

Home Missions in Western Canada

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The principle underlying Home Missions is that they emphasize the activities whereby we seek to develop better Christians. Home Missions are intensive. They raise the moral standards of those who are pagan by choice. Foreign Missions emphasize the activities whereby we seek to win more Christians. Foreign Missions are extensive. They raise the moral standards of those who are pagan by necessity. And since we can never hope to win many more to be Christians until we have developed better ones, the fundamental importance of Home Missions becomes apparent. For example, how can Christianity hope to win Japan so long as it can be truly said that social and moral conditions are far worse in London than in Tokyo? The progress of the Faith in China will be slow indeed as long as Chinese moralists fight a losing battle against British opium and the American cigarette.

I outline briefly three phases of our subject, viz., its teaching, its Conflict, and its Outlook.

To catch the spirit of the Teaching of Home Missions let us take a backward glance to obscure Palestine where a young Peasant was fired with the conception that moral and not material forces should rule the world. After his tragic death for this Faith, the few frightened Galilean fishermen who were his friends, apprehended enough of the significance of this revolutionary idea to brighten their sordid lives with a glow of Hope.

After them come one who gathered together in strange cities little groups of slaves and artisans. It was a turning point in human history when Paul, moving aside from the altar-people of Asia, entrusted this teaching to the Judean peoples of Europe. Among these were our Anglo-Saxon fathers, and through these was transmitted the moral teaching of Jesus and of Paul. To this teaching the religion of the Jew, the art of the Greek, and the law of the Roman, and the blood of Vikings have all contributed to make our Heritage of unique significance.

Canada, land of beauty and of wealth untold, has received a moral trust, the magnitude of which a few rare spirits have already realized. A wide variety of types of men have been flung forth to do the impossible by the inspiration of the thought that it is the moral issues which are eternal. One thinks of the Incendiary of E. J. Peck, who, in a pagan church, among the Esquimaux of Cumberland Sound; of the unflinching courage of James Evans who fearlessly faced the "life for life" law in a pagan village in the vast wilderness in which he had been the unfortunate agent of a fatal accident; of the business ability of Wm. Duncan, who in the far North Pacific colonized a cannibal Indian race, and taught them to make and use houses, roads, wharves, schools, shops, stores and churches; of the sacrifice of Bishop Bruns, Apostle of the North for 40 years, his diocese one million square miles, with exposure and danger disregarded, making terrible journeys through desolate solitude, with no variety of fields, meadow, or landscape.

These heroes of yesterday, in our own land, were inspired by a common spirit and teaching. To-day their places are being taken by men of like spirit; but whose opportunity is immeasurably greater. Missions have become for Canada a national issue. If we do not maintain we stand in grave danger of being paganized.

Grimly and silently the Conflict is be-

ing waged. The leaders of the world forces have a stupendous task. They are true missionaries, often combining in strong personalities the qualities and gifts of traveller, craftsman, linguist, author and organizer, as well as preacher. The most subtle foe is the rule of self-indulgent materialism, which is rapidly becoming a Canadian characteristic. An eminent British scientist speaking recently in Winnipeg said of human settlements in Canada, "It is ever drenching fresh areas, and so far, has been predatory, predatory, reckless and destructive." In proof of this have we not the facts of scattered timber, vanished beaver and buffalo, depleted fisheries, stripped mines, and impoverished farms. This prodigal selfish use of vast resource has seemed to give us an era of peace, plenty, prosperity and pleasure. That we have proved to be fatally absorbing, and that problems are upon us unawares.

The very vastness of our heritage is in itself a grave responsibility. Twenty-five years ago the West was almost unpeopled. Twenty-three years ago Vancouver was in ashes. To-day a permanent city of 100,000, it throbs with commerce and taxes every public facility to the utmost to keep pace with its growth.

