

The Need of Laborers and the Way to Get Them.

The Convention Sermon preached at Yarmouth, N. S., August 24th, 1902, by Rev. A. C. Chute, D. D.

"But when he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then he saith unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest." Matthew 9: 36-38

At the time when these words were spoken Galilee was a populous district, thickly studded with towns and villages. From the hills that encircled Nazareth our Lord often beheld this densely peopled region and longed that dwellers therein might share in the ample provisions of divine love. Palestine was infested with wild beasts and robbers so that there was special aptness in representing the people's condition as that of shepherdless sheep, gone astray and helpless. These human beings were beset and victimized by the ignorant and ill-disposed, the impositions of the Pharisaic religion constituting some of their sorest afflictions. In these, men and women, as in all of every clime and age, were yearnings after holiness and satisfaction, and yearnings, too, which were not being ministered unto. Therefore in contemplating their state Jesus was stirred with tenderest pity on their account. "Moved with compassion," indicates not a mere surface agitation but a profound concern. Here by his side were a few persons who had passed over into the safety and peace provided for mankind and they were ready to do what they could toward meeting this destitution; but, speaking now in agricultural figure, how few were the workers compared with the vast stretches of ripened grain. So the disciples are bidden to pray that the laboring force may be brought into nearer correspondence with the requirements. Christ's eye saw, his heart compassionated, and his wisdom named the remedy.

I.—THE SIKING EYE.

Many besides Christ looked from the heights about Nazareth, and the same objects were in front of all—plain and valley, hill and stream, feeding flock and moving caravan, weary traveller and busy husbandman, walled city and unwall'd village. But what one sees depends upon the eye he has. There is the eye that is commercial, only that and nothing more, the eye that is æsthetic, the eye that is historic. There is also the eye that is Christian, which at the same time may be financial or geological for Christian ends. Some really see the world while scarcely passing beyond their own rural communities, while others see it not though again and again they encircle the globe. Piercing the shell of existence Jesus saw the spiritual poverty of the multitudes, saw them under their load of sin, saw them as those drawing no actual gain from the plannings and toilings and varied experiences of every day. It availed little that their spot of earth was rich and beautiful. Of what use is beauty apart from a heart-union with its Author? One family by Kadraon's Plain or Lake Genesareth might have a good roof for shelter while another had a poor one; one man's herd might be large and his neighbor's small; some might be robust in body and others delicate. All such outward differences were obscured in the prevailing poverty of soul.

Now this Convention is a hill-top to which we have come for an extended outlook. From all quarters we have climbed to this eminence that we may behold the harvest fields. Leaders in Home Missions, Foreign Missions and Higher Education, who by virtue of their positions are likely to have views that correspond considerably with Christ's, ardently direct our gaze to various points. But after all, their most glowing depictions and exhortations are but poor and cold. Within the shadow of some of our strongest churches people are perishing for lack of knowledge, as if none cared for their souls. Our missionaries of Telugu land talk and write to us and our response, judged even from the stand-point of our imperfect consecration, cannot be called generous. We see the whitened fields yet do not see them; we hear the calls yet do not hear them. What kind of an eye have you brought my brother, to this meeting-place of Baptists? It is important to ask it. It is more important to ask, What sort of an eye will you take away? This conference of saints is meant to be an eye-opener, and it will be nothing short of that if the Holy Spirit has his unhindered way in our sessions. Well, whatever the eye in coming, may it get more like Christ's eye as we sit together, as we speak and hear and pray, as intelligence is borne from far and near, and as in all we commune with him who issued the order ere he went from tenting among us, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

II.—THE COMPASSIONATE HEART.

The Saviour's seeing was attended by his pity. Out of unerring vision there sprang a depth of solicitude which told how distressing was the situation of those upon whom he looked. Of course there was a preceding compassion or he would not have seen as he saw. Love brought him down. The heart formed the eye. But as Son of Man his tenderness was stirred and enlarged as he scanned the needy hosts. The beholding of rebellious Jerusalem elicited his lament and approach to Lazarus' grave broke up the fountain of his tears. What was already in his breast was manifested upon getting into touch with the victims of sin's destructive energy. His words and deeds went forth to meet the special exigencies as they were encountered. Now in him we are summoned to a nearness of contact with the sin-marred and to an accordant activity for their welfare. You go to the home of a poor family where you discover that there is no food, and the crying of the children and the mother's anxious face hurry you to your own store that you may relieve the distress. There was something in you for this destitution to seize upon, and by surrender to the kindly impulse begotten of the occasion, you are made a

better man, one capable of larger sympathy than before and bent upon larger service. There is need of the seeing eye to draw out the compassion of which the heart is capable, there is need of the compassionate heart that the eye may be caught by the lack, there is need of serving that heart and eye may both be improved. How alert men are to be informed of spiritual destitution! If thoroughly devoted to the true business of life, they walk abroad to see how it fares with eternity-bound neighbors and are active in bestowment, they are fascinated by missionary literature because it gives direction to prayers and offerings. Their feeling of compassion is not succeeded by an inertness that leaves the heart less responsive under the next incitement. Christian deed follows hard upon Christian impulse. Oh, the amount of right emotion and inclination that hastens not on to its goal. Herein is explanation why we pass through cities and communities but slightly moved by the godlessness that abounds. From the knowing of God's will without the doing of it, it becomes a trifling matter that the feet of young men run in ways that are dark and that millions are perishing over the seas. God have mercy upon those who are "shutting up their bowels of compassion," who see much want yet see it not, for the reason that they have not been busy in giving relief, who hear unmoved about the "distressed and scattered," the selfishness of to-day being greater than that of yesterday.

