

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSTHE SIMULTANEOUS MISSION OF
EVANGELISM IN BRUCE.

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The Presbytery of Bruce did not rush into a simultaneous campaign of evangelism. It took over a year for the local committee to come to a unanimous decision. One thing, however, contributed largely to the solution. Quite a number of the congregations, especially the largest, had recent experiences of "special meetings" which made it easy to organize on a wider scale.

At the September meeting of Presbytery a conference of Christian workers was held. One of the objects was to hear at first hand the story of a successful "Mission." Accordingly Rev. A. E. Mitchell, B.A., of Knox Church, Hamilton, was present. He gave valuable counsel on the practical side of the subject and touched many hearts as he drew word pictures of the well-known Kootenay Campaign. Presbytery at once agreed to adopt the plan and pursue it in the early fall.

Ten congregations were of one mind. The remaining six for local reasons found the time inopportune. Those who joined hands lay, principally, in the central and southern part of the Presbytery and comprised a good solid block of congregations. The date of opening was Sunday, Nov. 14th., and to continue for two weeks. In two instances the work continued for a month.

The committee from the beginning met with encouragement. Ten local papers freely gave their columns for reports to plans, appointments and other informing matter. The Missioners who were invited promptly replied, showing deep interest in the undertaking. Some found that other engagements made it impossible to accept, while those who were free sent letters which were models of humility and devotion. "I do not know that I would be of any use. I feel that the call is too important to refuse. If your committee will take the responsibility of the appointment, I shall be at your service." Thus most of the letters read and the "call" proved to be the voice of God. The Missioners and their friends were as follows:—Dr. Dickson, of Galt, at Walkerton; Rev. R. G. McKay, M.A., of Cromarty, at Hanover; Rev. Donald Tait, B.A., of Teeswater, at Malcolm; Rev. J. G. Reid, of Alma, at Carrigg and Pinkerton; Rev. A. C. Wishart, B.A., of Brussels, at Paisley; Rev. Wm. Cooper, B.A., of Mount Forest, at Burgoyne; Rev. J. S. Hardie, of Listowel, at Glamis; Rev. W. M. Martin, D.D., of London, at Arnow; Rev. A. MacNabb, took his own work at Underwood and Rev. R. Atkinson assisted Rev. John Hoile at Salem.

"Preparation for the Simultaneous Mission of Evangelism," by Dr. Shearer, has been found to be a very valuable booklet. It was circulated and everybody "hewed as closely to the line" as possible. A call for united prayer went out far and wide and the reports indicate that it was a "praying" even as much as a "preaching" mission. The ten charges with a membership of 2,255 and the other interested people in the presbytery, during the month of preparation brought the "Throne of Grace," a volume of earnest prayer. One minister writes:—"We organized a union prayer meeting which was held every day for two weeks before the Missioner came. We also had a meeting for women." Another reports from a country charge that six weeks had been spent in preparation and the first paragraph of the Missioner's letter

reads:—"There was every evidence that the work was well in hand ere I came."

Lukewarmness there was. Also a good deal of quiet criticism and occasionally a face to face volley. This would have been expected had there been no signal given that the Presbytery expects every Missioner "to do his duty." Thus a good deal of aggressive work was done. In one letter it is recorded that a few of the "stiff folk" look upon the meetings as being "like the Methodists," but they were gracious enough to concede, "that they were doing good." In another charge, the discussion began with a brisk "I was sorry when I heard that the Presbyterian Church was going into the revival business." The reply was "I am sorry also that all our ordinary efforts have thus far failed to enlist you in the service of God." A local paper possibly voiced the opinion of those who did not go to church, "while the fire escape was holding forth." The editor said that the sweet stream of music and emotion is now at high tide; but it will soon pass away and then what? The best answer was in the pages of his own exchanges. The county press told a good fair story of the nature and result of the campaign.

The second and third nights were old fashioned blizzards. Wind and snow turned many from the House of God, and made minister and missioner look serious. In country charges the attendance fell to eleven. We can see on one bleak road, in apostolic companionship though lacking the temperature, the two leaders driving to the church two miles distant, to find less than a dozen people gathered. But in the "daily report" we read as follows:—"Stormy night, very small attendance, a good meeting, prayers very earnest, gave a message on the "Precious things of Peter." We are sorry that we have not a full account of the experiences of that "stormy night." For was not Pentecost as the "rushing of a mighty wind?"

