takes advantage of the constituted and appropriate means to produce a revival of religion. What is it that we aim at in Systematic Evangelistic work? Specially to gain a more earnest and continuous attention to the truths of the gospel. We count on this being secured by the series of closely following services, and that the truth, having a fair and full hearing, shall have its proper power and influence. We aim at—

CONTINUOUSNESS OF IMPRESSION.

We are not much in love with that phrase, but it may do for want of a better. Impressions are often made in the ordinary services of the sanctuary which fade and die because not speedily renewed and followed up. We have thousands of intermittent impressions, thousands of cases where the heart is touched and softened on the Lord's day, and hardened again during the working week. Now, might not special and Systematic Evangelistic work enable us to avoid this grief and loss?

The very aspect of the times seems to call for this work. It is a time of immense earnestness and pressure in all things. Business is a greater tax on every physical and mental power than ever before. Never before has there been such keen and restless competition in every department. Even among the multitudes of working men, the steam engine makes our great establishments scenes of the most absorbing activity. There can be no thought except of work, work, and amid the rush and din of the heating factory. But while the demand of worldly business on body and brain bears its maximum, there is a tendency abroad, to abridge in a minimum, the opportunities of the preacher of the gospel to recall the minds of men to higher interests. We would not dare, in these days, to attempt the thorough, well-rounded discourse, to which a past generation could listen with patience. Some thirty minutes is now considered the orthodox time for a sermon. Many are impatient when we exceed that narrow limit.

But all this goes to deprive us of a fair and adequate hearing for our message. That one half hour in the week, and with many, one service represents their whole usual attendance on the means of grace, that one half hour affords but a meagre opportunity for all we need to do: and even that is subject to fatal abatements. For, what can we expect to do such a span of time when, for six days before, the minds of our hearers have been made a common

thoroughfare by the concerns of worldly business. When we have them before us there is a worldly attitude of mind to rectify, an earthly crust to be broken through, before we can fairly reach them. Emphatically speaking, how certainly must many an impression made before the close of that one service, be swept helplessly away by the return of the worldly tide, and bring our hearers before us again at the week's end as ill prepared as ever to hear with profit.

Under this system the preacher of the gospel is at a disadvantage. It goes directly to foster that worldly absorption, to strengthen that grasp of the world on the soul, which he strives to undo. What can we do to help ourselves, and to help our hearers? Can we not break in, now and then, on this hardening worldly routine, and insist on a fuller and more thorough hearing and consideration of our message? If we cannot have this on one day, let us have it on successive days, when our hearers can come with impressions still fresh, or which may be renewed by a word. The impression becomes continuous, not intermittent, and then we see the might of that gospel which is the "power of God unto salvation."

"A revival of religion," says Finney "is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means,—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means. The means which God hath enjoined for the production of a revival, doubtless have a natural tendency to produce a revival. Otherwise God would not have enjoined them. But means will not produce a revival, we all know, without the blessing of God." This idea is a favorite one of his, and he presses it home most earnestly. He will have it that Systematic Evangelistic work is no more than the proper and most effective use of the constituted means to secure the desired result. It is ours to use these means in circumstances of the greatest advantage, and where nothing may hinder their native influence. We must consider the ordinary rules of cause and effect, and with a sound judgment guide ourselves by these, looking above, always, for the blessing from on high.

THE PROFIT TO MINISTERS.

This is another reason wherefore we plead for the church entering on a course of systematic evangelistic work. It is an advantage for a minister to be thrown off the track of ordinary routine, and to be called to exercise his ministry in circumstances different from those of his usual course. We are apt, in the course of ordinary work, to fall into a professional attitude of mind, and to work only according to rule. There is an attitude of mind in which we deal with divine truth in the abstract. Even when we preach on such practical topics as conviction of sin, repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we may deal with them abstractly, as doctrines, discussing them before our hearers, yet not touching them personally. It is a different thing when we try to deal, let us say, with conviction of sin, not as an abstract doctrine, but in the concrete form of a burden of trouble and fear on an awakened soul. There is, then, both an expansion and correction of our ideas. When we deal with it not as a doctrine, but as a fact, we are won, doubtfully helped in giving the truth its full practical power.

Now, the ordinary routine of ministerial work tends somewhat to foster the professional feeling, and beget that attitude of mind; keeping us a little way from our hearers. A series of evangelistic services tends directly to correct that, bringing us nearer to our hearers. The work begets the feeling that our preaching is a matter of business, whereon we transact, or seek to transact, the most momentous business with each hearer personally. As the late Rev. J. Milne puts the matter very well: "There is, at such times, a favour kindled by a distinct grasp of its object as present and immediately attainable. The hearer comes expecting that we shall call on him immediately and turn to God, conversion is in the mind both of preacher and hearer. This change of feeling, and attitude of mind, is an immense help to any minister in reaching the true style of preaching, and in enabling him to give it the true tone."

