

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA

EFFECTIVENESS IN CHRISTIAN WORK

BY

REV. JAMES G. K. McCLURE,

Author of "The Great Appeal," "Possibilities," etc., etc.

Fleming H. Revell Company
Chicago, New York & Toronto
Publishers of Evangelical Literature

**COPYRIGHT, 1901, BY
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY**

252
M13e

21 Feb 45 letter

Dear Friend:—

I am glad there is a prospect of having your address on "Effectiveness in Christian Work" published. I believe it will be helpful to any who may be anxious to do Christian work, to read carefully what you gave us in Chicago on that subject.

With kindest regards,

D. L. MOODY.

*Rev. James G. K. McClure,
Lake Forest, Ill.*

21 Feb 45 J. G. K. McClure

1180360

Effectiveness in Christian Work



EVERY earnest heart engaged in Christian work desires to be as effective in it as possible. That work aims for great results—to bring human lives into blessed accord with the will of God. The question then is appropriate, “How can I accomplish the most in such work?” Five elements of effectiveness sometimes omitted from consideration, are now to be suggested.

I. Effectiveness in Christian work is greatest when that work proceeds *from the lower to the upper strata of society.*

You can ruin from the top: you must save from beneath. Error filtrates downward: truth forces upward. Folly is destruction in that it pulls down: wisdom is edification in that it builds up. The ministries in all ages that have struck their stamp deepest upon the ad-

vancing thought of mankind have had power first and last with the common people. He who speaks to court and noble has applause: he who molds the life of the simple has leverage. Success in winning place with the great does not insure power over the masses: but healthy power over the masses does insure place with the great. The method whereby religious usefulness is best secured is procedure from lower to upper, from child to parent, pupil to teacher, servant to master, poor to rich, uneducated to educated.

This method is substantiated both by fact and by theory. By fact, for all history teaches that the most potent spiritual forces are always those that press upward from beneath. In due time their superior power is recognized. The lives that most bless those in the lower walks of life most bless the race. The hand that has lifted the multitude, eventually is sure to be kissed by the cultured few. Whitefield brought tears to the grimy cheeks of colliers and put a new life into their rough hearts and then the Chesterfields, Walpoles, Lady Huntingtons and Franklins came to hear him. Chalmers preached to children and servants and built up his Ragged Schools, and straight-

way, the wise men and the masters crowded his church pews. Men in lofty estate blind their eyes for the time to the value of the substrata of society. But when the lowest and supporting timbers of the social fabric are genuinely redeemed and the "mudsills" are made sound, then the common sense even of the aristocrats asserts itself, and rising superior to prejudice and dilettantism they realize that according to the stability or instability of those substrata is the safety or the peril of the upper stories of society; and speedily they acknowledge with gratitude the world's indebtedness to the teachers who have wrought the work of regeneration. Cowper in his generation dared not mention Bunyan in his verse lest he provoke a sneer from the purists. But when years had passed and the purists saw what Bunyan had done for the lowest and the weakest, Macauley was the faithful mouthpiece of them all in reverently proclaiming the genius of Bunyan. Men laughed at Tyndale because he was to make a translation of the Bible that the plowboy could read, but the scholars of today praise Tyndale for his practical wisdom. The wits of Oxford thought it ridiculous that Wickliffe

should put his Testaments among the unlearned, but Wickliffe affected public sentiment at its fountain head.

"What persons are most influencing the world's views of life as held today and are doing the most for society's good as that good shall appear tomorrow?" is a serious question. Are they those who minister merely to the upper classes, or are they those who are in touch with the bulk of mankind?

Beaconsfield's saying concerning matters other than religious, that "the prevalent sentiment of any age is the sentiment that is soon to lose its power," suggests the possible waste of energy upon social strata fast hurrying to their impotence. "The fashion of this world passeth away" is true in the popular as well as in the scriptural sense of "fashion." The "flower" of the field is often nearest to the withering. It was not mere heart compassion manifested by Christ when he preached to the poor: it was mind wisdom as well. For out of those very poor ever comes the fresh blood which in church, as in state, pushes society forward toward its blessed goal. Luther thought it the evidence of his far-sightedness that in his preaching he gave less con-

cern to the doctors and magistrates, of whom there were thirty in his audience, while he aimed with abounding zeal to reach the young people, children and servants, of whom there were two thousand before him. Thus Luther in preaching as well as in preparing the German Bible laid deep and broad foundations in the hearts of "the people" for the maintenance of his momentous cause.

