Our Missionary Societies

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DEAD WORKS SHOULD BE BURIED!

In so far as the unconverted are concerned, the society way of doing missionary work is economically unsound, because from one-third to two-thirds of the money contributed goes for lubricating the machinery. But the society is psychologically unsound. It falls down worse in reflecting benefits upon the one who contributes. Spiritually, subscribing to a scheme cannot possibly do one as much good as doing the work himself. Everybody knows that it is better for an individual or a congregation to execute its own missionary work. The Christian Standard features all news of missionary work done by what it terms the "living-link" method!

Some of our most thoughtful leaders—including some who have never been suspected of radical tendencies—have condemned our societies, and have declared that if forced to choose they would support sectarian societies in preference to our own *de facto* variety. So say I; but we do not have to make that choice. I do not intend to ever make it. Like the "Two Black Crows," "Even if it was good, I would not like it!" Even if I were convinced that societies were allowable (it is not supposable, except for purposes of illustration), I would never lend encouragement to them. That is not prejudice; it is sanity! That is just plain common sense! The whole approach of the society is wrong. It is utterly devoid of spiritual vitality. A society can produce nothing but dead works. It has no power to stir the hearts of men to spiritual action. A machine cannot inspire heart power. The best it can do is appeal to the pride of men. It pampers denominational pride. It is flat, stale, and unprofitable. It contains neither zeal, knowledge, nor spirituality. It neither honors God, gets the gospel to the lost, nor strengthens the one contributing to the work. The contributor does not know, and he does not care; and he must know, and he must care, if God's purpose in good works is to be accomplished.

Many years ago when the first missionary society was tied on to the Restoration Movement, many of the best minds among us honestly thought that if anything was ever done it would have to be done the society way. How astonishingly shortsighted they were! There had scarcely been a religious group in all the history of the Christian religion that had grown more rapidly. How could a movement grow and spread as this one had done without missionary work being done? They were doing one of the finest pieces of missionary work the world had ever seen—and yet they thought they had to organize!

They substituted machinery for spiritual integrity. They sold the substance for a shadow. They took an opiate. An antidote that will cure a sick man will often kill a well one. No wonder the work slowed down! Artificial respiration administered to a man who is running full tilt in a race is apt to slow him down. The strife and division that ensued, and other expedients adopted, were additional factors in slowing the Restoration Movement down to a walk!

After all, perhaps our own societies have accomplished some good. Surfeited by our own intemperance, our eyes have been opened to the inherent weakness in all mechanized work. I do not envy the denominations their machinery. Many of their most thoughtful leaders have seen the evils of institutionalism and have cried out mightily against them. But they were as a man in a dream. They could see that it was grinding all the spiritual life out of them, but they were so deeply buried in it that they could not extricate themselves.

What do denominational congregations do? Outside of their running expenses, they support their institutions. And what do their institutions do? Outside of keeping the machinery turning, all they do is support denominational pride! That is the vicious cycle of denominationalism—their pride produces the machinery, and the machinery feeds their pride. And to the extent that we have plagiarized their liveless schemes, we are in the same boat. If there were some way of suddenly extracting all of the denominational pride from all religious work—and it ought to be extracted—most of the religious institutions of the earth would fall in that day, and great would be the fall thereof!

Dribble, dribble, dribble—that is what they are, mere dribblers! The only thing they can think of is organizing something. They feel that they have been divinely called to furnish the brains for the brotherhood, and all they can suggest is: "Let's organize." Their suggestion *is their contribution* to the work. They "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." Organization is an alibi—a substitute for the life and spirit of religion. If men have genuine religion, they will spread it; and if they do not have the genuine article, it ought not to be scattered! We have all the organization needed. All talk of additional organization is drivel. They say, "Go, go, go"; but there is no point in going, unless we take something with us. If we have something to take, we will go. The "go" is the gospel. It cannot be contained—it will out! If God provided wings for certain seeds, so that the winds would scatter them and perpetuate the species, would he not provide the motive power for the gospel?

