

The Excuse Habit

Why do so many nominal Christians lament their inability to do work for God? We have often heard young people say that they would like to do so-and-so "if" such-and-such were the case, or they really would, "but."—Oh! those "ifs" and "buts," what sorry excuses they are! You will never be able to do anything unless you exercise whatever ability you have, despite all the "ifs" and "buts" in the world. And, after all, most of these are only imaginary. Sometimes, we fear, they are the creations of our own wilful caprice that seeks some extenuating circumstance for an inward spirit of indolence. Even supposing there are real hindrances to the way of one's service, what then? Shall we cringe or falter or lose heart? None who ever accomplished anything for God was thus cowardly. The loiterers always seek excuse, the truly loyal never apologize. What you can do, do, and in the very doing of it, added power to do more will be gained. Our Master has always done the willing weak ones to do great things, and from seemingly incompetent nobodies He raises up mighty souls to do exploits. Not one reader of these words is so weak but he may become a harvester of souls.

Definiteness in Christian Service

Where a positive religious experience has begun in the soul, its manifestation will be seen in the activities of daily life. It is often said that the most needed type of religion to-day is the practical. Was it not so in the earliest of Christian times? Our Lord directed us all towards this kind of service. But He was careful to instruct His disciples as to their need of personal knowledge, personal fitness, personal preparedness, for this practical work for the extension of His Kingdom. And when they had these things, when they were conscious of personal experience and empowerment, they spoke with "boldness," and mighty effects were produced.

There is no new way to do work for Him. At the very core of our experience must be the absolute knowledge that we have something essentially different from that which others have, something without which we could not live, and for lack of which they are dying, before we can effectively reach them and persuade them to accept what we offer. Have we this different, this superior, this indispensable thing? If we are not sure that we have, we positively cannot do definite and effective service for Christ.

There is little of this definite personal work done, and the very uncertainty of many regarding their own spiritual state and possessions is one reason why. How can you confidently recommend the Bible to another if you do not know it to be the word of God's grace yourself? How can you advise prayer if you are uncertain about God answering your own prayers? How can you point sinners to the way of life if you doubt the forgiveness of sinners? How can you preach or teach the doctrines of the New Testament if you are not sure of their appropriateness or effectiveness?

Definite Christian work, as we see it, must be the result of definite Christian experience, or, at best, it will be done in a perfunctory manner, lacking spirit and power, and from this grows another practice that in our judgment is becoming too common.

It is an easy way to shirk individual responsibility for definite personal Christian service, by appointing a committee. Oh, the committees! The need is seen, but the initiative, and, presto! the committee is appointed and the work too often un-done. We know the value of organized, concerted, united work; but we long for the time to come when, instead of waiting for a committee to be appointed, our individual members will do what they see needs to be done. A Relief Committee is good; but when you see a case of need, why say "That's the committee's work, let them look after it?" Let the helping hand yourself. And so it runs through all our church machinery. Meanwhile, hundreds are spiritual weaklings for lack of something definitely and personally done. "Our League cannot do anything without a committee," was said not long ago. "And it is done then?" we asked. The answer was suggestive, "Half the time the Committee never meets." Therein is weakness. What we want is not more machinery to devise new schemes of service; but more men to work the machinery we have. What is needed is not more or better methods, but more intense and heart-springing motives. Not short-cut plans or patented processes can do God's work, but prayerful, persevering, spirit-filled workers. For lack of such, the churches are too inactive instead of being centres of busy industry for God. Such workers with but indifferent equipment have achieved marvels. With the elaborate organization of to-day, they would conquer kingdoms.

Saladin, looking at the sword of Richard the Lion-hearted, expressed surprise that so ordinary a blade should have wrought such mighty deeds. Baring his arm, the English King said, "It was not the sword, but the arm of Richard that did these things." And it is only by the strength of

living personality that mighty deeds for God can be achieved in subduing the world before the march of the Conquering Christ. With the Bishop of Exeter, we say:

Give us men!
Men who, when the tempest gathers,
Grasp the standard of their fathers
In the thickest fight;
Men who strike for home and altar
(Let the coward cringe and falter)
God defend the right!
True as truth, though lorn and lonely,
Tender, as the brave are only;
Men who tread where angels have trod—
Men for country and for God;
Give us men! I say again, again,
Give us such men.

The Call for Men

It is no new call. And it will never be an old or worn-out one. The needs of each succeeding generation can never be met without the living active age. The work of God has ever needed, and shall ever need, men. The demands of the church, as its operations extend and its activities are multiplied, are the same to-day as a hundred years ago. When William Case, in 1808, was opening up the Western work of Methodism in this country, he wrote to Bishop Asbury: "I waded through deep waters and miles on my way to the river Thames, more than two hundred miles, and one hundred yet from Detroit, preaching in different places and thinking of an unsuccessful missionary returning in disgrace. But the Lord greatly blessed my soul, and showed me in a dream, that this 'wilderness should blossom as a rose.'—And as each deep water and mire request that men of stability and faithfulness be sent into this new work, for some will seek to destroy it. To engage in such a mission may be a sacrifice; but what good have we attained without sacrifice? God will more than repay."

As then, so now, the need is for "men of stability and faithfulness," who shrink not at "sacrifice," and are strengthened and sustained by the knowledge that good is being attained, and that "God will more than repay."

Will the supply of such men ever fail or cease? Not if parents count it a privilege to give their sons in infancy to the work of God, and in the spirit of the apostle, they can say as they see their loved ones depart to hard and toilsome mission stations, "If I had twenty sons I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them again." The place of dedication is the home, the time is at birth, the responsible persons are the parents. God honors and accepts such devoted sons, as He did Samuel of old, and had the world more Hannahs and Elkanahs the church would have more prophets.

Will the supply of such men cease? Not if Sunday School teachers, pastors, and Epworth League leaders are faithful. Scores of boys in our congregations might be won to a life of public service in active work for God if they were personally sought as recruits for the ministry. But if the home is failing in the primary duty of infant dedication, the church in its various activities is none the less culpable for neglect. Every boy hears more or less about the merits, prospects, claims, emoluments, and such like, of the trades and professions; but how few ever hear in personal conversation of the sublime glory, the supreme privilege, the immeasurable profit or the unspeakable joy of preaching the Gospel.

Will the supply of such men cease? Never! But the work of God may be delayed by our dilatory methods and plans, and whether we are parents, teachers, stewards, presidents or leaders, we must remember that we are responsible not only for a certain measure of work ourselves, but for the increase of workers to carry the great world plan of God to a successful completion.

Yes, the church still needs "men of stability and faithfulness," as in Case's day. Have you not a boy to give? By God's grace let us keep up the supply of men by dedicating and training our boys!

About Our Honor Rolls

On page 141 you will find one. It represents hard, conscientious, yet pleasant study. Our friends who have written speak in glowing terms of the correspondence plan. It is not too late for you to join the ranks. Write for particulars. We want another Honor Roll. From month to month we shall print the names of those Leagues whose officers are all subscribers to our paper. How many of your officers have their names on the ERA mailing lists? As soon as all their names are there, let the Editor know, and down will go your name. What League will be the first on this Honor Roll? Surely everyone in any official position in our Young People's Societies and Sunday Schools should regularly receive this paper. Get on the Honor Roll!

"He who never changes any of his opinions never corrects any of his mistakes."