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THE WORK OF THE  
**CHURCH AT HOME.**

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**AN ADDRESS**

DELIVERED TO THE

Students' Missionary Society of Knox College

IN

Knox College, Toronto,

November 13th, 1896.

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BY

REV. D. D. McLEOD,

BARRIE

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## THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AT HOME.

**Y**OUR College has always a warm place in my regard. My acquaintance with it dates back further than that of any of you. It began in the year 1857. The college then carried on its work in the house which had been occupied as a residence by Lord Elgin. Some who are now venerable ministers were then students. Professors Burns and Willis were then its prominent teachers. I had then a student of Knox for my tutor; and I had the honor of acting as a sort of "diaconos" to these eminent professors occasionally, when they visited the locality in which I lived, on missionary expeditions. In recent years I have known the college only through its students. In the mission work of our Presbytery, which is quite extensive, the students of Knox have done excellent service. More than one half of the congregations in our Presbytery have pastors who have studied at Knox. Of these, twelve have been received since my connection with it. Not only then, in the examination of the students, and in the duty of reading your discourses, but in the administration of the mission work in the field. I have had opportunities of being acquainted with you. Nevertheless it was with some surprise I received the invitation to address you to-night. I may not meet your expectations in doing so, but I think you are wise in asking one from the outside of college circles to address you, as often as you can. It is wise both for your society's sake and for the sake of the church. It prevents the idea being cherished that there are only a few men about the city, or that only those connected with the college, are interested in your work. I am glad to learn from your last report which I have seen, that your operations are being carried on with an encouraging measure of success. For one cannot but recognize that these operations are carried on under many difficulties. That you have been able to do so much for the church, and for the cause of religion in outlying fields, is creditable to you. I am pleased to learn of your mission work in the city among the poor and criminal. This is not only a field in which you may do much good, but one which cannot but be of great use to you in your training for the ministry. In this is brought home to you what the gospel has to do for men, and that *what* has to be done for sinful men, can only be done by the gospel. The best antidote for scepticism is to engage in the work of saving men from sin.

It is not necessary to occupy your time with the common appeals which are made to us on behalf of mission work. Appeals, which sometimes are not very intelligent, and which sometimes are not altogether scriptural. Every intelligent person knows, that our religion is, in its nature, aggressive and missionary. Where it is not so, it is either dying or dead. The theoretical part of the subject then is settled, so far as we are concerned. The questions which occupy our minds chiefly are: How the work may best be done, and how may the means be procured with which it is to be done?

It would be unfortunate for the church if these questions should be regarded as settled and solved. I do not think they are. There is room for advance both in respect to, How this mission work should be carried on by the church, and How the means for carrying it on are to be obtained.

But regarding these questions as settled in the meantime, both the theory and the practice, taking for granted that you have the missionary spirit developed among you, I will proceed to speak on the subject of the work of the church at home.

And first, I would refer to the subject of our Home Mission work as that is commonly understood. The term "Home Missions" is a household word. It means one of the schemes of our church. That is all! It is a work done in outlying fields, by some unknown agents, under the orders of an omnipotent committee. So it is thought of by many. And did Home Mission work mean no more than that which is done through our committee, it is yet a great and necessary work. The records of it are full of interest to every friend of the gospel, and to every lover of his race. The records of it are full of self-sacrificing devotion to duty, of patient continuance in the well-doing, of hard toil, of severe privation, of Christian faith and love in those who have gone out into the new and remote parts of the land to seek the souls that are uncared for, and to lead them to the Saviour. The story of it has pages also that are sorrowful. On its fields the missionaries have laid down their lives. And on its fields are found those scenes which so touch our sympathies. Homes without the knowledge of God, souls that have not heard the gospel, communities lapsing into moral decay. Some points in the work claim attention.

First, the *extent* of the work forces itself upon our notice. The church by this time should have some idea of the geographical extent of her field. But this is a subject that only some one from the west, gifted in geography and descriptive power, is competent to speak on. The vast extent of the field should be no discouragement to the church. Rather it is a fact in which we should rejoice. It should be not a disadvantage but a stimulus to the

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religious life of the church. It should prevent us sitting down to the selfish enjoyment of the gospel for ourselves. It should awaken and keep alive our sympathy for our fellow men. It keeps ever before our minds the necessity of religious ordinances in order to the growth of religion even in a Christian land. It gives us an interest in every part of our country which we would not otherwise have. It furnishes us with new fields in which to carry out the work of our Master. It is ever affording us new and powerful illustrations of the influence of the gospel upon human hearts. There are souls in these new fields for the church to seek out. Souls more precious than the earth's treasures. His jewels whom it is ours to reclaim for His crown. It were a waste of time to dwell on the *claims* of the Home Mission field. It is that field which has the first claim upon the church. We cannot change the divine order. He has put it first.