It is certainly a pleasure to minister to those who are in the upper strata of society, parents, employers, the rich and the cultured. Every man of years, education and intellectual power finds it easier and more congenial to stand level with such. But the subject of supreme moment is the subject of a pervading and lasting influence for good. The minister who would thrust his influence the farthest in time and force it the deepest in groove will always begin low and work upward.

This he will do because theory as well as fact teaches him the wisdom of such a course. Among the lower strata the human heart does not masquerade. Years, power, wealth, social usages cause it to conceal its true estate under a veneer. In the upper strata the human heart less often shows itself in its naturalness.

In these strata is the artificial, the assumed. Elegance of manner largely is repression of feeling. But the lower strata wear their hearts upon their sleeves, blurting out their views and revealing their needs and even their vices. Human nature as human nature is more open and is easiest studied in the lower strata. Away from those strata we see the veneer in such prominence that we are apt to preach to the veneer and labor for the veneer. The veneer is in the eye. The sins behind it are unseen, and the true needs of the soul, unknown by reason of this concealment, are unreachd: the appeal stops with the veneer and does not penetrate to the heart.

There is reasonableness in saying that the ministry that shall reach real human nature (which is indeed the same in every stratum), and shall recreate it to the largest possibilities, will hold itself somewhere and somehow in unceasing contact with the lower strata: because it knows that only thus can it keep aware of what it has to deal with, and only thus can it abide where its leverage shall not flounce into thin air. Antæus could never be conquered so long as he kept in touch with mother earth, but the rather, each new touch

upon that earth made him stronger. The Christian church is invincible and is sure to advance its victorious hold upon mankind, so long as she keeps in intelligent, sympathetic contact with the lowliest, the humblest and the weakest.

2. Effectiveness in Christian work is largely dependent upon *search for the individual*.

Christ's miracle of healing the blind man did not bring forth its desired result until, having followed the man, he revealed Himself to him as the Christ in a face to face presentation. It is the face to face presentation that wins the heart's allegiance to the Master.

"The burden which rests upon us is not simply a proclamation of the Gospel, but such a proclamation of it as shall save and edify the soul." Sermons, addresses and services are means, and means only. If, having made proclamation in some public place and shown the path of duty, the Christian worker can shake off the dust from his feet and straightway be released from all responsibility for the reception of the truth, sermons and services may engross his whole attention. But if he is set to lead souls to personal acceptance of

a Savior and to growth into His likeness, his responsibility never ceases until he has made every possible effort to render the spoken word effectual. Sermons and services thus become mere incidents. Sermon worship ceases: sermon ministration begins. The danger is ever a threatening one that people will go to church to hear the sermon and the minister to preach it, and that with the quiet orderly hearing the duty of the one will be supposed to end and with the earnest, attractive preaching the duty of the other will be done. Where the responsibility for this idea lies is uncertain. It may be that Christian workers themselves have so spoken and acted as to create the impression that pulpit success is secured when preachers attain laudatory acceptance by reason of their startling epigram, correct pronunciation, intellectual acumen and accurate exegesis rather than through the actual salvation of souls. John Todd feared for the people and feared also for himself when on Monday he was overheard praying: "O Lord, I preached a great sermon yesterday, but if Thou wilt forgive me I will try never to do it again." The minister himself often falls into the belief that unless

his deepest study and most prolonged thought are given to sermon making he is unfaithful to the gospel trust committed to him.

But Baxter, in his "Reformed Pastor," as long ago as 1656 said, that just as much intellectual power is demanded for hand to hand application of the truth to individual souls as for preparation for the pulpit. Baxter calls for as much time and strength to be given to the one as to the other. Every minister of experience is aware that sermons in themselves, however earnestly they may summon to repentance, if not followed by personal solicitation, very, very seldom bring hearts to renounce their sin. It is not wisdom to pour water broadcast over bottles so that they receive but dribblets when pouring into each singly all are soon filled. "Commonplace truth," John Foster said, "is of no use as it makes no impression; it is no more instruction than wind is music. The truth must take a particular bearing, as the wind passes through the tubes, to be anything worth."

