

Messenger and Visitor

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S. McC. BLACK EDITOR.
A. H. CHIPMAN BUSINESS MANAGER.
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The Church or the Society?

We have been asked why there are so many societies to do the work which it seems to many the church should perform? While there has been considerable discussion of this subject in recent years we respond to the request and offer a suggestion or two.

In the first place we think the societies come into being in part because of a narrow view of the office and work of the church. Unconsciously, almost, there has come to be in some churches at least a feeling that the church has done its whole duty when it has provided for preaching on Lord's Day, the other services for prayer and praise, the administration of the ordinances and the equipment of a Sunday School. Something is also expected to be done for missions, and then it is felt the church is doing pretty well. A proposition looking to any more extensive operations is perhaps viewed with some suspicion, as if it were opposed to the sacred character that belongs to the church. A kind of superstitious view of the church makes young people prefer to work in a society which seems to be a little removed from the immediate church influence. They are a little afraid of the Lord, so to speak, and think it presumption to act as a church in the new effort, but are quite willing to serve the Lord and the church if possible by helping in a society. This we consider wrong. For while the reverence for the church and the upholding of public worship must ever be dominant, surely the activities of the church must not be restricted to formal services. Our Lord's life was one of ceaseless effort for the minds and bodies and souls of men. He went about doing good. And His church may well follow in His steps. Unless it tries to do so its life will be weak. The activity of the church in its endeavor to preach the gospel to every creature should be promoted to the utmost. And the divine character of active effort should be allowed as well as the sacredness of worship.

To study the history of God's work in the world is serving Christ and perfectly proper for the church. It ought to be considered the duty of the members to grow in knowledge of Christ as well as in grace, and to learn what history has to teach us is to learn of Christ. No superstitious sense of the sacredness of the church should prevent us from being men in understanding. What an enlarged view of the kingdom of God might be obtained if our churches as such would undertake the study in as thorough a way as possible of the history of the last hundred years. The progress in material resources and social conditions, the diffusion of knowledge and the growth of science, and especially the progress of Christianity would be found most fruitful to the earnest, devout Christian. And the undertaking of such a work by the church would give it a character that would be a strong impulse, while the church itself would throb with new life. It ought to be understood among us that study is to be made religious. The courses of the young people's work might be carried on by the church as a body without the slightest infringement on the reverence due to our most sacred institution.

Another reason for the growth of the societies seems to be that the business and work of many of the churches is kept very largely in the hands of a few of the older members. Not only in the choosing of the pastor, the erection of a house of worship or other large undertakings is this the case, but in practically all the business. The smallest work seems to require the wisest and ablest men in the church. So it comes to pass that a few deacons and old men do all the work. While in theory all are equal, in reality a very limited number compose the

church. Thus a line of cleavage is begun between old and young and the societies spring up. It is not that the young desire to usurp the functions of the old, nor that the old deliberately exclude the young. But the practice tends to separation. If the church could take in its whole work and could give its younger members posts of service adapted to their ability and fitted to develop their sense of responsibility, there would be fewer societies and more united effort for the highest purposes disclosed to man.

A Surplus of Ministers.

This is what we have. The denominational press of the United States is discussing this subject pro and con. It seems to be a live subject. We are told that there are hundreds of ministers who are idle and cannot find churches to serve—it may be the churches they want to serve. And yet the world is not brought into subjection to Christ. In our own land there are communities where the gospel is preached very infrequently. This may be because of the niggardliness of the people of those communities. But why does no one seek to create a source of need for the truth? Then, too, the great heathen world is accessible today as it never was before. The business of the preacher is to "preach the gospel to every creature." A surplus of ministers, and men and women dying in their sins, some of them at our very doors. There is something wrong somewhere.

There may be too many persons clothed with the ministerial office, but there are not too many devoted, consecrated ministers of Christ,—men who realize that their first business, their one business, is to bring the truth of God's Word to bear upon the heart and conscience of men individually and collectively, whether or not they receive appointment from denominational boards, or receive full compensation for their labors; men who realize that their responsibility is to the Great Head of the church, and whose great concern is not as to the amount of salary they obtain, but whether, when they render their account, they shall hear from His own lips "Well done!" There is and there always will be a great demand for this latter class of ministers. We have far too many of the former, and perhaps we are on the road to the making of more of them.

Spurgeon was accustomed to say to his theological students, "Young men, if you can possibly stay out of the ministry, don't enter it." That is good advice. It ought to be given to some men seeking aid today. If it were given at all of our schools of learning there would be fewer students for the ministry, but the proportion of failures in after life would be much less. Perhaps we should get a better brand, which might not be amiss.