It would be absurd to leave our own land inadequately provided with the gospel while we were sending it to other lands.

We hear much of the "Cry from Macedonia" as applied to the foreign field. But that cry comes from the home field as loudly. It comes from the lakes and woods of Muskoka, from the rocks of Algoma from the benighted fields of Quebec, from wide prairies, and from the mountains and valleys of the boundless west. We must put first in our regard, that which God has put first in its claim upon us, and in its relation to us. It is not a question about which there can be any dispute. One of the best fruits of foreign mission effort is to make us value the gospel more, and desire to make it known to all men. It is a mistake to exaggerate or to exalt out of its proper place, the claims of the one field or the other.

The souls of all men are alike precious in the sight of our Lord. Reason as well as scripture teaches us to expend our sympathy and benevolence first upon those within our borders. The true missionary spirit is practical not sentimental. It is governed by duty. It works by divine direction. It is willing to do unromantic work. The heroism is shown at home, as willingly as it is abroad. Let the claims of each field have their just place in our regard. My decided conviction is that the church will never fulfil her duty until she gives to the cause of Home Missions the first place. The church should give to the home missionary the same training, the same generous provision in going to his field, the same liberal treatment on the field, which she gives to the foreign missionary. No one can give any reason that will stand investigation: why so great a distinction should be made, as is made, between the supply sent to the foreign field and the supply that is sent to the home mission field.

The people at home in our mission field deserve to be treated

with the same respect as the heathen abroad. If the heathen require trained men to teach them, surely the highly intelligent people, the pioneers of your civilization, require men of equal ability and equal training. The church appears to think that they do not. The existence and prosperity of the church depends upon the adequate cultivation of the field in our own land. That should be attended to first up to the point of our duty and ability. I hope the church will yet come to this view and be as diligent in strengthening her stakes as in lengthening her cords. No advocate of foreign missions desires to diminish the interest of the church in home missions. The very opposite is the case. The true mission spirit will not err in this matter. When the church possesses it, then each claim of the Master will be attended to up to the extent of the church's power.

Let me refer to the *agents* by whom the work in the home field is to be done. In the foreign field it is done by order of the church, by ordained men. Here a considerable part, in fact the greater of it, is done by students. Some of it by catechists.

The church lays a great responsibility on you. The system has serious defects. First, in respect to the partial time of supply given. Second, in the inability of the student to dispense the sacraments of the church. Third, in its interfering with educational work of the students.

We must, however, take the plan which is in use, and deal with it as best we can. This is to be borne in mind, that your work is only preparatory. You are the skirmishers in advance of the heavier troops. Your work belongs to a dispensation that passeth away. The result of it should be to make the people long for the dispensation that is to follow. It should be that the people would not ask students to be sent to them a day longer than was necessary. We find, often quite an opposite feeling created in the mission field. That after students have been employed for some time, the people will not look at a minister of years and experience. They do not want an ordained man. If compelled to have one, he must be as like a student as possible in his qualifications. This is no doubt complimentary to you, but it is an unhappy result of your work. You should take the role of John the Baptist and teach, that the student must 'decrease' and the ordained minister must 'increase.' The people should be taught that it is their duty and their privilege to have gospel ordinances in all their completeness set up among them. The church owes this to them. They should give the committee no rest until this has been secured. The church should supply the funds to do this, and I think that the church would supply the funds, if the need for them was demonstrated.

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Further there are two elements of character and work, which I would commend the student missionary to cultivate while on the field. These are, first, that principle which the apostle inculcates when he says to the Phillipians. "Stand fast in the Lord." I notice a tendency in a portion of the ministry and church to be too easily influenced by the views and practices of those who are not qualified to be guides or models. A tendency to fall in with some popular opinion, or to adopt some novelty in the form of worship, before the matter has been fully considered. Let us examine our ground and be sure of it, and stand fast upon it. There is no virtue in being compliant to every apparently religious current that presses upon you. There is great influence wielded by simply standing fast. Such should be the opinion of the gospel pioneer. False views and foolish opinions and sinful practices will break down when confounded by this spirit which will not give, in matters of religion. It was upon this rock like character in the early church that Paganism was broken in pieces.

The second principle I would mention, though I observe that you are already adepts in it, is, that of elasticity of method. Presbyterianism allows this. It also profits by it. Presbyterianism puts life above form. It approves of putting the "new wine into new bottles." But while it is proper and sensible to adapt your methods to your situation, this should not lead you to be careless of form. There is both use and power in the form and in the manner. It is never out of place to be reverent in the treatment of sacred things. It would be a great accomplishment to teach the people, that it is of vast importance *how* God is to be worshipped. So many think, and are encouraged to think that it does not matter. That idea fills God's house with confusion. Men think to-day that in the Christian pulpit they may teach what they please with equal acceptance in the sight of God. They also think they may introduce whatever fantastic form of worship they please.

