

The Development of the Unused Forces of Our Churches.

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In prescribing I propose three elements, Education, Organization and Inspiration. You will observe my prescription has at least this merit, that it possesses three basal remedies. Providing these are not too much thinned there surely ought to be some virtue herein for the sufferer.

I. EDUCATION.—Enlightenment is the prime requisite to progress and improvement. Men must not only know what is the true ideal and that it is within the range of the possible, but they must also have disclosed to them the fact that they are themselves imperfect. Having arrived at the latter, one has taken a long step towards the former. But these things are not possible apart from education in its various aspects.

Men are found half alive in loyalty to the church because they do not know what the church really is. Sickly plants we have in many of our members. They claim the sole purpose of Christian life is to get to heaven. They can only thus think because they do not know what truth is. We have many good and trusted Christian people who have only half influence in their community for they are only half cultivated; hence the importance attaching to enlightenment in the utilization of the unused forces.

Our college in great measure holds the key that is to unlock these rich veins of unused force. I am not making a claim for a new university, we have a goodly plant in this direction. The same may be said of our academy and seminary; of our journals, of our Sunday Schools and of our pulpits. We have an abundance and in quality are yet in advance of our constituency. It is worth while, however, to ask if we are reaping from these educational forces as largely as it is possible for us as a body? I do not mean merely that we should have more students at college, or more pupils in Sunday School, or a larger subscription to the MESSENGER AND VISITOR. These are desirable as our constant advocacy indicates. There is something more important than these, as vital as they are. It is rather more study we need than more students, and more assimilation of our literature rather than a larger circulation of it. That is, we are in need of utilization and quality rather than circulation and quantity.

Here let me be more specific. We have the highest appreciation of our educational work at Wolfville. There is not a year passes but we feel that infinitely more could be done the constituency if it would but take advantage of the privileges therein. Further, there is not a Convention passes but men are heard to say in their advocacy of the College interests that her strength is in the fact of the general rather than the particular interest in her. Now I ask is it not possible for the college to enlarge its sphere of ministry and at the same time intensify and enlarge its body of support? Heretofore we have regarded the body of students on the hill as the body to be served by the college. Why not the whole Baptist body be directly the recipients of her good as well as the student body? Is it "university extension" I am advocating? It is extension whether it has the technical idea of that movement or not. Perhaps the B. Y. P. U. A. has suggested something for us as a Maritime educational force, I refer to their C. C. C. idea. How wonderfully has it blessed its constituency, in that educational idea, and how wonderfully has it just bound its constituency to it. Could not our college by such popular courses become to us what the B. Y. P. U. A. has been to its constituency in this regard? What would be the result? One whole participating constituency would receive its direct ministry, better fitting it for church work; and in return it would more fully minister to its great benefactor, and the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, which would naturally be the medium, would become a greater factor in the homes of the body.

"Our college staff is overworked already," someone says. We do not propose to add to the hard worked professors. We understand that the tendency is towards the establishment of some theological work at Acadia. A large bequest is awaiting the fulfilment of the conditions there when it will become the property of the institution. Why should not this new energy to be added to Acadia in some measure look to this end, the direct ministry to the non-college constituency as well as to the student body?

The churches need it, brethren. They must have mental quickening and that of the right type or they will dwindle in influence and power. Christian culture is as necessary as conversion in the progress of the church, and an educated laity as necessary as an educated clergy. Talents must be let loose, and brought to the service of Christ.

Further, there is the means in the pockets of our people to give ample support to our Christian institutions, although we are not rich. We only need the secret to get at it. The time is fast passing away when an appeal to the self-sacrificing spirit of our noble fathers will be sufficient to move the generations to support the college.

It will not always suffice to say that our churches reap an annual contingent of preachers from her, an occasional Christian doctor or lawyer. These things will only have an abiding effect to strengthen the bonds between the churches and the institutions as the churches see these schools becoming a direct and constant source of beneficent ministry.

It needs only a little thought to discover that what I have said specifically of our college in this connection is also true of our denominational journals. It is not sufficient to have a paper coming to our homes. It must be read. It is more important to get a good paper read than to get it published. From that we can pass to our Sunday Schools. Let the Sunday School mean a truly enlightening and educational factor to our pupils and not a mere Sunday diversion, which does not always last as a diversion. Let it be a graded school, if you will, and it will become a greater factor in our churches in enlarging and in unloosing the unused forces thereof.

And what is said of these agencies and constituencies may just as truly be said of our Foreign Missions. Stagnation will most surely settle down upon ignorance, but progress and increased usefulness will surely accompany enlightenment in the Christian community.

I cannot pass from this feature of the subject without a word as to the home in this connection. The Christian parent has almost unlimited opportunities in increasing the value of our church members. Parents can clench the nail after the pastor or Sunday School worker has driven it home, or they undo in a great measure what these have sought to do. The worldly ambition of parents, wherein wealth and social influence and worldly pleasure alone have sway, gives no opportunity for children to be impressed with the church as anything else than an institution to receive the odds and ends of life. Sabbath School work is not a piece of religious proxy machinery for careless parents. The home can do much by way of increasing the usefulness of our membership and it cannot shift it to another. It is a lamentable fact that so many of our homes never regard the family altars or undertake to instruct in the Word the inmates thereof.

II. ORGANIZATION.—In speaking of organization as another factor in this development, I mention it from the point of view of method. This does not necessarily imply the introduction of or the extension of societies. Whether we need more or fewer organizations I am not to discuss, nor whether we need institutional churches. I only claim that a measure of these unused forces will yield themselves to judicious organization.