They say that without the stirrers-up, the brethren will not do missionary work. If they will not do the work without machinery, it is evident that they do not have the gospel in their hearts; for if they did have, it would make them do it before the machinery could be started. They say that the brethren are not mission-minded. That is not a disease; it is merely a symptom—the disease is that they do not have the gospel in their hearts. If a man is not mission-minded, he had just as well not go, for he would not be worth anything when he got there. And how much is he worth if he makes the trip by proxy—through the missionary society? He can send nothing but money. If he had religion, he would go without the society; if he does not have it, he has nothing to send. If such people support the society, can that society transport across the seas something it does not have? It can take nothing but money. It is high time that men learned that the salvation of the world cannot be purchased with money. On the other hand, with heart power, it can be converted with but little money. Starting from Jerusalem, the gospel was preached throughout the world in one generation. With all the money and machinery of the multiplied generations since, the feat has never been duplicated. Without heart power the world can never be converted.

The society comes in when religion fails. It is a substitute for religion. And it will not work, for it has no religion either. It takes fire to start a fire. It takes religion to produce religion, just as it takes beans to produce beans. When a man is filled to overflowing with the gospel and is on fire with love for the souls of men, he has no time to wait on missionary societies. He can rescue souls from death while the society is lubricating its machinery and getting up steam to function. He can save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins

(*Continued on page 737*)

Our Missionary Societies

(*Concluded from page 732*)

while his organization-minded brother is attending a missionary convention looking for a job!

Was man made for religion, or religion for man? Do we make Christians out of men and establish congregations that they may lubricate religious machinery? or are societies formed to facilitate the work of individuals and congregations? If the first is true, the societies deserve to die; if the latter is true, they are unnecessary. When Christians are filled with the Spirit, they can get the job done without the societies; when they are without the Spirit, the societies cannot fill them.

To close this phase of the discussion, I shall quote from an article by F. D. Srygley, perhaps the most pungent writer who was ever on the staff of the Gospel Advocate. The article can be found in the Advocate of 1891, pages 17-19. J. N. Smith had proposed in an article in the Christian Standard that the Disciples adopt a system of church-government similar to that of the Methodists. He had said that their episcopacy was "the strength and glory of Methodism." Brother Srygley said:

"In the name of Methodism I protest! There may be episcopal cranks among the Methodists who, like the author of this 'plan,' unduly exalt the peculiar form of their ecclesiastical organization and underrate the spirituality of their religion, but they have only the *form* of true Methodism, denying the real power thereof. If there is one thing which the Methodists, as a people, have emphasized by almost unanimous agreement all along their history, it is that 'the strength and glory' of their religion is not in the outward organization of their episcopacy, 'but in demonstrations of the Spirit and of power,' so to speak."

And then he closed the long and interesting article in these words:

"Denominations die, episcopacy rots, parties, sects, and ecclesiasticisms perish from the earth, but the spirit of Christianity lives on. Every reformation from Campbell back to the days of the fathers has been a protest against general organizations and episcopal supervision. If there is one proposition in all the world that is absolutely demonstrated by the history of the whole religious world, it is that all forms of general denominational organization, ecclesiasticism, and episcopacy are inimical to the spirit and genius of true Christianity. The pure faith and spirit of the Christian religion dwell not in centralized ecclesiasticism, or in organized institutions, but in the minds and hearts of spiritually-born individuals. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; . . . for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' But the religionists of this world seem determined never to learn this simple lesson, and, hence, they go on 'organizing' and—dying!"

Brother Srygley was speaking particularly of general organization, but the spirit and nature of all organization is the same. Organization is nothing but a stick horse. Go ahead and organize—and die—if nothing else will do you. You were half dead already, or you could surely have thought of a better suggestion than organizing something.

"Brother McGarvey"

(*Concluded from page 725*)

Morro drops below the plane of a logician and deals in common drivel. He should know that there are many things that belong to social life which are right, but are a violation of God's will when brought into the worship. It is right to eat meat and drink milk in our social activities, but it is wrong to bring those things into the worship and have them as a part of the Lord's Supper.

Again, Doctor Morro makes the argument in answer to McGarvey's teaching that musical instruments "were used in Old Testament times as a part of the divinely-constituted worship, . . . and are also to be used by saints and angels in the praise of heaven." He concludes: then why not use them in the worship in the church? He should know that many things were used in the Old Testament worship that are not used in Christian worship today. His argument means nothing if he does not mean that we should use instrumental music in the worship, because it was used in the Old Testament worship. Again, he should know that heaven is a spiritual abode, and not a literal or material abode or place. He should also know that musical instruments are material things, and that no material instruments are to be used in a spiritual place. He should know that the New Testament speaks of there being horses and other animals in the future life of heaven; he does know that there are not literal horses and other animals in heaven. Such an argument to justify the use of instrumental music in worship today betrays the inconsistency of the one making it and the weakness of the claim for the use of instruments.