Herein we see the ordering of infinite wisdom. For only as the Christian worker deals with the impenitent as individuals, can he know their temperaments and the difficulties.

of their lives and so be able when they have penitently entered the flock, to be the true shepherd who feeds each with the food suitable to individual needs. Only in this way, too, can he be kept aware how much, under God, his power to bring souls to Christ depends upon the winsomeness of his own personality.

This search for the individual does not rest until it has touched his home with earnest effort. Irreligious homes involve danger to every indweller. In India when converts ready for baptism beg leave "to first go bid them farewell that are at home," the missionaries have reason to fear lest once within the atmosphere of those pagan homes consecration will languish and the converts will never return for baptism. Christianity as a life and as a system is so largely dependent upon the place it has in the family, that the Christian worker who fails to pass through the home doorway and make Christ regnant in the household circle is as one beating the air.

Christianity never stands on its dignity. If men will not come to its services, its services must go to them. If they will not come to hear, we must go to speak. The symbol of

Christianity is not a stately building with open doors within which sweet music and eloquent voices are waiting for incomers. Its symbol is a human form with eager eye and elastic step and loving heart carrying the gospel to those who have no relish for it and who must be "compelled" to accept eternal life. Its watchword is "go," until it is face to face with a needy soul and then, offering the water of life, it says "come." The lost sheep seldom realizes its preciousness to the Great Shepherd, until the tender under-shepherd leaving the ninety and nine that need no repentance goes after it, searching long perhaps for it, and having found it, lays his hand upon it and takes it to his heart. Through human solicitude for the individual is revealed the divine solicitude for him.

3. Effectiveness in Christian work is closely connected with *recognized heroism*.

Leo Herman has given us a brilliant picture of a scene in a cardinal's palace. Lolling in luxurious chairs and feasting from a table spread with wines and dainties, are several richly robed prelates. Among them comes a worn and weary missionary. His eyes are deep sunk, his dress torn, his manner is ear-

nest. He is telling these ruddy cheeked, soft handed sybarites the story of his labors and sufferings in heathen wilds. They look on him, half in pity for the man's mistaken zeal, half in contempt for his forlorn appearance. But the sight of that man of hardship touches the world's heart as naught else in the picture can. The world feels sure that so far as good fellowship goes none could be more jovial than these graceful, merry cardinals. But it is only the self denying missionary that can touch the world's soul and rouse it to high and grand living.

Heroism appeals to human admiration with directness and power. In its lowest form, mere physical endurance, people delight in it. The battles of pugilists and every kind of physical sport involving tension and pain, have a hold upon mankind that the supercilious sneer of the fastidious cannot relax. Alike in the church and in the world physical suffering has set in movement brave action and noble thought. Onlookers saw the anguish of Christian martyrdom and as they looked at the blood of devotion to Christ, that blood became the seed of consecration to Christ. Martyr deaths have resolved indolence into zeal; mis-

sionary pains have fired cold hearts with a burning love for souls. Let there be one grave of a pioneer preacher in a heathen land and that grave will secure the final conquest of that land for Christ. He, who is every Christian worker's exemplar, the Christ himself, living, unlike John the Baptist, in the ordinary dress of the people and mingling in their scenes of gladness, was still the one of midnight vigils who wearied Himself out in serving human needs, who had not where to lay His head and who trod a pathway leading from the Mount of Temptation to the shadows of Gethsemane on to the passion of Golgotha. To this day the suffering of Christ is essential to His sway over men's hearts. The cross, with its form of self-denying heroism upon it, does not lose its power. The story of Christ's life exerts an influence unsurpassed in potency, because in that life companionship with sickness, narrowness and need figures so much more prominently than presence at feasts and the recipiency of anointing oil.