Editorial Notes

—In another column will be found a list of places which Rev. A. J. Vining proposes to visit in the interest of North West Missions. Mr. Vining has a good story to tell and he tells it with telling effect. The brethren in our churches will be glad to hear him and our pastors will give him a cordial welcome to their pulpits.

—It is said that the total strength of the Moravians in their home churches in Germany, Great Britain and the United States is 37,475, and they have 92,142 converts in their mission fields. These may possibly include infants. The Moravians are models in missionary zeal and endeavor. As a foreign missionary body they have had a marvellous history. It might be wise policy for some of the great denominations of Christians on this continent to ask themselves the question, "Might we not very properly take a leaf from the Moravian notebook as to our own methods?" That they should have such marvellous results, and make such a splendid showing, should set some of us thinking most seriously as to the why and wherefore of all this. There are some people among us who will be narrow enough to suggest, that perhaps the Moravian brethren would "have done even more for foreign missions had they been more careful to strengthen the base of operations at home." Do not these brethren, and there are such, know that the 92,000 will give a base of supply as well as the 37,000. Why not? "The field is the world."

—The Disciples of Christ are in annual session in this city. They are holding their meeting in the Coburg Road church. Representatives are present from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, as well as from different parts of New Brunswick. The reports from the churches show a falling off in membership in some instances and an increase in others. A new church has been organized at Nauwigewauk. Rev. W. A. Stewart, the pastor of the Coburg Road church, has been compelled to resign his charge on account of failing health, and also to sever his connection with the editorial work and management of 'The Christian,' the organ of the Disciples in these provinces. Mr. Stewart will be greatly missed by his own congregation and will be a distinct loss to religious forces of the city. On Friday last a public missionary meeting was held under the auspices of the Maritime Christian Women's Board of Missions, which was presided over by Miss Payson, who gave a most admirable review of the work of the past year, which was followed by short addresses by Revs. Messrs. Ford, Harding and Murray. An interesting paper was read by Mrs. Richardson on Missionary Zeal.

—The annual Conference of the Free Baptists of New Brunswick began its session on Friday, the 4th inst., at 10 o'clock, in the F. B. church, West End. The whole of the first day was a ministers' conference. Both morning and afternoon sessions were private. In the evening Rev. M. S. Gregg, of Gibson, preached. The conference proper opened on Saturday at 10 o'clock. It is expected that there will be representatives from 150 churches. On the Lord's Day the different Baptist churches were supplied most acceptably by the visiting clergymen of the F. B. denomination. The meetings up to the time of our going to press have been interesting and indicate a considerable degree of zeal and devotion in the work entrusted to this active and aggressive people. It does not seem, however, that their interest in world-wide missions is all that it should be and might be if properly directed. The delegation from the Maritime Convention was well received. Why there should be two bodies of Christians so near akin in matters of faith and practice as the Regular and Free Baptist bodies in this Province is hard to see?

—The church needs today the enlistment for Christian work, of every one of its members within its borders, could this enlistment be effected we could then sing more effectively,

"Like a mighty army,
Moves the church of God."

It is a fact that no church which fails to recognize its duty to those who are in need of the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be truly called a living church. As one has well said—"It is a recognized law of spiritual life that to be consciously saved, means to seek to save others. The power to do this is like the widow's cruse of oil unfailing, if used." As the withered hand was healed when stretched out, so many a church member, many a church may be paralyzed for want of obedience to the divine command, "Stretch forth thine hand." A church that is not evangelistic ought not to be regarded as evangelical. Orthodoxy must find its way promptly from doctrine to practice. Doing for Christ ought to be done as a part—a vital part, too, of believing in Christ.

"The restless millions wait,
That light whose dawning maketh all things new.
Christ also waits, but men are slow and late;
Have we done what we could? Have I? Have you?"

—The Liquor traffic must go—not on, but out—out of existence, and it must be kept out. This is the aim and purpose of the Temperance reform. The struggle will be long and hard, but it will be successful. It is sure to be so. There can be no doubt whatsoever on this point. All that has yet been done is but the beginning. The hardest battles are yet to be fought. Those who expected a Prohibitory law as the result of the Plebiscite, were men "born out of due time." This is no kid glove conflict. It is a war to the death—the death of the liquor traffic. This question is economic as well as moral. We are not to ignore the latter but press it yet more vigorously. We are, however, to give special attention to the economic. Then, too, we must bear in mind, that sentiment alone will not win victory. The struggle with the traffic in strong drink is no battle on paper. Much may be done with paper, especially if it finds its way to the bal-