

CONCERNING EVANGELIZATION.

By Rev. R. G. MacBeth, M.A.

Enthusiasm is a blessed and splendid quality. It is a good thing in love or war or business or politics, but a lot of people seem disposed to crush it in connection with religious work. We may get enthusiastic about any of these things or about baseball and hockey and sports in general, but when it comes to the question of saving men from eternal ruin some seem to think we should become dull and stagnant as a pool of water on the level prairie. Such people overlook the fact that the stagnant pool is a breeder of disease and that dull professing christians may not only have within themselves the sentence of death but may destroy the health and strength of those around them who are struggling for new life. Enthusiastic earnestness is a law of the Kingdom of Heaven, for only those who are of that type succeed in entering its gates. The violent, said Christ, take the Kingdom of Heaven by force, pressing forward with the eagerness of people who are afraid the gates will be shut before they reach them. It needs all this eagerness to attain salvation, and "if the righteous scarcely be saved where shall the ungodly and the sinner stand?"

It is because of all this need that Evangelism in special services is a good thing. Many of our communities both in city and country, while eminently respectable and moral, lose enthusiasm in religion and even in politics till a series of meetings stirs up the latent feelings and powers into active energy once again. It is in this way that the interest in these things is renewed. I like the old word 'revival' as applied to these evangelistic meetings because the primary purpose is to awaken Christian people that through them the unsaved may be reached.

Revivals of religion in the days of the Old Testament were marked by tremendous enthusiasm and they held back the oft-times approaching disasters that threatened the people of Israel. The same thing has been proven true in our modern day. It is generally conceded by the most exact historians that England in the 18th Century was nearer to the edge of Revolution than was France but the wonderful evangelistic movement under Wesley and Whitefield effected a reformation which saved the country from calamity.

If a revolution is a delayed reformation and if, as Carlyle says, it costs too much to have French revolution strike on the horologe of time to tell the world what o'clock it is, then, by all means, let us have the evangelistic movements and the reformations.

The Presbyterian Church has always been cautious about encouraging mere temporary religious excitement lest under epidemic influences people should imagine and profess a faith which they did not in reality possess. She has never recognized the right of anyone to "fall from grace" and feared lest, through persons making profession when they had no root in themselves, their own lives and the cause of true religion would suffer injury. But the Presbyterian Church has always been ready to recognize the value of real movements that make for righteousness; and because in our day materialism and worldliness have been threatening to destroy the noblest aspirations of humanity, our Church has rightly seen the wisdom of mobilizing the forces of God to withstand the enemy. As the warships of some great nation's fleet are called together to make a demonstration in some direction to give visibility to her power and overawe the invader, so the simultaneous evangelistic movement in a city or state demonstrates the power

of the church and convinces the forces of evil of their impotency. This has been the actual result in many places to our personal knowledge.

There has been considerable discussion of late as to some of the elements which, if not guarded against, might wreck the evangelistic movement by destroying the faith of the people in its disinterestedness. One must always count on a certain amount of criticism from quarters unfriendly to religion and every minister must be prepared to hear occasionally that he is in the work for the money there is in it. This is a line of argument that has practically lost its point in connection with the regular ministry because it is positively known now that men of education and ability could make much more money in other directions than in the pastorate. But this criticism is being revived in regard to the occasional evangelist. Where it comes from critics unfriendly to the cause it is not so serious, though we should "walk in wisdom towards those who are without," but where it comes in the way of warning from friends attention should be paid to it.