One sign of this is the felt unsuitableness of written and read discourses at such services. We should almost as soon expect to see a physician come to the bedside of a fever-patient, and take out a carefully studied and fully written thesis on the disease, and begin to read that as his instructions what to do. The circumstances will not suffer this. He must deal practically with the particular case. He must be able, by considering the symptoms of the patient, to say what is best to be done for him. He finds a considerable difference between studying the matter in books, and at the bedside of the sick. And so it is with a preacher in the experience of evangelistic work. There may be some topics which we find must be taken up. We may have a carefully prepared discourse upon that topic, the fruit of study, and a large use of books. Now, it is almost certain that we shall feel dissatisfied with the discourse, and be reluctant to deliver it to the people, word for word. Points which cost us great labour we shall feel inclined to drop as needless; others, formerly overlaid, shall come out in prominence. Like the clinical experience to the physician, so is this to the minister of the Gospel.

Moreover, the true topics of the preacher begin to bulk more largely in our view, when we grapple so directly with our real work. We are apt to forget that all other departments of our work are subordinate to that of the ambassador, when we come in Christ's name, beseeching men to be reconciled to God, and not counting our work done until we see this business completed, and have them at peace with God. In our ordinary ministerial work there is room for the exposition of the Scriptures at large, and for the imparting of an immense fund

of information, historical, social, or scientific. In this way whole books of Scripture may be taken in course, and all the various matters on which they touch receive a due consideration. But, in evangelistic work, you take your place, specially, as an ambassador for Christ; and you feel constrained to give yourself wholly to the ambassador's function and work. This takes its place as the work of the hour. The concentration of mind and heart on this, the peculiar function of the gospel minister, has the best of all effects in exalting in your esteem the special work given you to do, and in begetting within you the true spirit and mind of one who comes to men as the minister of Christ.

In short, evangelistic work gives a thoroughly practical turn to all we do. Our labour, instead of being mere professional duty, becomes a matter of business, to be settled if possible then and there. The effect of this cannot but be marked and beneficial on the whole tone and spirit of our ministerial work. A distinct aim gives force and power. We begin to discern a new meaning, or at least new depths of meaning in the design of the office we hold and the function we discharge. We discover a new power in that great instrumentality we use. The preaching of the gospel appears now, in very deed, as the power of God unto salvation. We learn to love more to proclaim that living word, whereby it is well pleasing to God that men should be saved. There is nothing better to give us a more thorough knowledge of the intrinsic power of this means of grace, or to beget the true tone in all our preaching, than a course of earnest, and systematic evangelistic work.

THE ADVANTAGE TO THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

There are many among them who desire to see the work of God revived, and the Church imbued with a new life and energy. Indeed, it is not in the heart of any man, possessed of vital religion himself, to bear patiently to see a spirit of slumber or apathy as a characteristic of the church. He will be constrained to cry to God to revive His work. This holds true of every living Christian soul. A true spiritual instinct leads to this. But the prayer, "wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee," is often offered up in a very general and formal manner, with little hope or expectation of being immediately heard and answered.

Now, if, at such a time, special evangelistic work is begun to effect, by God's blessing, the very end for which they are accustomed to pray, a great change is at once perceptible in the spirit of their prayers. Effort is now combined with prayer: a becoming and blessed combination. Instead of lingering prayer, this helps to give it point and fervency. On the effort put forth the heart is fixed, and the earnest cry for the divine blessing upon it is drawn forth. When prayer is thus concentrated, and directed on one point, if it is true prayer at all, with faith in the power and willingness of God to grant what we seek, then a high degree of hope and expectation is begotten. And thus reacts on our prayers to make them more earnest and importunate.

We cannot imagine a more certain, or more beneficial result, of the simple imitation of an evangelistic effort in any church or congregation, than the impulse and concentration which it must give to the desires and prayers of God's people. The gift of spiritual blessing, the refreshing of His heritage, and the conversion of sinners, are just those things which God delights to bestow. These are given in the use of the means of grace. When we have such faith in God as to set about the more diligent use of the means appointed to convey the blessing, the very effort is a constant prayer. Hope now begins to stand expectant. Faith grows. Hearts glow with a new fervour, kindled by a distinct grasp of the object as present and immediately attainable.

Possibly, our want of preparation, is one great hindrance to the revival of religion. Unbelief stands in the way. But when we begin to work with the distinct and definite purpose of reviving the church, when we take steps to stem the tide of prevailing worldliness, and break in on spiritual apathy, we can do nothing better for the purpose of bringing God's people into the proper frame to receive a blessing from on high. When they are prepared to receive, God is ready to bestow. We are not constrained in him. Evangelistic work, initiated in any church or congregation, would be abundantly repaid in its effect on God's people, in preparing them for the blessing. When they are awakened to more anxiety and desire on behalf of the unconverted, and made to realize more clearly their responsibility in connection with the matter, that is a revival. And it will not stop there. When water is poured on them that are thirsty, it is certain to overflow upon the dry ground. As an appeal, then, to the hearts of God's people, as a means to draw out their desires, and give concentration to their prayers, and as a help to awaken hope and expectation of an unmeasured blessing, we plead for evangelistic work. Many a time it has done for a church or congregation more than all this.

