

THE CHURCH AT WORK.

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The work of the Church was clearly indicated by Christ Himself in His intercessory prayer: "As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." The Church, therefore, was instituted by Christ to carry forward the work which brought Him into the world. He Himself states what that work is: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Therefore the paramount concern of the Church ought to be the glory of God in the salvation of souls. In comparison with this everything else is of second rate importance. When souls are being turned from sin to God, then the work of the Church is being done, when this is not accomplished and there is no divine life stirring in men's hearts, the work of the Church is not being done. How sad it is to see ministers of the Gospel spending their strength in contentions about church polity and outward administration and neglecting the one thing of supreme and vital importance. To be sure that we have got the right machinery for doing Christ's work is but a poor achievement after all, if Christ's work is not being done.

The Scriptures expressly declare that the whole world is to be brought into the Kingdom of Christ; that the Jews are to be brought back to the faith of Abraham; and that the fulness of the Gentiles is to be brought in. It is the will and purpose of God that this great work be accomplished by the prayers and labours of the Christian Church: for, how shall the nations believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The internal prosperity of any one Church, at any given time, will largely depend on that Church's fidelity to her risen Lord's command. If she would enjoy prosperity and have the Lord to bless her and make His face to shine upon her, then she must labour to make His way known upon the earth and His salvation among all the nations. For this work Christ has distributed a great variety of talents among the members of His Church. The Scripture theory is that the recipients of these talents are only stewards, and that the talents belong to Christ, and are to be laid out entirely for His glory. So St. Peter (1 Pet. iv. 10) says: "As every man hath received a gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." And just right here lies the church's first great failure. Many churches have a name to live, and are dead. The communion of saints can only be looked for among saints. Before we have brotherly fellowship we must have brotherly relation, how else can we love as brethren or edify one another as brethren? Many churches are so lax in admitting members, and in their oversight of them after they are admitted, that they are almost solely made up of people differing in no material respect from the world around them. How in such circumstances can the chief end of the Christian Church be fulfilled? So much has this been the case in the past that the history of the Church abounds in many striking instances where true believers failing to find in the Church any Christian fellowship worthy of the name, have unwillingly left her communion and formed a society of their own, in which they might in some measure enjoy that communion of saints which the Church ought to have afforded them, but did not.

HOW TO REACH THE MASSES.

Let us look for a moment at the Church and the population. "How to reach the masses" has been a crucial question at religious conventions ever since I can remember. The fact of a separation between the masses and the Church, has never, as far as I am aware, been seriously challenged. We assume it, then, to be a fact, account for it as you please. Mr. Moody said quite lately, and Mr. Moody is never hostile to the Church, "The gulf between the masses and the Church is growing deeper, wider and darker every hour." Careful investigations made all over the United States during the last five years verify the above statement. From these investigations we are forced to believe that "less than

30 per cent of our population are regular attendants upon Church, that 20 per cent are irregular attendants, while fully one-half of the people of the United States, or more than 33,000,000, never attend any Church service, Protestant or Roman Catholic." On both sides of the Atlantic it is as a rule, the labouring classes which constitute the non-church-goers. Dean Farrar said only recently: "not 3 per cent of the working-classes, who represent the great mass of the people, are regular or even occasional communicants. The causes of all this are not far to seek. Lax ideas of duty. The rush which characterizes modern American life. Prevalence of the continental ideas of the Sabbath. Competition with the pulpit made by books and magazines, and especially the Sunday newspaper. Private ownership in church pews. A wrong conception of Christian life. Dare I place here the Sunday school? In many places this is made a substitute for the Church and in many instances it draws from the Church instead of to it. The habit of church going must be formed in youth, multitudes leave our Sabbath Schools with this habit unformed, and so swell the ranks of non-church goers. These are causes. What is the cause? Human nature has a Godward and a manward side. As a person man sustains relations to God; as a social being he sustains relations to his fellow men. Christ, the authoritative Teacher, has laid down certain principles for the guidance of men. His Kingdom is founded on the great principle of Love, which is to the moral universe what gravitation is to the physical. This principle Christ applies to man in his twofold relations. 1. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 2. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The Church has emphasized the first, the Fatherhood of God, but it has failed to embody and enforce the second, the brotherhood of man. And yet the love of our neighbour, inculcated by Christ, was meant to be not only a kindly sentiment, a beautiful ideal, but a practical working principle, intended to control human society. This second fundamental law of Christ, which is the organic law of a normal society, the Church has neglected. If she had accepted and exemplified this as the practical law of everyday life, it is quite safe to aver she would never have lost her hold on the masses. The one conclusive proof of love is sacrifice; and of this the world sees in the Church a "most plentiful lack." The average Christian to-day is having his part of the work done by proxy. He hires someone else to do it, and he not infrequently forgets to pay the bill. "This one Christian work has become largely institutional instead of personal, and, therefore, largely mechanical instead of vital." Of what I am trying to say, this is the sum. "Our modern Church habits and methods have totally failed to manifest a personal love for non-church-goers, and so they have come to disbelieve in any such love." This is the cause, we believe, for the alienation of the multitude from the Church, namely, the failure of the Church to teach and exemplify the gospel of human brotherhood, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, any other is a human counterfeit and an intruder.

If the Church is to do her work, and surely she is, anything else is surely out of the question, if she is, 1. To establish right relations between man and God. 2. Right relations between man and man, then we believe she must first go backward, and secondly, she must go forward

BACKWARD.

I. Backward. Our social system needs salvation as well as does the individual, this can only come through the application of the teachings of Christ. To-day the Church can mould the civilization of the future by accepting and applying to human life the teaching and example of our Lord in all their many-sidedness. Says one:—"The conversion of the Church to Christian theory, must precede the conversion of the world to Christian practice." If the Church would only go back to the Christianity of Christ, the multitude would soon return to her. An intelligent workingman said lately before the Committee on Labour of the United States Senate: "Workingmen do not attend the Church, not because they are irreligious or are opposed to Christianity, but because the Churches have ceased to represent to them the teachings of Christianity." Charles Kings-