

## Original Contributions.

## OUR NEEDS.

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What are the needs of the Disciples in the Maritime Provinces? Doubtless they are "too numerous to mention." Yet some things may be specified—some "needs" which are particularly urgent. As a religious people we need :—

I. *A Keener Appreciation of the Righteousness and Necessity of Our Plea.* The distinctive plea of the Disciples of Christ as a people is for the union of all God's people on the Rock Christ Jesus, with no creed but the divine creed of the New Testament church, no rule of faith but the sacred scriptures, and no names but those given to such persons by inspiration. This has been the characteristic plea made by the Disciples of Christ since the beginning of their history; and every peculiarity of teaching and practice which distinguishes this people from others, is due to their faithfulness to the spirit of this plea. It has been this plea, persistently made and courageously emphasized, which has given us power as a people before the world, and which accounts for an expansion of our work which, in rapidity and vigor, has few, if any, parallels in religious history.

We need especially, in this field, a deep conviction that this plea is right, and that it is necessary to the world. And this means much in our consideration of our work. It means more than the mere acceptance of the principle that Christians should be united, and that the way to union is to go back to Christ and the Bible, to the abandonment of party platforms and human creeds. It means a deep conviction that divisions among Christians are wrong, and that to perpetuate them is a sin; a conviction strong enough to become a motive power impelling us to make the plea for union wherever divisions exist. There is a vast and vital difference between holding the principle as a personal and private conviction, and making the plea as a matter of Christian obligation. The first may save us from confusion and sin of sectarianism. Only the second can rescue others from that condition. And we must remember that, as a people no less than as individuals, it is not enough for us to "keep the faith;" we must also "fight the good fight." And behind the charge and onset of the battle, there must be the deep conviction that the cause is right and just and ought to prevail.

Then we should be convinced that this plea is necessary both to the church and to the world. Without question, divisions among Christians, with all the brood of evils which they foster, have done more to weaken the church and mar its joy, than any other cause. The health and happiness of the body of Christ demand the unity and harmony of its members. Yet the Christian world has gone on blindly perpetuating its divisions and seeking peace and prosperity in vain. And even now, when the consciousness of the need of closer fellowship is making itself felt, and there is a groping after the blessing thus to be obtained, men fail to see the inconsistency and hopelessness of trying to be united while still determined to remain divided; or if they have the

disposition to abandon division and come together they have failed to discover the way. In such a condition of things there is need for a positive proclamation in the ears of all Christians of the plea we make for a union of God's people; and of the way to union by an abandonment of the things which divide, and an acceptance of the common elements of the Christian faith. The Christian world needs this plea to help it to realize the destructiveness and sinfulness of division, and to point out to it the way to union and peace.

And beyond this; the need of the great unsaved world demands that this plea be made. For a divided church stands comparatively helpless before the task of converting the world. The union of the forces is the first requisite to the speedy capture of the field. While the strength of the army of Christ is largely spent in fortifying and defending rival camps within its own lines, the citadel of the enemy will stand secure. The unsaved and perishing world needs, for its salvation, the union of Christians. Hence this plea needs to be made for the world's sake.

To realize this will help us to feel that we have not only a "faith" but a mission; that these provinces, where sectarianism still holds so strong a sway, need us and the plea we make; and it will make us strong in the work to which we have been called.

II. *A More Aggressive Spirit in the Propagation of this Plea.* Why is it that for half a century or more, our work has stood comparatively still in these provinces? Why is it that churches which have had an existence for that length of time have been largely content to live, without attempting seriously to multiply themselves by the establishment of other congregations committed to the same plea? Is it because the conditions of this field have been such as to make efforts at enlargement fruitless or useless? This can scarcely be a sufficient reason. Is it not rather that we have lost the aggressive spirit which in our early history carried the advocates of this plea everywhere preaching the word, and which, even down to the present time, in many quarters, carries the work grandly and irresistibly forward? Have we not come to act as though we thought the field was now divided between us and other religious peoples, and that our business was to cultivate the territory already won, while we conscientiously refrained from trespassing on the territory held by others? Had we nothing to offer the world but what others are offering, this would be the proper attitude. But when we have, as that which above everything else gives us a right to exist as a distinct people, a plea which the religious world needs as much as the ungodly world needs the gospel, such an attitude is a shame to us; and, I had almost said, a sin. We need a revival of the aggressive spirit, growing out of the conviction that this cause is a just and righteous cause, and that the interests of men everywhere demand its success, which has been the prime propelling force in its marvelous expansion thus far. We need a holy zeal for its success. We need to feel the obligation heavy upon us to proclaim it in every city, town, hamlet, and rural community in these provinces, so that, at least, all men may hear it and have an opportunity to espouse it if they will. This should be done by voice, and by the printed page as well. If we had the zeal we should have, we would aspire to have a propaganda which would make our plea and principles familiar to every individual in this field who was not too bigoted to hear or too heedless to investigate.

III. *We Need Larger Liberality Toward this Work.* No enterprise that is worth anything can be carried forward without expense. No work of such magnitude as this can succeed without liberal support from its adherents. The business necessities of the Lord's work should be provided for with as much business sagacity as any of the temporal affairs of men. It is poor policy to restrict operations in a great enterprise by parsimony. It is as true in gospel effort as in other things that "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet and it tendeth to poverty." God is not mocked. As a people sow, so shall they reap. "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." And this applies most pointedly to the support of the gospel. The gospel seed cannot be sown without sowers, and "how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?" Do we want the world to hear our plea? Then men must be sent to proclaim it. But shall we send them and fail to minister to their needs? If our conviction of the righteousness of our plea is ever to result in making that plea generally heard, the path by which it must travel to that result will pass through our pockets—and not through our empty pockets either. We need a large development of the spirit and practice of giving for the extension of our work. If the annals of the extension of our work in these provinces could be truthfully written, I venture to assert that it would be found that the expense of that work has been borne by a comparatively few. It is time that every disciple should feel his obligation to give to extend the work. While "forward" must be our motto, we must see that the army is properly equipped for the advance.

IV. *We Need to Realize that the Present is the most Auspicious Age for the Success of Our Plea that the World has ever seen.* Never since Christians became divided, has there been such a strong and general conviction that divisions are hurtful and wrong, and that there ought to be unity among God's people. Never have there been so many agencies at work wearing away denominational walls, and lifting Christians up towards a common level. Never have the minds of men been so strongly turned Christward—away from creeds and traditions—as now. Never have the influences at work in civilization been so strong to break down the barriers which divide men and bring them into a common sympathy and into a concert of action, as this time. And it will be impossible for people who have lost their narrowness and prejudice in other things, very long to hold them in religion. The railroads, the telegraphs, the newspapers, which are so rapidly making the whole world a neighborhood, are agencies of God at work for the union of the divided race of men. Are they not also agencies for the reunion of a divided church? The increased and more independent and intelligent study of the Bible is turning the gaze of Christians more and more upon Christ as the central figure of revelation. And as he grows in magnitude before them their creeds and party interests lose their importance of comparison. The fellowship of Christians of different denominations in the great general movements, like the Young People's Endeavor work, is making them better acquainted with each other; and they are learning to esteem and emphasize their agreements rather than their differences. And thus the tide is rising and sweeping onward which is fast and forever