Again, he charges McGarvey as basing his arguments against the use of instrumental music in worship on "the silence of the New Testament concerning musical instruments." He says that McGarvey "consciously built his argument on this assumption." Furthermore, he says that "McGarvey adroitly and skillfully parried the points of his critic, but he could not remove the fact that his argument is all founded upon silence." He is unfair to McGarvey in making these charges. Doctor Morro then argues in favor of the use of the instrument in worship, *because the New Testament is silent on it.* His argument is that since the New Testament does not forbid the use of the instrument, we may use it in the worship. His contention is that we may use in the worship anything not forbidden in the New Testament. He fails to understand that the teachings of the New Testament are *both inclusive and exclusive.* They include all that God commands and they *exclude* all that he does not command. It seems strange that the Doctor does not see his own weakness in this matter.

A. H. Kennamer, 1806 Parker Street, Cleveland, Tenn., July 23: "The work with the East Side congregation moves on with interest. Sunday, July 21, a man and his wife were baptized into Christ. They had formerly been Baptists. James Burrows, a student of Freed-Hardeman College, preached for us Sunday evening. At the present I am in a meeting with the church at Patty, Tenn., near Benton."

V. E. Gregory and Ross Derryberry, both of Nashville, Tenn., are in a meeting at Greenville, Miss.

Alonzo Williams, Tyler, Texas: "Our recent meeting, with G. C. Brewer preaching, resulted in about twelve baptisms and much good done."

Athens Clay Pullias closed a meeting at Cornersville, Tenn., Wednesday night, July 24, with ten baptized and five restored.

B. C. Goodpasture, Nashville, Tenn., July 29: "One confession (a Catholic) and two by statement at the Hillsboro Church yesterday."

J. T. Marlin, Old Hickory, Tenn., conducted a meeting at Vester, Wilson County, Tenn., July 7 to 17, with eight baptized and seven restored.

Everett Day, Route 3, Box 322, Tampa, Fla., July 22: "There have been four baptisms, with good attendance and interest, at Mount Gilead, near Fulton, Miss. S. A. Freeman, of Humble, Texas, will continue the meeting through this week. I will go from here to Tippah County, Miss."

H. W. Wrye, Lyle Station, Tenn., and Ross Derryberry, Nashville, Tenn., recently closed a meeting at Spring Hill, Tenn., in which ten were baptized and two restored. One of those baptized and one restored were visitors from New York, and another restored was from Detroit.

E. P. Watson, 1220 Center Street, Bowling Green, Ky., July 28: "Leslie Blakey and I will begin a tent meeting with the brethren at Central City, Tuesday night, July 30, to continue through August 18. We will appreciate having the brethren within reach to attend the meeting and lend their encouragement to the work."

Frank D. Young, Hartsville, Tenn., July 25: "Our meeting begins here August 4, with C. M. Pullias preaching. Services daily at 3 and 7:45 P.M. Come and be with us. I closed a meeting, July 23, at Cash, Ark. Interest was good and attendance fine throughout the meeting. Twelve were restored and one was baptized."

Rolfe Wagner, 4437 S. E. Hawthorne, Portland, Ore., July 24: "The church that meets at 4315 S. E. Division will conduct a meeting, from August 18 to September 1, with services at 9:30 A.M. and 8 P.M. daily. We invite anyone having relatives or friends here to notify them or us, or both. If you are passing through on vacation, stop with us."

H. D. Jeffcoat, Drew, Miss., July 27: "I just closed a good meeting near Drew, with twelve baptized. This is the third meeting in which I have assisted that church. It has made progress under the leadership of Renny White. I shall go next to Crocket, Tate County, Miss., to begin tonight; then to Huntsville, Miss., the second Lord's day in August; then to Monette, Ark."

Leroy Brownlow, 521 Essex, Fort Worth, Texas, July 25: "Horace W. Busby recently closed a good meeting with the Vickery Boulevard Church. Six were baptized and others were restored and placed membership. Attendance was large, and I suppose that every congregation in the city was represented. On the last Sunday morning it was necessary to run a speaker over to the educational building and seat some there. The evening services wre held in the open air."

(Continued on page 737)