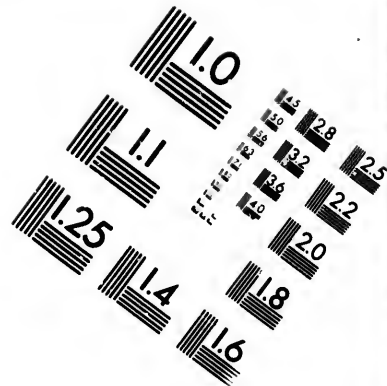
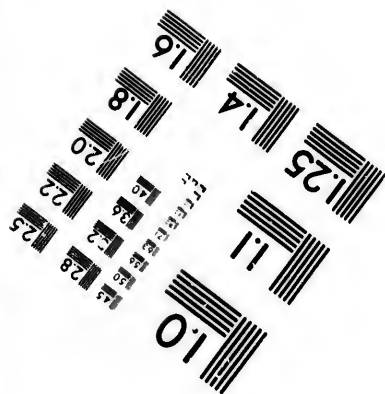
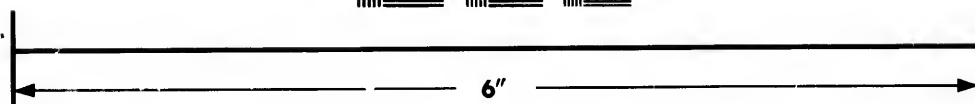




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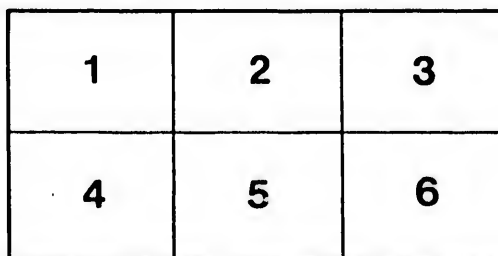
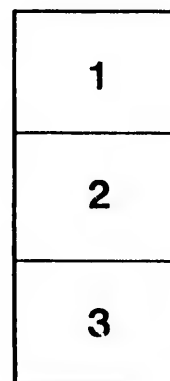
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"FOR CHRIST AND THE CHURCH."

Drawing the Net.

--- FOR ---

PRAYER . MEETING . WORKERS.

FAMILIAR LETTERS

BY

FRANCIS EDWARD CLARK, D. D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

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I.

MY DEAR FRIENDS:

Let us seriously face the question which, after all, is the most serious one we ever have to face after we have once given our own hearts to Christ.

A SERIOUS QUESTION.

Are you doing all that you can to make others acquainted with our Saviour?

What are you doing as an individual?

What is your society doing?

What plans are you laying?

I have a very great longing and so have you, I am sure, that this season should see among all our societies the manifestation of God's power as never before.

The conditions are all favorable, so far as human vision can see. Never before was there such a great, united and devoted host of young people enlisted for this service, never before was there manifested such enthusiasm or deep consecration; it only remains for us to *apply* this power under God's direction, so that His Holy Spirit may reach the hearts of myriads of our friends.

We have been rejoicing for months as we have thought of the thousands of our associate members reported as last year brought into the churches. There is no reason why, during the coming year, that number may not be greatly increased.

WHY WE EXIST.

It would be a good plan for every society to ask itself these questions: What are we established for? Why do we exist? Certainly not for the sake of the Christian Endeavor cause. There is no reason why this movement should grow except as it does Christ's work in the world. We do not exist for the sake of keeping up a flourishing local society, or merely for the sake of having good meetings, or vigorous committees, or doing a certain amount of work.

A QUESTION OF RESULTS.

What do the committees accomplish? What do the meetings result in? Those are the only questions worth considering.

When I was in Scranton, the other day, I was much interested in the great steel mills, which at night, with their belching flames and multitudinous sparks, illumine all the region. But those great works do not exist simply for the sake of keeping men employed, much less for the sake of throwing off showers of sparks. They exist for just one purpose—to make steel rails, strong, symmetrical, serviceable steel rails. Our societies exist for no other purpose than to make strong, symmetrical, serviceable Christians for the Church of Christ. Those swarthy workmen whom I saw did not spend all their time over the same rails, remelting and recasting them, but they were continually bringing in new ore, melting it and fashioning it, until it assumed the proper propor-

tion and toughness. That is just what every Christian Endeavor Society should do—bring in new material, get it under the melting power of God's love, fashion it by prayer and service, until it is ready for His work.

This work will not do itself. God has given it to the Society of Christian Endeavor to do.

ARE YOU PLANNING FOR IT?

Though in one sense the conversion of souls is all God's work, in another sense it is our work as well, and we are entirely faithless to our trust, and unmindful of our privilege, unless we do it.