What was a prime element of power with Christ must be a prime element with us. Leave heroism out of Christian work and that

work can never attract to itself the noblest spirits. The men who are wanted at its entrance step are men who start upon it at a great cost to themselves. The men who are wanted in its life-long labor are men who forsake much for Christ and souls. The heroism that is often found in hovels of poverty, in the crowded rooms of factories, in the earnest plodding of true business enterprise strikes home upon the world's eye much more forcibly than the heroism of the ordinary gospel worker. The hours of labor given to pulpit study and the time and strength spent in social engagements mean little as self-denial in the estimation of the multitude. When they see that the Christian worker has neither time nor disposition to dissipate vitality in the trivialities of feast attendance, that his beneficence, uncramped by a bargaining Jacob's tenth, streams forth in glad profusion toward human needs, that he puts himself nearer to their own level in hours of recreation and nearer their level in hours of labor, they find it easier to believe in him and in the unselfish devotion of his life to their interests.

Let the idea once prevail that he is coddled by others or by himself and his influence is

weakened. Self-petting cannot develop self-respect. To be known as the pet of the rich or aristocratic is to lose the esteem of the multitude. Self-gratification in material and intellectual comforts (the alluring weakness of every age) must not characterize us. Christ did not stop upon the shore when his disciples were in the midst of wave and wind, but pressed on into the tempest, that where they were he might be.

Christian workers cannot hold themselves aloof from any peril or any loss involved in reaching the perishing else they sacrifice their effectiveness. Whether or no English thinkers are right in advocating an order of workers in the Protestant church who take the triple vow of poverty, chastity and obedience, this is certain, that until men and women put themselves side by side with the lowliest, eating as they must eat and living as they must live, the work of the Christian church will not reach its greatest effectiveness.

4. Effectiveness in Christian work finds its most powerful qualification in *love for souls*.

Personality is the one thing for which the world never loses its zest. In Christian work especially, personality is the mightiest of hu-

man factors. Professor Austin Phelps said: "The influence of the clergy with the upper classes of society is to a considerable extent a religious as distinct from an intellectual influence. It is the influence of the man, of his personal weight, of his devotional spirit, of his self-forgetfulness, of his eminence in all the passive clerical graces. For their personal help in a religious life the upper classes want a religious teacher whose prayers uplift them. The culture of our congregation is moved by the religious more than by the intellectual spirit of the age."

Of all the elements which constitute religious personality spotlessness is usually named as the most effective in Christian work. Paul upon the island of Melita, so long as the snake is upon his hand is powerless to impress divine truth upon the unlookers; but Paul having shaken off the serpent of evil may declare himself a messenger from God and now the people pay heed to his words. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." Purity is an essential to a useful ministry, but it is not *the* essential. Purity is a perfectly spotless curtain. But spotlessness never roused a soul. Something bright and glowing must stand

forth from that immaculate background if a soul is to be stirred with lofty purpose. Had pure light been all that the earth needed, God might have hung a great electric lamp in the skies, that would have flooded the earth with white light. But the earth needed life-giving power, that vegetation might spring to its birth and animal existence be sustained, and so he hung the sun there with all its heat as well as all its light. Mount Hermon's snow-capped summit, dazzlingly beautiful in its purity, is the holiness men admire from the distance, but the place where men linger, bask and delight is not upon that summit, but is at Hermon's foot where there are the inviting fruits and the nourishing breezes of the warm vineyards.

In Christian work love outranks every other endowment or requirement, however intellectual or holy. Tradition declares that God appointed Moses the leader of his people because he saw the compassionate love Moses showed to a lamb caught in a thicket when he was tending flocks in Midian. The Bible represents the purity of the soul of Moses as so great that the sight of Israel worshipping the golden calf palsied his hands and the tables

of the law fell from them. But it was the supreme climax of the life of Moses, the hour when compassionate love for Israel found its full expression, as in the agony of Gethsemane he besought God to forgive the wrongs of his people, crying out in his intense yearning, "If not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy remembrance."

Such love made him fit for leadership. The lack of such love made him unfit. When he turned upon Israel and, in his impatience that revealed greater thought than love for them, rang out the words, "Ye rebels," that instant God decreed to take away his leadership, that he was decreed that he should not cross over the Jordan.

The controlling sentiment of Paul's life is similarly set forth in Scripture. He wrote chapter after chapter to the church on the wondrous salvation found in the gospel offer. Thinking of his fellow-men in Israel who would not avail themselves of that offer his heart broke loose from the bounds of prolonged logical argument and poured out in one vehement exclamation of love, "I wish myself accursed for my brethren."

"accursed," given over to hopeless, eternal death, accursed "from Christ," the joy, the delight of his soul, "accursed," he the loyal one, from his all in all, if only the Israel of his love could be saved!