"The church is all you want," someone says. Yes, truly, we do not want societies apart from the church—away with all such as are divorced from her. I think, however, that sometimes out of our jealousy for the church we have suspiciously regarded definite and specific means by which to accomplish our work. The apostles approved organization when they declaring, "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables," instructed the church thus, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business." There has been displayed much of heresy in the form to which F. B. Meyer directs attention when he says, "There is no sense in always telegraphing to heaven for God to send a cargo of blessing unless we are at the wharf to unload the vessel when it comes." It is not sufficient to educate. The Venus de Milo had a head to contrive but no hands to perform. Good heads are all right but we want good hands for execution.

It is scarcely necessary for me to stop to advocate organization from the point of view of co-operation. Every intelligent man knows that successful co-operation can come only through organization simple or otherwise. But let me speak of it from the point of view of centralization.

The application of the principles of organization tends to centralize and so strengthen our work. We think failure to reap more largely as to sow more effectively frequently is due to our spreading tendencies, that is after the manner of the farmer who spreads himself over the whole of his 200 acres for small returns rather than confine himself to a smaller portion to greater effect.

How much too is lost that men in Christian work arise merely at the occasion of an emergency or of desperation. Then they strike out at random. The result is talent exasperated and beneficence outraged. Possibly a large measure of success attends the extraordinary or shooting-star effort at the very grave expense of the regular. Enthusiastic souls in response to a brilliant appeal empty their spirit of benevolence into the agent's purse and the local church suffers and possibly the local preacher has to go unpaid. This is neither good for the denomination and its work, permanently, nor for the individual contributor. The established should not suffer because of the novel. Having a centralizing organized method and working to that, then we develop and do not strain the tendons of the denominational life.

This suggests another fruit of organization—permanency. This ceaseless winding up and running down business is a dissipation of energy, we need something that will stick. It will never do for churches to drift in

the haphazard way of adopting a plan to meet the occasion, and so with each want of the church run to its members. There are some methods which will pauperize the church while its members are yet rich and give little of their means because they create the impression the church is a perpetual begging institution. There is no virtue in making beneficence hard, just because it is beneficence. "Lord loveth a cheerful giver," and methods to facilitate our religious efforts will be acceptable to God, because enlarging of our spirit and our possibilities. This permanency, however, all will admit can only come from organization. The haphazard and spasmodic give no strength to any movement much less to the cause of God.

I have spoken of organization as necessary for the centralizing of our forces and as giving permanency to our work. These are rather conserving features of organization. Let us consider organization for the purpose of utilization more directly.

It fills one with sadness to behold the great army of idlers and the great array of unused talents in the churches. An acknowledged authority in Christian literature says, "During the year 1891 in a large denomination of the U. S. it took on the average fourteen church members to win a single convert from the world; in another it took seventeen and in another twenty-two, striking an average for these three it took about 19.8 of these Christians twelve months to make one convert." It is very unsatisfactory to judge the Lord's work by figures and in some respects puts false standards on his work. We believe that we need not more Christians but more Christian, not more converts but more consecration. Yet, we must admit, the force of our churches at work is altogether too small, so the number of converts is too small and the quality below what it should be. Here we quote again from the same writer. He says "there are hundreds of thousands in our churches who ten, twenty, or forty years ago professed to give themselves, time, powers and possessions to Christ's service, who have never even invited a soul to him. Yet they could get for the asking letters stating that they are in 'good and regular standing.'" Further he says, "I know a pastor who says he can get a million dollars from his church for a Christian enterprise but could not get from them personal Christian service."

When on a sea voyage after having looked at the waves for some days Edison is reported to have said it made him wild to see so much force going to waste. "But one of these days," he continued, "we will chain all that—the falls of Niagara as well as the winds—and that will be the millennium of electricity." It took no prophet to give utterance to that. It only required one who believed in the unlimited possibilities of organization to utilize the unused and wasting forces in the world about him. What Edison said of the physical could be said of the moral and religious. I do not mean to say that organization is capable of rectifying every difficulty and bringing out all the unused forces but wise and holy and consecrated organization will do much.

Have we then as pastors and churches given the subject of organization sufficient thought. As leaders we are observant to perceive the wrong, but we have made a greater display of perception and courage in detecting and pointing out the wrong than of courage and persistency and skill in rectifying it.

I believe, brethren, every church should have its organizing force. In the war department of the nation in the time of conflict the ruler gathers about his "board of strategy," securing information and formulating plans of operation for the fighting force. Every church should have its board of strategy in its conflict with the world. The pastor and the deacons if they are wise and discreet men should form this board. They should conduct themselves with such discretion one towards the other, that there could be the fullest and freest intimacy on all the church work. Their plans could be formulated out of the exact facts and not out of hearsay and imagination, and the work of the church in bringing into line the unused forces would be greatly blessed. It is just as essential to get converts to work as to get them converted (if I could be permitted such an expression.)

The sub of the whole matter is this, we want more business in our religion, we have long heard it advocated that we needed more religion in our business. To this we all assent, but we as firmly believe we will not arrive at that happy end wherein we shall secure more religion in our business, till first we put more business in our religion.

III. INSPIRATION. I have made strong claims for education and organization. There are many in our churches that will yield their powers more fully to God's service by merely instructing them in the ways, but there is that which will not yield to anything short of the grace of God. Some need merely to be instructed, with many however it is rather a problem of conversion.

Motives are more important than methods in this struggle, for without the former the best possible methods will be regarded indifferently and suspiciously. Men are saying "we can't, we can't," to this, that and the other Christian service; when it is but a polite way of saying "we won't, we won't." This arises from the lack of motive power of the right sort.