Besides, it is often in connection with such work, that christian men and women realize their personal responsibility to labour for Christ, and permanently rise to a higher standard of duty. Work for Christ, the personal effort to win souls, exerts the most beneficial influence. This matter is brought before members of the church in a more distinct and practical form than usual, in connection with an evangelistic effort. Their minds are directed specially to this aspect of their duty as Christ's people. Blessed results have often followed. Sometimes they have been raised up, not only to a higher standard of duty, but to a higher measure of spiritual

life and enjoyment. They have become, as they ought to be, like the springs of water in the midst of the people, a source of new life and refreshing to all around.

THE INFLUENCE ON THE WORLD.

This is another reason why we plead for systematic Evangelistic Work. On the face of it, such work is the expression of our hearts desire, to careless men, that they might be saved. When they see us combining together, and engaging in work and labour for their sakes, the thought is likely to be suggested to them, that it is time to care for themselves. They can hardly witness the manifestation of our concern, without some answering feeling in their own hearts.

How often ministers have occasion to combine to labour for other objects;—say, for the missionary enterprises of our own church, or for the work of some beneficent association. It is well to be identified with every good and worthy enterprise. But why should we not combine more systematically in labour for that which is best of all, that for the defence of which we are set apart? A combination for evangelistic work is not of which we are set apart? A combination for evangelistic work is not open to objection common in the mouths of worldly men, with respect to almost every other work of beneficence. If any thing is our special business it is the preaching of the gospel. The earnest and eager prosecution of that work, becomes us well, as the ministers of Christ. Worldly men cannot but see that we are only attending to our special business, and seeking, without hope of fee or reward for their good. Would it not be a strength to the ministry to take up such a position before the world?

The effect on worldly men cannot but be good. The very novelty of any special effort, of a series of evangelistic services, draws the attention of the many living in carelessness. A certain amount of interest is excited in the community, in which they share. They may scoff about making such a to-do. But we have an ally in every human conscience, more or less sensitive to the appeal these services make, that men should attend to the things which concern their eternal peace. Should there be some among them, and we believe there are always many, who under a smiling, careless exterior, cover up within the canker of a mind ill at ease, these meetings have a voice which can hardly be suppressed or resisted. In numberless instances they have been drawn to hear, and to receive the truth in the love of it, to the saving of their soul.

These special services, besides, form a distinct ground on which God's people may plead with their unconverted neighbours. It may be, it should be, their grief, to see them utterly given over to the world, perhaps they have neither the courage nor tact to bring spiritual and eternal things fairly before them. They fear to try. Well here is an effort made to reach the very objects of their anxiety, and to win them from sin to God. How easy to give the invitation to come, even to press them. How few could say that it was beyond their power to make the attempt to bring to the place of meeting some worldly, unconverted neighbour? There is this, at least, to be said. If hitherto you have shrunk from direct dealing with such an one, an evangelistic effort makes the duty as easy as possible, and gives you the best of all openings to begin the work. There can be no mistake about the design of such services. An invitation to attend them has all the significance of an entreaty to attend to the business of their eternal salvation. Thus, by such an effort, the children of God are not merely quickened to duty with respect to the world, but the way is made plain to do something, it gives them their opportunity.

But, enough. We hope this plea may gain serious consideration, which shall result in faithful action. Last year an earnest thoughtful writer, in England, discussed the matter of Systematic Evangelistic Work. After describing the services, detailing advantages, and reciting many encouraging facts, he closed with this sentence: "The church that acts on this plan faithfully, energetically, and perseveringly, will be the church of the future."

Doubtless it shall be so. For, notwithstanding the talk of the present day about the church of Christ not being sufficient for the age, and the gospel becoming obsolete, there is, after all, no power in the earth, at this moment, which can work with such effect on the minds of men, and produce such marvellous results, as the preaching of Christ, the wisdom and power of God unto salvation. The church, whose ministers and members are most thoroughly pervaded with the Evangelistic spirit, is the church which shall take its place first of all in every element of true power and progress. This spirit pervading a church can laugh to scorn the depreciation of unbelieving cavils. Now, would that our own beloved church in Canada were wise to mark the time. Would that she might take the place that befits her; and, with all the power of her admirable organization concentrate her energy to become the great Evangelistic agency for this wide Dominion.

There is no outward sign of politeness which has not a deep moral reason. True education trenches both the sign and the reason. Behaviour is a mirror in which everyone shows his own image. There is a politeness of the heart akin to love, from which springs the easiest politeness of outward behaviour.

Mortal life is no creation of moral phrases. The words that are truly vital for good or evil are only those which, as Pindar says, "The tongue draws up from the heart."—Whipple.