The idea prevails that it is the people who are to be consulted and not God as to how the service of his house is to be carried on. But I say, be under divine commandment. "The grandest things that ever come into us are commanded in. The authority of God is our noblest educator. For more than all else it wakens up our life and impregnates our sentiments with all that is heroically true and good. When the soldiers of Jesus Christ throng in, after their great campaign is over, what will be more surely discovered in them, than their everlasting ennoblement in Christ's great will and commandment."

I have been speaking of home mission work in the narrower sense in which we are accustomed to regard it. It has wider meanings. It includes the whole work of the church at home:

Every congregation should be an organization for doing home mission work. We do not need to leave our own parishes to find sinners outside of the church to convert. They exist all around us. Our first duty is to them. The churches of the old countries recognize this. They nearly all employ mission agencies beyond the pastor's work. I see that the church in your city recognizes this. And in this direction is the most useful field for student training and for the employment of students. I speak from personal experience, having spent my last year in theology between this kind of work and the duties of the hall. The people of Toronto are favored in having a college to draw upon for agents in this field.

This mission agency is of the kind called by the Lutheran church the "Inner Mission."

It deals with things temporal and physical, as well as things spiritual. This is the most fruitful effect of foreign missions on the church at home. That these teach us more fully what gospel work means. That it means not only preaching, but teaching and healing and caring for the poor, the sick, the friendless, the orphan, and the widow.

Under the shadow of our churches an unchristianized population is growing up. That is true in rural centres as well as in the city.

The need of directing attention to this view of the subject is attested by two painful facts:

1. First, that in not a few districts and towns, while the population has increased and other denominations have increased, our own church has remained stationary. In some towns whose population has increased there are no more congregations than there were twenty years ago. It was shown a few years ago in the census returns, that there was a large number of Presbyterians who were not accounted for in the statistics of our church. The second fact is, that in the neighborhood of all our congregations, other agencies are at work to reach people who are not connected with any of the churches. When each congregation becomes a centre of mission life in its own district, the spiritual life of the church will be revived. A greater interest will be taken in mission work both at home and abroad.

The church would increase not only by the natural growth of its membership, but by the in gathering of those outside of the fold. There is nothing to boast of in the fact, that in comparison with a few years ago our numbers have increased. Only some calamity, or disruption, could have prevented this. There is nothing to boast of in the fact, that the man is stronger and wiser and richer than the boy. It would only be a matter to thank God for if we could show, that any increase was the result of enlarged activity and zeal in bringing the people under the power of the

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gospel. But again, let us enlarge our ideas still further in respect to the work of the church at home. The church is the great educating power in the land. Religion exercises a deeper influence over the minds of men than any other agency. Even the denominational form which religion takes, shows itself in the life of the people. We have an illustration of this fact in many countries but very manifestly in the people of Scotland. They are intellectually and morally the product of their religion. And they are marked by very distinct denominational characters. No where probably are seen so clearly both the coarser or finer shades, indeed all the shades of Presbyterianism. A fact that is made much of in a humorous way by recent Scottish writers.

The influence of the church was exerted upon the country as it ever is, through the ministry.

An educated ministry in each parish from generation to generation, preaching Bible truths, affected the life of the people profoundly. Those who were interested in spiritual questions found a counsellor in their pastor. Those who had literary aspirations found a friend and guide in Him.

It is the church which has had such a ministry, which has been the great educating power in the land. It is the church which has kept alive the conscience, which under all defects and errors, makes that people conspicuous for their integrity. As is the ministry so are the people. Scotland under the reign of moderation illustrates the same truth. There is no virtue in Presbyterianism, nor in any ism, to preserve it from corruption. We have seen it sink into Unitarianism in England, developing Arianism in Ireland, and Moderatism in Scotland. So it is not the ism there is any virtue in. It is only the church as the temple of the Holy Ghost that has power. It is only a church spiritually alive that can escape corruption. The purpose of the church whether at home or abroad is spiritual. It is to make good men out of bad men. So long as she does this there is no danger of her overthrow. Her strength is in her product. A gospel that can gather a church out of "Jerusalem, the city of priests; out of Antioch, the city of lovers of pleasure; out of Corinth, the vanity fair of the Roman Empire, at once the London and the Paris of the first century after Christ; out of Rome, the city of imperial power," is a gospel that cannot be despised by anyone. To do this, is the best answer the church can make to her assailants. No criticism can harm a gospel which can show such trophies of her teaching. The influence of the church is felt in every department of life. Education in this Province, it is said, lacks the religious element. If it does so, it is not so much the defect of the laws as it is the fault of the people, and of the church. It is because the ministers, the trustees, and the parents do not take the trouble to see