III.—THE REMEDY WHICH WISDOM NAMED.

Our Lord indicated that this spiritual destitution was to be met by the multiplication of laborers. Hundreds of years have gone over to eternity past since the words of our text were uttered, and it might be expected that they would no longer be applicable to the world's condition. The harvest was plenteous and the laborers were few; but there must surely be laborers sufficient in number today and there must be little remaining to be done. But not so. Met in this assembly in this Twentieth Century the words are still appropriate: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." Multitudes are still "distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." Pressing indeed is the need for the conviction to roll in upon us, a mighty propelling conviction, of man's sad state on the one side and of the adequate provision of God's love on the other. Many of our own dear children are not Christians, which means that they are prodigals off in a far country wasting their substance. A good proportion of our acquaintances are entirely absorbed with the unsatisfying things of earth. Numerous are the regions in these Provinces where Sabbath pass with but little of religious teaching. And as for the millions of heathen, hosts of whose vastness we have but small conception, operations among them have but well begun, though we are as surely ordered to carry the gospel to them as to publish it in our own land.

"The laborers are few." This has been having some special emphasis of late. It is being affirmed on all sides that the number of candidates for the gospel ministry is on the decrease. In our own college those looking forward to the pulpit from the lower classes are fewer than those with the same intention in the higher. The Presbyterian College at Halifax has been expressing regret over the smallest attendance during the past year of any year for some time. At the last meeting of the General Assembly of Canadian Presbyterians, the retiring Moderator spoke of removals from their ministry by death and other causes as exceeding the number of graduates from their Theological Schools. Religions papers of the United States have been noting the same shrinkage within their borders and journals across the water have been exercised in the same way. To no one denomination or country is this state of affairs confined. Think ye that this tells of an eye grown dim and a calloused heart? It is certainly fitting to go in search of the cause.

It is now better understood than it used to be that religion is a matter of the every-day life, a thing to permeate and control every sort of activity, as salt permeates every drop of the ocean. The distinction between sacred and secular is being obliterated by a fuller appreciation that all may be done—the work of preacher and ploughman alike, of merchant and missionary—all for the glory of God. This is why in later years there has been so much preaching upon economic and social questions, although preachers must beware lest they go too far afield and lose touch with what alone can make all things sacred and keep them so. It should be noted, also, that there has been a multiplying of spheres wherein that which, for convenience sake, is called distinctively religious work may be done, as for example the sphere of the Young Men's Christian Association. No doubt such institutions, closely allied as they are to pastoral labor, have drawn into them some who would otherwise have entered the Christian ministry. These things may at least be maintained as reminders that, it is possible to reach too hasty and too depressing a conclusion respecting the matter before us. Not forgetting these alleviating features, therefore, we may pass on to suggest a few reasons out of many that might be named why the ranks of the rising ministry are not fuller.

Undoubtedly it is quite superficial to say in this connection that, as a rule, inadequate provision is made by churches or congregations for the temporal necessities of preachers. But a symptom assists in getting at the seat of the disorder. There is no calling in which a man can do so much, nor in which he can do so little, according to the spirit he is of, as in the pastorate; and so there are lazy ministers as there are lazy mechanics, both receiving all of this world's goods that they deserve and a little more. But as a class there is no harder worked nor poorer paid band than preachers. Some will question both parts of this statement; but truth to tell most people appreciate not the extent to which a zealous pastor's powers are taxed, nor the demands his position makes upon his purse. Every under-shepherd to whom the word faithful is applicable, whether he be in country or city, in Nova Scotia or India, has his time filled with arduous and wearing toil; and ordinarily the requirements of his home and of his study, together with the legitimate calls upon his generosity, are not suitably provided for in the monetary returns the people make. Of course when a people are doing all that they are able, then well and good; shepherd and flock are partners in poverty and must rejoice together. But not infrequently there is a one-sidedness which is to the preacher's disadvantage and so to the loss of the good cause at large. No pastor should have to worry unnecessarily about how to make ends meet, nor should he be needlessly bereft of literature for the enriching of mind and life. The period

of preparation for the pastorate is long, where desirable courses of study are taken, and the outlay heavy. Then the period of active ministry is frequently short in these times when wisdom and experience do not count as in law and medicine. Furthermore a man's hold upon a particular church is much too easily severed, especially in democratic bodies where the crochety and ignorant and unspiritual so readily press to the front. An educated and godly man may be elbowed out by a sorehead or a crank. Now if men are constitutionally given to forethought, and their native quality is stimulated by observation, if they see looming up ahead a galling dependence upon others before old age arrives, or the necessity of some unremunerative and perhaps humiliating occupation at a stage when they ought to be capable of their very best work, they are likely to inquire, at feeling impulsion toward the pulpit, whether the Lord will not allow them to take some kindred pursuit, where there is promise of a more comfortable and more prolonged and so of a more useful career. It might be profitable for the rank and life to turn this over in their minds. The law of sacrifice and of enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ is not designed for an exclusive but for a general application.

