

SUPPLEMENT TO THE ONTARIO EVANGELIST.

ERIN and EVERTON, ONT., JULY, 1887.

EVANGELIST'S REPORT OF HOME MISSION WORK IN ONTARIO.

READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING IN GUELPH,
JUNE 4TH, 1887.

I commenced my visits to the churches in August, 1886, and in the seven months following I visited forty-five congregations, usually spending two or three days with each, and occasionally making longer stays, as for instance, two weeks in Toronto, and one week each in Welland, Glencairn and West Lake.

During this seven months I preached almost every night except Saturday, and on several occasions on that night also.

As my visit to each church was necessarily short, I did but little work likely to lead to additions—only fifteen confessing the Saviour in the different meetings. My main teaching was along the line of Christian duty, and I gave much prominence to (1) Our responsibility as a people in spreading the gospel; (2) The need of more preachers; (3) The need there is for developing the talents of our young men and encouraging them; (4) The need for a larger and more systematic liberality.

Very much interest was taken in these discourses, especially those referring to the question of money, and to the encouragement of our young men. This interest was truly refreshing and made talking, on what I feared would prove an unpleasant subject, not only easy but a pleasure.

While visiting the churches I took the opportunity of enquiring about a number of things, with, as far as I could get them, the following results, and I submit them as fairly reliable.

The total number of Disciples in Ontario, in the congregations, is about 3,500 with possibly 500 scattered members, making in all about 4,000. Beamsville, Everton, Meaford and Erin Centre being the largest congregations, and having each about 150 members.

Twelve preachers are giving their *whole* time to 18 churches, while three only are giving their *whole* time to more general work. Thus there are only 15 preachers who are giving their whole time to the work in Ontario, and these are not all entirely supported.

In many of the churches the teaching and preaching are done almost exclusively by the elders, many of whom are grown old in the work. It is rare to see young men sharing in the public services of the church, a thing much to be deplored and for which a speedy remedy should be found. Denison Avenue, Toronto, has more than any other congregation I have visited, there being some twelve or fourteen men of varying ages who can and do take part of the services.

Of Sunday Schools we have about 27 with some 1,400 children receiving instruction. Everton, Bowmanville, St. Thomas and Meaford having the largest attendance, Meaford heading the list with 130 scholars.

About 26 churches, *only*, have prayer meetings during the week, while 30 have only one meeting on the Lord's Day with neither prayer meeting nor Sunday School; prayer meeting and Sunday School go together in nineteen cases out of twenty-seven.

A new feature of the work and an important one is the interest taken by our sisters in missionary work. We have "Women's Mission Bands" in connection with the churches of Guelph, Everton, Wainfleet, Lobo and Toronto. Their zeal and energy will be productive of much good in quickening our interest in the spread of the gospel, both at home and in foreign lands, and is even now doing not a little in *provoking the brethren* "to love and good works."

Our church property consists of 45 meeting houses, valued at \$62,000.00, almost free from debt. The most valuable are St. Thomas and Beamsville, possibly worth about \$5,000.00 each; Meaford is building a new house of almost equal worth.

During the past year we raised nearly \$9,000.00 for the support of the churches in the Province, and for missionary work, both home and foreign, about \$2,500.00, besides many gifts to both

home and foreign work from individuals of which this takes no account. It would be safe to say that at least \$12,000.00 was spent last year for all purposes, being an average of \$3.00 per member per year.

A cheering fact is, that many of our churches are manifesting a zeal and activity quite refreshing, giving promise of much future good; and a disheartening fact is, that some few seem to have passed the point for making an effort, and will probably cease to exist or be carried on with great difficulty and at great disadvantage.

Now for a few observations.

The number of Disciples in the Province is less than I had been led to expect. The cause is not far to seek. *There are too few preachers of the gospel and too little preaching.* Thirty of our churches have only one meeting on the Lord's Day, and that presents but little opportunity for preaching the gospel to the unconverted, for two reasons: (1) It is the meeting for worship and teaching the children of God, and (2) There is an absence of the unsaved at these meetings. The evening service gives the best opportunity for preaching the Word, and such a meeting should be held if possible.

Another thought in this connection—I cannot help noticing how few attend our meetings, outside our own families and immediate connections, and how few unite with us from the world even in our most successful meetings. For some reason we are not successful in reaching the world with the gospel. I suggest that our meetings could be made much more interesting, without any departure from New Testament example. Better singing, a heartier welcome, more pressing and personal invitations, a better attendance of the members of the church themselves, and above all a fuller presentation of Christ as the sinner's hope, and his all and in all. Not preaching the conditions of salvation less, but the salvation itself more, making "Christ and Him crucified" the theme always.