At the last moment the proposed "rally" of workers had to be abandoned. Thus there was considerable variety in methods and some originality. The missioners had no lack of "spiritual gifts." Three of them could sing the Gospel with touching effect. The replies of ministers are abundant testimony to their character and service. We quote as follows: (a) He has a special gift for this kind of work. His sermons were of a very high order. I believe if we had him for another week, the result would have been double. (b) We had good meetings with a good impression. I think another time we would hold them in one place. (c) His work was very much appreciated by the people and many were helped. (d) We are receiving a great spiritual uplift and are very grateful for the services of the missionary. (e) You have sent us the right man. There are none better. (f) We had a large attendance every night. Many never missed a service. (g) We would like if it were possible to work by two's all the time. Our missioner fits in splendidly.

We enter upon the next paragraph with caution. In giving methods and results there is no claim that cause and effect are understood. But the letters we have were in response to questions and the writers would be the last to make such presumption. We think they have a very special value as sidelights on the campaign to guide others. We quote from either minister or missioner. (a) He used the expository method of preaching. After the sermon there was sometimes nothing except the benediction. Our plan was that nothing should efface the impression of the

Word. The people said "It was just the Old Bible." Results:—A deepening of interest and power, non-attendees stirred, seven young people made profession of faith. (b) He, the minister, usually took twenty minutes expounding the chapter. I then sang a Gospel song and there was a season of prayer. The sermon lasted about forty minutes. Results:—In all my ministry I never felt people hanging so firmly upon my discourse. There was only a week in each place but they said why, we are only beginning. Note. The minister says, I can see a good deal of follow up work to be done. (c) Nothing but the "Old Gospel" will do. It has not lost its power. But it is not enough to let down the net, it must be drawn in. Thus after each sermon we gave an invitation quietly for decisions. Result:—Sixty made profession of their faith. Among these were a father and his two sons, a sister and her two brothers, the mother of a large family, a young lawyer, etc. Note:—The last night all took front seats and re-affirmed their decision. (d) We had a "singer" who helped our meetings very much. The missioner used the "sword of the Spirit" alone. His made no mistake. Results:—About fifty people signed the cards indicating a renewed consecration. (e) We made the agreement at the beginning that each should be free at any time to do what the Spirit prompted. Sometimes we tested the impression made by the point of a sermon by asking for the raised hand. We also used the choir for Gospel solos. Our aim was to break up the stiffness of the usual service. Results:—Some tests were remarkably well answered. Some failed. Seven made profession of faith and 30 others signed the cards for a fuller service. (f) We did not think it wise to make any tests. The last night, however, the elders rose and spoke of the blessing received. One person wished to unite with the church. (g) Not the least interesting are two letters from a minister who was disappointed in securing a missioner. He went into the fray for a month alone. He preached thirty-four times and stated that he intended to ask for a public profession at each of his churches on the last nights. We do not know whether he did or not; but he writes "I am glad to be able to report that twenty-eight united with the church last Friday. Of this number eighteen were males. Another joined the Baptist church and one seemed in the judgment of the session to be too young." (h) Another brother in a rural charge conducted his own meetings. They were interfered with by the building of a new church at another of his stations. His hands were rather sore full and no special report has been forwarded. (i) Two other places are vacant congregations or practically at present are mission stations. One reports that he made about fifty pastoral visits and had an encouraging experience. The other was asked to remain a month. He preached forty-seven times and was greatly helped by the Baptists and Methodists. He concludes his report as follows:—"We did not make any attempt to count results for the reason that there was no one left to care for, establish and build up. Hence the beginning and ending of our work lacked the two essentials—a good preparation and a strenuous continuation."

The Assembly committee rendered valuable assistance. It was hoped that there would be a thank offering from every congregation. Some have responded but the expenses of conducting the mission in the weaker charges left little over for the work at large. But the committee will not be forgotten as the "scheme" has been weighed in the balance and found not wanting.