To allude to those steel works again. They were definitely planned for a definite purpose. The iron and coal are not dumped together with the expectation that good steel rails will result, but with great ingenuity and immense labor and the wisest foresight, the works were built, and the machinery set up, and labor subdivided and organized, and the result is,—the perfect rail. Nothing would ever have been accomplished had these wise plans not been laid.

And now to return to the question that concerns us as societies, Are we planning wisely to accomplish our work this winter?

GOD HONORS HUMAN PLANS.

Do not be led away by the false notion that to plan for these things is somehow to dishonor God, and to discredit the work of the Holy Spirit; there could be no

graver mistake. All the history of the church proves that, instead of wise human plans for revivals and the conversion of souls dishonoring God, God honors these plans. The whole history of the Society of Christian Endeavor, whose object is to work for just these things, is a proof of this, for the society is one of God's humble instruments to this end.

The only thing that dishonors God is a lazy, shiftless do-nothingism and care-nothingism.

LET THESE PLANS BE DEFINITE.

Do not simply say in a general way, "We must have a revival this winter, and bring some of our associate members into the church," but plan the matter out definitely, step by step, always, of course, with much prayer and constant reliance upon God, and then carry out these plans in the same spirit.

BE PERSISTENT.

Let this be no spasmodic effort. Do not become discouraged if every plan does not succeed in just the way you expected it would. Your failures may be God's successes, and out of the seeming failures may come something wiser and better than you could possibly have dreamed.

Plan for a whole winter's campaign; not simply for the Week of Prayer, though that is a very important factor, but have every week a week of prayer, and, before the close of this church year, every society will be quick-

ened, and thousands of new voices will be heard singing the new song. May God grant it!

In our next letter we will talk together about some particular plans for revival work in our societies.

Your Friend, FRANCIS E. CLARK.

II.

MY DEAR FRIENDS:

We talked together in our previous letter, about the importance of doing our share toward securing the revival blessing, for which we are all praying. Let us now consider some more specific plans. I hope it is no longer necessary to attempt to prove that any plans to this end which we prayerfully and humbly make, honor the Master in whose name and for whose glory they are made. Each society, of course, must have its own plans; they must be flexible and open to change, and must easily respond to Providential indications; but here are some things that many societies can wisely do.

A MEETING OF THE COMMITTEES.

Let the committees meet together for this very purpose—to lay their plans. If not all of them, at least let the lookout and prayer-meeting committees have such a meeting,—not a few hurried minutes at the close of a prayer-meeting; but let them set apart an evening for this purpose when there will be plenty of time for

prayer and consultation, and let it be understood that the all-important subject to be discussed is how a revival of true religion in the society may be promoted, how we may bring all our associate members to Christ and into the church.

INVITE THE PASTOR.

I have no doubt the pastor of the church will be invited to this meeting of the committees, and I hope he will be there. When you have come together, after a number of earnest prayers have been offered, I think you will lay out the work systematically and definitely.

PERSONAL EFFORT.

You will not leave it at haphazard, but you will talk together something as follows: "Such a one can be reached in this way, and such another in that way." "A. B. has more influence over C. D. than any one else has; we will try to persuade him to use it." "Charlie J. can help Frank L. to Christ as no other boy can help him; we will see that Charlie J. is urged to do all that he can for Frank;" and "Mary K. is always seen walking to school arm in arm with Katie D., but Katie is a Christian, and Mary is not. There is just the bond of friendship which Christ would use to bring Mary K. to Himself. We will remind Katie of her duty, and encourage her to speak that word which she has been almost ready to speak so often." So to the heart of every one there is some open highway or quiet byway.

If we can only find it; and a little thought and study and careful, prayerful consideration will usually enable us to find it.

PLAN FOR A WARM SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE IN THE SOCIETY.

Perhaps a plan that should have been laid even before this one for personal work should be to promote the deepest and most tender spirituality among the active members. When that is gained, the revival has already come, even before a single soul has been converted. In that case conversions cannot but be multiplied before long.

Plan for the next consecration-meeting to have such a meeting as you have never had before in all the history of your society. If necessary, send a circular letter to every member; or, better still, a written note, reminding each one of the meeting, expressing the hope that it may be one of peculiar power, asking every one to come from earnest, secret prayer to the meeting, bringing a blessing as well as expecting to take away a blessing.

Let the desired revival be the burden of the prayers, and so far as possible, get every one to consecrate himself or herself to work for this special end. If possible, in addition to this note, let the members of these committees make a point of seeing every active member, to impress upon each one the importance of this particular meeting, in view of the special work before the society. I have little doubt that all would go

away from such a meeting feeling that the windows of heavenly blessing were already opened.

SPECIAL EFFORTS.

Then ask the pastor if Sunday school prayer-meetings cannot be held, and at least a few after-meetings at the close of the Sunday evening service, or some special evangelistic services in the schoolhouse a mile away from the church. I haven't a doubt that he will be more than glad to encourage these efforts, and will be particularly pleased to have the proposition come first from the members of the society.

