

THE LEAGUE FORUM

A Glimpse at the Early Workers

Look up the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and notice how things were done in the early Church. They were not without their problems. There were some complainers in those days. Whether all the complaint of the complainers is justified or not we need not discuss, but there was some trouble anyway. The best of people are human. So the "twelve" called the multitude together and talked things over. Getting together is one of the best of cures for complaints. Talk directly with the critics. They will always have something to teach you. There was no use for the "twelve" to say, We know more than you do, and you must do as we tell you. That won't work; never did. The Church is a brotherhood and is always willing to share and learn. Then when talking the thing over they decided that it was wiser for the "twelve" to be given full scope for the ministry of prayer and the "word." There was a division of labor. One kind was about as necessary as the other. But some were better fitted for one kind than for another. There were no invidious distinctions about higher orders, no religious snobishness, or bureaucracy.

In arranging things further it was not understood that all the praying and preaching was to be done by the twelve. The deacons or laymen were to be men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom. Those are three of the most commendable virtues. Some men are of honest report, but not very enthusiastic. Some are fearfully zealous, but lacking in tact or wisdom. Stephen, of these helpers, was noted for his faith; he believed in things—in God, in men, in work, in helping and improving the world.

Now note the sequel. Stephen came to the front as one of the greatest men of God in all ages. He was the first Christian martyr. He espoused the "twelve" for a time. So there may be laymen who are of outstanding usefulness and talent in the Church apart from the regular ministry. We need not be afraid if that happens. We have laymen to-day of that stamp, and they are like Stephen among the most effective workers. Honor to such men! Let us not say that Peter and John were not what they ought to have been because Stephen outshone them for a time. God has a place and work for each.

Unused Talents

Have you thought much about the number of talents that are not in use? For every one in use I judge that there are ten lying idle. Our Church leaders are not as statesmanlike about their work as men are about their business. A business would find it very unprofitable to have idlers around. They are in the way for one thing, and they were always criticizing those who do work. Have you not noticed that grumblers do little or nothing in a church? The man who is earnestly at work has no time to grumble. We can do more than we are doing. Our Leagues are capable of vastly more service. We have too many monopolists among the officers. They want to be "the whole show." If they would tactfully stand aside and throw responsibility on others some night, the others would surprise them and themselves. Of course if the officers say in a peevish way, "Well,

if you think you can run this better than we can, go ahead," there will be nothing gained but harm to the League.

Marshal the League forces. Go down deeper. Call out the reserves. Mobilize! Get a programme so big that you will have to call for others to help you. Wake up!

No Cross Benches

The British House of Commons we are told has no "cross benches." Every member of the 670 has to be on one side or the other. That is a good hint for young people's societies—every member a worker or not a worker; the workers of course trying to convert the others to their point of view. Or they might be divided in another way—every member a Christian or not a Christian, those who have the witness of acceptance in Christ endeavoring to lead the others to Christ. Take a leaf from the politician's book of methods. He counts every voter as for or against his party, and governs himself accordingly. Definiteness about these divisions, coupled with sympathy and tactful dealing will bring about good results.

Prophets

The order of the prophets was never closed. The world may look for them to-day as formerly. They are, however, the centres of communities. There is always a stir around them, and they are not to be measured or circumscribed by the canons and standards of fashion or custom. Amos was one of the first of the prophets, and he dropped in on the religious ceremonies of Israel in a very unimportant way. Some said he was impudent. Those who thought that human precedent and law were final and eternal thought Amos was guilty of a breach of good manners. But those who place the laws of God first saw that Amos was doing the divine will. Jesus cleansing the temple appeared to time-servers very rude, but He was being swayed by a higher law. The guilty monopolizers did not come back to ask why He did that.

Luther and Wesley were rather rude in their action toward Church dignitaries. Even Roberts and Peter Cartwright seemed to run counter to men's thoughts about the fitness of things. But they had authority from God. A prophet then is answerable to God's own invisible laws. They fear God and not men. They see things from eternal standpoints. In that light "big things" look little and "little things" look large. It is well for us to have these things in mind when the prophet comes around, because people will be saying all kinds of things about him.

A Personal Interest

If we want our society to grow we must take a personal interest in it. "How do you account for your success as a farmer?" I asked a man whose farm took first prize for good work and appearance. "I make a hobby of everything I do," was his reply. Make a hobby of your League or Sunday school class. Run your class as a man would run a business; not as some men run a business, but as a successful business is run. Watch for strangers. Keep your eye open for opportunities. Redeem the time. Know a young man who delivers goods by

team from a store. He is a great temperance worker. By looking out for opportunities as he goes about he has been the means of bringing a host of people into the Temperance Society. He takes a personal interest in this work, and is not always pulling at the muckrake of business.

A Personal Experience

We have in our Leagues literary, social and citizenship workers. We have those who will take part in missionary programmes and will read a verse at a Consecration meeting, but after all what about a personal experience? That is the crucial test. "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did another tell thee?" The Bible is a book of personal experiences. Truth comes fresh and dynamic from that source. It is living truth. From what did the Reformation start? Luther's personal experience of saving grace. From what did the Wesleyan revival start? From John Wesley's personal illumination. It is the same with us. We are strangely warmed, and felt in his deepest heart that God had forgiven his sins. Is not this significant? Paul was the interpreter of Christ to Jews and Gentiles. How did he know? Look back at that conversion at Damascus. That was the vital thing. From that came the greater part of the New Testament, the first great manual of theology, and the programme of world evangelization. No inner birth, no conversion—no progress, no inspiration, no drawing other lives in to union with Christ.

Decide for Yourself

"Is it right to go to the bowling alley?" a young man asks. He sees some go there possibly whom he thinks are good people, and yet his mother does not wish him to go. What shall he do? First, young man, be a Christian, that is a follower of Jesus Christ. Be guided by what will please Him and keep busy. Second, make this matter a matter of prayer. Ask and ye shall receive. If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God. We do not try enough at this source of light. Third, study the tendencies of things. You are human, and if these things have been a deterrent influence in other lives, look out. If they form associations for you which make it hard for you to be a Christian worker draw back. Fourth, seek the counsel of good and wise people who have had a longer chance than you have had to observe things. Fifth, form your own conclusions from this, have a clear conviction, be able to give a reason for your action, and be consistent. Treat all the amusement question in this way.

Pointers

While we ought to keep the millennium in mind, we must not forget that the world is but slowly growing away from its imperfections.

Ideals need incarnating before they can be effective. Do not expect other people to do what you are not willing to do.

Existence is an opportunity, not an evil.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; therein is the marriage of individualism and socialism.

If you want a society to run successfully you want to invest brain, heart and soul in it.

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