But young men must be careful to entertain no erroneous views touching this ministry of reconciliation. A people cannot pay in money for a ministry of love, with its giving of self, though a duly responsive love will seek to furnish enough of it to facilitate the most lavish giving of the best Christian self. Forethought is useful in the extreme when it leaves little room for the exercise of trust. Too often does it appear, from the conversation of those who should leave a very different impression, that the test of ability and success is the salary one can command, as if pulpits were to be taken for the gold that can there be won, like as a man opens a jeweler's shop for that end. While, then, we would implore the people, for Christ's sake and by no means for the sake of preachers themselves, to provide favorable conditions as far as possible, for pastors and missionaries to work in, we would also appeal to the heroism and faith of Christian young men, and beseech them to cherish nothing short of the loftiest and holiest ambition. If church members try to see how small the number of dollars they can contribute for spiritual ministrations, and ministers are brisk to see how many they can get, then both are in a sorry state, the blind leading the blind and falling together into the ditch. Attending the grievous malady of sin, which everywhere reigns, there is stout aversion to the one only remedy, so that while the herald of the Cross seeks the welfare of all who are about him, he can, at this distance from the millennium, hope for the sympathy and help of but part. Human nature is now exactly what it was in the day of Christ's sojourn below, a poor wicked thing, quite unaltered by the gospel's spread and the march of civilization, save in the individual cases where birth from above has been had, so that those who tell the gospel story, whether in Christendom or heathendom, must count upon taking the bitter wind in their faces for Jesus. At great cost has the plan of salvation been provided, and at great cost is righteousness established in the earth. Men eagerly pursue things inferior and injurious, but only take what is of infinite worth by the sacrifice of the choicest of their fellows. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master."

Again: the spiritual methods into which churches have fallen in our time have not tended to the making of Christian ministers. The idea of furnishing things new and entertaining in the house of God has recently gained a large place. Church-going is too much of a pastime. Leaders have descended somewhat to the prevailing taste instead of lifting it. A sermon is now discussed after its delivery with the same flippancy that a play would be, both pastors and congregations being at fault. Smooth things are prophesied instead of faithful dealing and declaration of the whole counsel of God. Fear of offending, along with recoil from the more austere sides of truth, has too much figured in Sabbath messages. It goes without saying that a conciliatory manner is to be cultivated by those who would win souls, but the smile of man is not to be put in the foreground while the aim to please God has a corresponding recession. In the musical parts of Sunday worship there is a catering to a concert-loving public, to those unconcerned about inspiration to holy conduct, to people who want the pleasant and passing emotions awakened by artistic productions, quite apart from any desire for the enthronement of Christ by the development of Christian character. Crowds are too often taken as the sign of success. The methods adapted spring frequently from men of commercial spirit, from the fin d'etier whose vision goes not beyond the Sunday offerings and the balance-sheet—reason enough why funds get so low. Dullness and deadness are assuredly unpardonable, but choice is not confined to a quiet church that has scarce any life and a noisy one that may have less. In the raising of monies for the home programme and for missionary treasuries, how heavily has ingenuity been taxed to devise novel and taking means. Amusement is offered in doubtful and varied forms, dainty dishes are served, knock-knacks and ornaments are put on sale—in fine there is no end of strange devices for elicitation of coins from unconsecrated or partially consecrated purses. I verily believe that we are not aware how this militates against vital godliness and fosters in our youth erroneous conceptions of the manner in which the Lord's work should be done. Money should be furnished out of the internal pressure of a love nourished by sound instruction from the Word, rather than by extraneous persuasion, even as a cork is thrown out of a bottle by a force exercised from within rather than by the pulling of an outward hand upon a corkscrew. Not only is a tight end essential, but the means must be perfectly in accord therewith, else imperceptibly the aim itself is lowered. Then out of that impaired atmosphere, out of the unspiritual conditions which have so artfully insinuated themselves, there cannot be expected to arise in needful numbers those wishing to be publishers of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And such as do emerge from such surroundings for such employment are apt, unless lifted by other influences to a superior plane, to perpetuate the self-same blemishes. By a steadfast holding to truly spiritual ends, and a like holding to thoroughly harmonious means, our children are best helped to those very spheres of labor which God would have them enter and most is done to ensure their success therein. It is the business of the church of