that the schools are religious. The law permits them to be so, if the people desire them to be so. There is nothing in the law to prevent any Board of Trustees from being careful to appoint a person of Christian character to teach. There is nothing in the law to prevent the trustees giving their teacher to understand that they not only desire the religious exercises which the law prescribes to be used, but that they desire the teacher to impress on the young minds the authority of that divine law which they are required to teach them, once a week. That they desire him to enforce his instruction by a reference to the principles of the Christian religion. And there is nothing in the law to prevent, but there is a distinct provision to encourage the ministers of the different churches, giving all diligence to see that this is done. The church to-day is disposed to lean too much upon the Government, and to ascribe to a defect in the law that which is due to the weakness not of the gospel but the ministers. The church should make her influence felt much more in this field. Christianity is the educating element of the world. The churches which exist alongside of the school as ours do, and yet do not make their power felt in moulding the education given in the school, are churches which are weak. Weak in intellectual power and in spiritual power.

*Again.* The religious life of the family in our parent churches was due to their teaching. They held that it is in the home that the beginnings of character are made. The home has the chief influence in making a religious and moral people. To make good men is to make good citizens. That was the theory. The church set herself more to the attacking of sin in the heart than to crusades against particular sins.

It is not a successful method of work to divide up the sins of the community too much, and letting sin alone, to make a great stir over sins. It is injurious to the conscience, and has been so in this land, to magnify one sin, to the hiding of others.

The avarice which is the root of all evil, lies comfortably undisturbed in our churches, while the offspring of it in particular instances, is assailed with exaggerated violence. Let us remember that it is only by attacking sin we will get rid of sins. The life of a people is measured by the life of the home. The church is responsible for the character of the homes, the state is not. Such is the wide spreading influence of a living church. Such the work that is to be done at home. To do her work effectually requires the indwelling in her of the Holy Spirit. As one working in the field I simply add my testimony to that of others when I say, that the great duty to which we should address ourselves, is to maintain at a high standard the religious life of the people.

What is needed is that we should unite in one great effort to lift up the whole church to a higher plane of life. Not separating

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in our regard, or in our advocacy, one part of her operations from another, but putting first that which God has put first the life of the church as a whole, and the mission she has to fulfil in the place where by God she has been put. The question is, how is this to be done? It is a question which the courts of the church might profitably spend some time in the study of.

Those who are placed by Providence as leaders in the church, should hold before her a high standard as to what is required, and what is to be undertaken. There is now a painful acquiescence in low standards.

When one considers the doles and dribblets meted out for God's work at home, compared with what is required, it is discouraging. Through *all* our home work, as well as home mission work, more means are required. We should not set before the people the minimum but the maximum of our need. And we should ask for it, not as those who ask a favor, but as those who are appointed to show to the people the will of our Master and the openings set before them in His service.

2nd. We should not separate in the regard of the people, one part of the church's operations from another. We should adopt the divine order in presenting claims. For there *is* a divine order. We should follow it. If we did, I think that in some cases, that which is now last would be first. The wants of the household, the providing for the family, the widows and orphans, the aged, and the educating of the family would be first—and after these every outlying enterprise.

There are required in the church at present those three things: 1. Unity. The whole church being enlisted for the whole of her operations. There should be not only an alumni association of this college or that, but of all the colleges. An association in which men of all schools and from every part of the church at home or abroad should be enlisted. To such an association let your schemes be submitted, endowment schemes and all other schemes which require to be lifted up. Are those ministers who have been trained abroad not worthy to associate with you? Are they not interested in the colleges and in the church as much as yourselves? Appeals emanating from such a source embracing all the ministry would come home to the church with more hopefulness of success. I think it is needed in the direction of greater unity. Unity of policy, and plan and spirit. 2. There is much to be desired a larger measure of enthusiasm in the ministry, and membership, on behalf of the operations of the church. Enthusiasm for the life, and the good name, and the prosperity of the church as a whole. Such a spirit would lift us out of our localism and our hobbyism, and make all parts of the church equally the subject of thought and prayer, and all the schemes equally the object of our care and

sympathy. 3. There is needed further an increase of our faith in God. It is His work we are engaged in. He will supply the means for accomplishing it. He will honor a large faith.

It will be unto us as it ever is according to our faith. He will send the means for generous undertakings. Let us cast ourselves anew on him, and attempt and expect greater things. Union, enthusiasm, and faith, these are a trinity of great power. As the rising tide will lift the heaviest vessel in the channel from the place into which she has been left to sink by the outgoing tide, so the tide must flow in upon the church, the tide of divine grace and of divine enthusiasm and faith—then those who are in charge of her operations shall have clearer and larger views of her great duties; then all jealousies shall be swept away, then the church with all her attendant institutions and schemes, shall be lifted out of her worldliness and unbelief, into a spirit more worthy of her high calling, and shall go forward with new power on her mission of divine beneficence throughout all the regions of this wide Dominion, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