Regarding the Middle West there are no figures that are up-to-date. There are great lands, great areas of arable soil, bewildering in extent, as far north-west of Winnipeg as Winnipeg is north-west of New York. All this is of vital interest to us. Our sons and our brothers have been lured yonder by the challenge of uncalmed wealth. They have gone seeking personal gain. They hope to get the money dollars and to get them easier. The danger is that these kinsfolk of our own will inevitably become prodigal sons rather than wise stewards. Their dream is golden. To get on, to glut the prairie soil, to be rich, to retire while in the prime of youth in some desirable city to drink richer wines and wear softer. —It was such self-indulgent materialism that ten years ago made the saloon the social and business centre of every new prairie town. So, too, in the mining camps farther west, with their unstable economic conditions, constant strife between capitalism and labor, widespread materialistic socialism, no Sunday, no holidays, no homes, short hours, big wages, no social restraint. Small wonder that splendid fellows, amid such an atmosphere of fierce temptations to sins of the flesh, became prodigal sons in ideals and in habits. It is an atmosphere where faith in moral forces weakens. No young man should go West whose moral life is not strengthened by a vital faith in God-fearing religion.

Western Missions must thrive in this stifling atmosphere, must face blind indifference to right value of moral issues. The missionaries who would lead under such circumstances must be men of faith, with elements of the heroic, and with a vital faith that will let necessary suffer in the championing of an unpopular cause.

The present situation from a missionary viewpoint is complicated by the unknown presence of the foreigner. The Anglo-Saxon dominates his material heritage with at least a dozen peoples. This has been well called "The greatest work that has ever confronted our church in Canada." Winnipeg has been called "The Melting Pot of Races." We are told that one-half of the population of Manitoba is new to that city and its suburbs, and less than one-half of these people are Canadians.

About one-third are either foreign born or children of foreign parents. Truly a great fusion of races is taking place. The serious aspect of the process of assimilation is the fact that so far the product has not been satisfactory and

the process not rapid. For example it is said that "city Galileans are reckoned as worth so much a head at the polls."

Other features of this problem are the painfully over crowded slum conditions, the perplexing question of the bi-lingual school, and the religious faith of thousands of Ruthenians, who may become either Protestant or Roman Catholic. Winnipeg is heretofore striving to cope with the problem of education, but finds it difficult to build schools fast enough. In that city in a typical school it was recently found that out of an attendance of 537, 392 were non-English. If "the problem of the non-English is the problem of the race," that problem for Western Canada is complicated by the foreign child who learns all too readily, to smartly imitate our follies. Self-preservation alone, demands that Home Missions take cognizance of these. And in this work state and church must cooperate. The task is too great for either alone.

In conclusion—what is the outlook?

Are Home Missions a forlorn hope or will the moral forces dominate? One of the superintendents of the far flowing prairie missions recently remarked: "These days of heroes are not yet gone." We suspect not when he mentions journeys of 27,109 miles in the activities of one year's duties. One Conference opened up 32 new fields in one year. When a province can say of its growth, "A new town every week, and a new school every school day," it is no wonder that the Superintendent of Missions reports "Missions are so changed and rearranged that it would be next to impossible to present any statement of individual growth." But he adds cheerfully, "All along is progress, increase and development."

Ten years ago the saloon was one of the first buildings in every new town. It was the centre of influence. To-day there are present everywhere the signs of public drinking are numbered. Conventions, brotherhoods, and scientists, are uniting in condemnation of the dominance of the saloons. Saloon towns will to-morrow be impossible.

The centre of the first among the new buildings of growing towns is the hall. This is surely a more legitimate business centre than the bar, which is still in new towns the social centre. To-morrow there is strong hope that the dream of the missionary will come true, and the home, the school and the church come to their own. In helping to bring this to pass Home Missions are winning a conflict, solving a problem, and saving a nation. This opportunity and responsibility call for utmost wisdom and consecration.

These are good days in which to live. Compared with other epochs of history, even the money-mad idolatry of the West is sane and temperate; far fewer than formerly give themselves to folly, and the faces of more than ever before are hopefully uplifted, ready and capable of playing the man in the coming days.

Canadian youth are crossing the seas by the score, seeking to dominate the Orient with their moral ideal. To this task the West is giving its share.

Meanwhile can we dominate the paganism within our own borders? If from the homes of the older provinces there continue to drift West boys who become a burden and a curse in the new land, instead of a blessing, then the agents of moral forces may still be outnumbered. From the youth of to-day must rise leaders, men to whom money is nothing, and manhood is everything; who in that spirit will dominate in school, church, press, and legislature, for the saving of a heritage, and the triumph of the Christ.—An address given at the Toronto E. L. Convention, Toronto, Nov. 2, 1909.

"That is poor worship that blinds you to the world's woe."