Where the statement is made that these evangelistic movements are under the general direction of a business manager or management it should not be regarded as a serious thing no matter by whom made. All our congregations have business managers because every organization needs business control and guidance. If evangelists are to give themselves unreservedly to the ministry of the word of God some one else must serve the tables of business in connection with their work. Arrangements must be made for meetings and the evangelist has to live in circumstances that will enable him to bear the strain of his wearing toil. There can be no honest objection made to all this, nor to the reasonable efforts made through the press to make the meetings known and keep them before the public. But there ought to be some way of answering the statement that the evangelist is receiving amounts unreasonably greater than he ought to get. It ought to be admitted by every fair minded person that he should receive more for a stated period than one who is steadily employed, as in the pastorate, because the work of the evangelist cannot in the nature of things be constant. But it appears to many friends of the work that the Church as a whole through its evangelistic committee should stand behind the evangelist with a certain fixed annual amount for his services, and that the offerings of the people, after paying local expenses, should go in the General Assembly's Committee. This would free the evangelist from anxiety as to his support and at the same time would make it possible to have services in places where the people could not possibly be expected to do much financially. It would do away with the demand for a guarantee which handicaps the meetings from the start, wherever it is made, and it would enable local pastors to appeal to the people to support the work rather than pay the evangelist for his services.

There are many who are so deeply convinced of the value of evangelism that they believe the General Assembly should establish it as a distinct department with a fund to which the whole church should contribute as a stated thing; and to which the people in communities where services are held should give their free-will offerings in the meetings.

At the recent meeting of London Presbytery a motion brought in by the Rev. J. G. Inkster, and seconded by the Rev. Dr. McDonald, "that this Presbytery is in favor of the great principle of organic union," received the hearty support of the members present.

DOUKHOBORS MAKING PROGRESS

The last report of the Canadian Interior Department gives an encouraging picture of the progress the Doukhobors are now making. It will be remembered that 9,000 of these Russian refugees found new homes in the Canadian Northwest eight years ago.

At first they attempted there the same fanatical religious practices which had made them obnoxious to the Russian Government, though the chief reason why the Russians persecuted them was that they utterly refused to perform military service. Some of the leaders who incited the Canadian immigrants to sally forth naked to meet their Lord and to violate the law in other ways are now in Russian asylums and others are in prison. The mass of the people have settled down and are already classed among the best Canadian farmers. . . .

No western settlers are more industrious, frugal, thrifty and neat than they and they are beginning to be held in much respect. The Government has made them one great concession. It does not require them actually to live on the homesteads which they have taken up.

They prefer the communal life and in fact they hold all their possessions to be the common property of their sect. The families are opposed to living isolated on their farms and so they are grouped together in forty-eight villages strung along in a northeast and southwest direction from the neighborhood of Yorkton in eastern Saskatchewan to the northwestern corner of Manitoba, a distance of about 100 miles.

About 800 of them have become naturalized citizens, but many are still holding back, as they hesitate to take the oath of allegiance. The Government is not giving them any trouble over this little matter, as the prospects are that the next generation will become thoroughly fused in the population. . . .

The change that has come over the Doukhobors is not due to the imprisonment of their crazy leaders, but to the great influence over them of one man, Nastasia Verigine, who kept his head when most of the leaders were going crazy and giving the Government no end of trouble. His people call him Father Verigine and their chief town has been named after him and appears on the Government maps as Verigin. . . .

This leader has evolved most of the plans that the farmers have carried out. Large granaries have been built in every village and the wheat from their farms is stored in them till the market conditions are most favorable for selling. Schoolhouses have been built in many of the villages and the children pursue their studies both in the English and in the Russian languages. . . .

It is expected next year to complete the connection of all the villages by telephone and to have a schoolhouse in every centre of population. The harvest of 1906 was especially abundant and \$35,000, a part of the money received for the crop, was expended in the erection of flour mills for the community.

All the money goes into the common treasury and late in the fall agents of the people go to Winnipeg and buy at wholesale supplies of all kinds that are taken to Verigin and distributed to the families in each village according to their needs. Doubtless communism is now being practised by the Doukhobors on a larger scale than it ever was before on this continent.

Many of them still harness themselves to ploughs because they think it is wicked to make the animals work. On the whole however, they are a harmless and a thriving people who are doing their full share in the development of the country.