

Christian strength and zeal? What is the style and what the amount of Church labor for all her sons and confessors?

And I answer :

1. It is the work which the Church itself can do. The truth of this reply would seem self-evident. You hire a laborer on your farm in the country. There are many fields and many tasks. Here the soil is to be tilled. There the yellow harvest is to be gathered into the garner. Yonder the emerald grass is to fall before the sweep of the mower's arm. Yonder still a forest is to be felled and corded. What is the laborer's work? Not all that there is to be done, but what he can do, what one able-bodied man is equal to; what with his best diligence he can personally achieve. You have no right to expect anything more from him. That is all you look for him to accomplish. As it is with individuals so it is precisely with associations of individuals. What they can perform by their combined strength measures their full obligation. The spiritual wastes in this sin-desolated world are broad and drear. The gospel has as yet but a minority of earth's population as its confessors and followers. It holds here and there a conquered territory as its own. It has all the rest yet to overspread and subdue. Each Church has certain relations to this whole work. It is to do what it can toward bringing in the full day of the gospel triumph. Its task is what it finds its power adequate to undertake. Beyond that limit it may discern other and broader wastes of spiritual barrenness and death. But it cannot enter and cultivate them. Its hands are full. It is to do the work of one Church, not the work of two. When it uses the whole of its own instrumentality in its field of labor, and exhausts itself in advancing its own spiritual triumphs, it is at the end of its responsibility in that direction. Its work is that which itself can do.

2. It is, again, *the whole* of what it can do. This has already been said, but not with this particular emphasis. It must fill out its sphere. It undertakes the spiritual training of those who are banded together in its fellowships. Hundreds of families are associated in its parochial bonds. Within these households there is every variety of age and character. Age lingers there with patriarchal years and honors, perhaps with manifold sorrows and infirmities. Infancy buds, childhood blooms, young men and maidens stand up in the glory of their strength and beauty, and burden-bearing manhood strides stoutly on with its loads of weighty care. Some of these are already the disciples of Christ, and are walking with the brotherhood. Some who are thus joined in sacred bands, are fighting great battles with temptations, plunging amid worldly influences and defilements, hoping to keep their ermine unsoiled, and to maintain Christian purity, but needing to hear on all sides the watchwords of hope and faith as their comrades meet and pass them. Others are strangers yet to the work of the Spirit, and are drifting forward: childhood, youth, and age, toward eternity, unsealed for the Lord. This is the great special work for a Church, to save its own people; to carry salvation to every house and every heart of all these multitudes; to watch for opportunities when grief or scabiness shadows the door, to send in the healing, comforting Gospel. This sacred charge is laid at the door of the living, acting, working members of the Church. Whatever else they forego, this they must attend to. Whatever else they attempt to forward, this must not be neglected. No other ministry, no other brotherhood will care for these souls but this ministry and this brotherhood. If they cannot do this, and all they would wish to do beside, they must do this. If this remain undone, and they are out on spiritual adventures, a reproachful question arises which they must