But I haven't room to talk about these special methods of "drawing the net" in this letter. We will talk them over together in our next.

Your friend, FRANCIS E. CLARK.

III.

MY DEAR FRIENDS:

The special revival effort to be put forth by each society, of which we have been talking, must be largely determined, of course, by the needs and opportunities of each society, after much prayer and consultation with the pastor and others. Here are some suggestions which have certainly proved useful in many places.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PRAYER-MEETING.

Scarcely any line of evangelistic work is more hopeful

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than the Sunday school prayer-meeting. If the pastor is willing,—and better still, under his leadership and guidance,—call such a meeting. Ask all who will, teachers and scholars, to remain after the Sunday school, and then for twenty minutes conduct as earnest a gospel meeting as is possible. Do not leave it too much to chance, but have it arranged beforehand, so that the warmest prayers will be offered from the warmest hearts, and the most urgent, sensible and heartfelt invitations given to accept Christ. Let it be clearly understood what accepting Christ means and involves, and give the invitation to any who would be Christians to express it in some way. Have four or five of these meetings on successive Sundays, and if they are of the right kind, it is almost certain that some will declare themselves as desiring to begin the Christian life.

THE WORK JUST BEGUN.

Then the work is just begun, and just there comes in the especial opportunity for the Christian Endeavor Society. Then take these boys and girls, these young men and women, follow them up, get them to the weekly meeting, see that they take some further stand for Christ, set them at work, put the arms of loving interest around them; and it will not be long before they have taken the second and third steps in the Christian life, and soon they will be active members of the church of God.

The great thing is to take the first step, and this the

Sunday school prayer-meeting enables them to do, naturally and appropriately. Moreover, we have the younger people at Sunday school, if nowhere else, and until their interest has been aroused and their hearts touched, we cannot always get them into our society meetings. But be very sure not to drop them after they have expressed an interest and a desire to follow Christ, or else their latter state may be worse than the former. However young and apparently thoughtless they are, follow them up after this entering wedge has been driven, in the Sunday school prayer-meeting, until they are thoroughly committed to, and identified with, the right side.

THE AFTER MEETING.

Another most effective evangelistic method which can be used in many churches, is the "After Meeting." Following the Sunday evening service, let the invitation be given to all who will to remain for a short prayer-meeting. At this meeting have everything,—singing, praying, speaking,—short, crisp, earnest, full of heart. At the end, give the invitation to acknowledge Christ, and even if none accept it the first evening, repeat it the second and third. Very likely, however, many in your church are waiting for just such an opportunity which they have not yet had.

"DRAWING THE NET."

Do not be afraid of drawing the net, or in other words, of giving the unconverted an opportunity to

express their decision for or against Christ. I do not by any means say that this invitation should be given at every meeting through the year, but in these special meetings of a revival nature it can seldom safely be omitted. Many, I know, shrink from this invitation, and not unnaturally. They fear that if not accepted by any one it will result in more harm than good. It is very easy to reason oneself out of it and to give a score of good reasons for not extending it, but these are often temptations of the enemy to neglect a duty.

By a few judicious words, any evil tendencies may be avoided, the real nature of and reason for the invitation can be explained, and the burden of accepting or rejecting it can be rolled heavily upon the hearts of those who have never said, "As for me, I will serve the Lord."

I should not dare, at such a time, to neglect this invitation, lest the blood of some souls at last should be fornd on my soul. At the same time, it must be given simply and quietly and with the utmost solemnity, and only after, and accompanied with, heartfelt prayer.

Thus given it can never do harm, and no soul can say, "I did not have the matter presented to me clearly and definitely by the Christians who ought thus to have presented it."

VARIOUS METHODS.

There are various ways of drawing the net: no stereotyped method can always be followed, but in some way each soul should be faced with the question: "Will

you now and here decide for Christ and express this decision?"

There are also many other special methods of evangelistic work which can be devised, but I will only mention one more.

ASSIGN INDIVIDUALS TO INDIVIDUALS.

This is being done in some societies, and I am sure the importance of this method can hardly be overstated. To each warm-hearted, active member assign some one or more associate members, or some one outside of the society altogether. Do this quietly and discreetly. Do not parade it, and if possible, do not let the associate members know that it has been done.

Then let the active member rest not until the one specially committed to him has had every good influence thrown around him which may bring him to Christ. This, too, must be done wisely and judiciously, with sanctified common-sense, but *it must be done* if we would see the results for which we are praying this winter. These are only some of the methods. But in some way, dear friends, shall we not so pray and labor, that the angels' song on Christmas Day, a year from now, may mean more than it does now to thousands of our associate members—"Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good-will to men"? God grant it!

Your friend, FRANCIS E. CLARK.

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