Our strength can only be maintained and increased by the addition of new members. To maintain our own spiritual life is only one part of our duty; to save others is the other part. Deaths and removals are always going on. A church of a hundred members ought to have at least thirty additions per year to maintain its ground, and more than that to enlarge its usefulness.

Now this calls for preaching. Who shall do it? Preachers you say. Where are they? The material for scores can be found in this Province, but they need both training and encouragement. The first step to a fuller preaching of the gospel by us, must be the encouragement of our young men in the congregations, a simple invitation from the platform, "If any brother has a word of exhortation there is now an opportunity," is not enough by any means; speak to them personally, plan the service for them, take them on the platform, and then let the elder men stand aside and give them an opportunity; don't criticize unkindly, but praise them wisely, and, as often as possible, let them see and feel that they are necessary to you in this great work, and that the future depends largely on *their* zeal and faithfulness.

But we want a fuller training for our young men than the congregations can give. We need educated men, and this is no new demand. It was *always* the demand. The teachers of fifty years ago were intellectually and educationally in advance of the congregations they taught, and that is precisely what we need to-day. Many of us never had these opportunities, and we are behind, and our usefulness is lessened thereby. We can only do the best we may, with our limited acquirements, but we want our younger men to be better equipped and more influential for good than we are. At present we are not able to do much for these young men but encourage them by kindly words and by a hearty appreciation of the sacrifice they are making in obtaining this needed education. I suggest that an expression of sympathy and encouragement from this annual meeting to such young men, would help and cheer them, that a willingness and an endeavor on the part of this co-operation to assist them to enter the field when they are ready to

do so, would greatly strengthen them, and that the employment of them by the churches, during their vacation, in some fields where they could be useful, would be a wise and profitable step, both for themselves and for the congregations who secured their services. If it were possible to select such a preacher for the city of Toronto as could gather the young men who attend our University there, and by occasional classes and lectures keep them together and help them on in this grand work, we would then have a training college on a limited scale, and an inducement to our young men and a help to the cause in this great city. I do but suggest these things, hoping there will be opportunities to consider them more fully.

A word about our Sunday Schools. We have only 1,400 children receiving instruction in our S. S. The church that gets the children will get the young men and women, and will be the strong church of the future. Moreover, many of our children are getting their religious training in other schools, because we have none of our own. They will eventually become members of the churches that trained them. If you have no S. S., then start one and that at once. Train your own children at least; there is no work that brings a larger return than this.

A word about prayer meetings. Only 26 churches have prayer meetings, not a very good showing. Every real, live church will feel the necessity of coming together for prayers; it is a source of strength. In the country they can be held from house to house with good results. Use the sisters more in the prayer meeting, at least to pray and read; they can do grand service there, without violating the apostolic prohibition. It is a stepping-stone in the week; a place where the active and spiritually minded are found. You can measure the working force of the church by its prayer meeting.

Now a closing word as to our liberality and our system of raising the money we need. I have come to one conclusion, it is that we are not lacking in the *spirit of liberality*; but for want of thought and care we are negligent in carrying it out. We have too many systems, and bad systems at that. Each church has its own peculiar plan (and peculiar enough it is sometimes) for raising money. Frequently a plan that is laborious and awkward, uncertain in its workings and very unsatisfactory in its results, a plan that removes this Christian duty as far as possible from cheerful giving, and makes it a matter of begging and scraping together, less than enough to meet the need. Then comes the annual making up of deficiencies from the pockets of the willing few who have already borne the heaviest portion of the burden. In place of this I have everywhere recommended the regular and systematic giving week by week. Some churches are adopting this plan with good results. I suggest that elders and preachers preach and teach and converse frequently on this subject, bringing it clearly and forcibly before the congregations. Let no false delicacy keep us from dealing frankly with a subject of such practical importance.

I have now touched upon a few of the more important points, and close with one more suggestion, the result of my observations of what I consider a great need; that of more comprehensive teaching in the congregations on *Christian duty and privilege*. I will illustrate what I mean by the remark of an intelligent brother to me not long since. Talking of the churches in his own locality, he said, "Our brethren here seem to know scarcely anything beside what they have gathered from protracted meetings. They are thoroughly acquainted with 'first principles,' but know comparatively little of those truths which belong to Christian life and duty." I would suggest that some provision for a *protracted meeting for the saints*, in every congregation, when Christian duty and responsibility could be set forth, would be rich in results and would by stirring and quickening the church first prepare it for preaching the gospel to sinners with a power now unknown.

Sincerely yours,

JAMES LEDIARD.

Toronto.