The power of these, the two greatest religious leaders of all time, lay deeper than their mighty intellects, lay in their love for souls. When John Knox, in the enclosure behind his house, pierced the stillness of the night air with the thrice repeated, intense appeal, "Give me Scotland or I die," that eager, yearning, well nigh broken heart got its Scotland. When Brainerd went to sleep thinking of souls and dreaming dreamt of them and waking still thought and prayed for them, souls became his. "Tell me," says Maclaren, "the depth of a Christian man's compassion and I will tell you the measure of his fruitfulness. The wealth of Egypt's harvest is proportioned to the depth of the Nile's overflow." The model Christian Worker is portrayed as "moved" with compassion, as though a great surging tide flowed over His heart when He saw the multitudes standing before Him in their want. The more selfish and worldly minded and careless they were, the more His

soul went out to them. Their dullception, their thoughtlessness of living, their waywardness of self-will lack to appeal all the stronger to these very characteristics revealeding greatness of their spiritual need.

Intellect counts with the intellect counts with all. Let it be as good as a Christian worker's life as man counts. But unless loving earnestness shows superior to intellect, using intellect as a vantage ground on which to plant, besieges the soul with love, the Soul is not exemplified and the soul is won.

5. Effectiveness in Christian work is greatest in *seemingly narrowest fields*.

The question is beset by difficulties: what fields is the effectiveness of work the greatest?" Popular opinion usually replies: "In the largest and most crowded churches; in crowded communities where population is sparse." This thought is under consideration, not which animated the apostles. They aimed to plant their first churches in cities where new infusions

Christianity could obtain a hearing in them which the conservative villages, imbued with paganism, long denied. The new thought is this: Where in Christian lands is the influence exerted that has the most lasting and most determining power upon the religious good of society? Where are the men born and where are they molded for Christ, who in the past have done, who in the present are doing, and who in the future will do, the most for Christ's cause? Who are the workers to-day living, praying and teaching, who as workers are fashioning the greatest servants of the kingdom? The feeding streams of the mighty river on whose banks the large city flourishes, rose far back in the hamlets. Oftentimes the littlest churches have equipped and sent out the largest characters. Henry Taylor, in his *Philip Van Artevelde*, asserts: "The world knows little of its greatest men." Often it is ignorant and must be ignorant of those who in obscure places and in lowliest surroundings have done most to shape the onward progress of Christian power. Again and again the official leaders of city churches, in the pulpit and in the pew, are almost wholly

men who in youth were converted in narrowest country churches.

Eleven of those Apostles on church is built, came from province promising Galilee. Neither in his nor in the eyes of others should any minister be deemed small in influence. Metropolitan churches reservoirs which both receive and so that their streams of beneficence the cause of religion in every world. But if in Ormiston, a tiny small as to be unnamed in any of guide books, the Christian worker one soul for Christ, and that the secret Moffat, who through himself as his son-in-law, Livingstone, shall whole round earth with missionary the influence of that worker's field force of righteousness may outweigh influence of hundreds of fields in vastness. The contact with the individual in lowly communities may give the opportunity for sending out spiritual stamped with the impress of his life after when the spiritual father lies in an unrecognized grave. These a

later shall be spoken of as the brawn and the brain of the church universal. Unwritten history is not seldom the world's truest history. Great though a worker's influence may be with many because the place he occupies is popularly regarded as a large place, not until the light of eternity dawns, with its revelation of all the onflowings and interminglings of influence, is it possible to know what worker's influence is the greatest. In our present uncertainty it is enough that we hear the divine voice bidding every one of us in his own place make full proof of his peculiar opportunity and that we rejoicing in the wondrous effectiveness that may result from Christian work, set hand and brain and heart in motion to make that work all that we possibly can make it, in the love of Christ and of souls.

NOT many years ago there was growing up in a narrow country home, beneath a widowed mother's care, a boy whose advantages for education were very meager. Northfield, Massachusetts, had no reputation as a source of power, nor was there any star seen in the skies over that humble home, leading wise men

to inquire where a leader of God's hosts had been born. But the mother, all unknown to herself, was caring for a boy who had capacities in him for shaking the world. Every other (beside that mother) as the Sunday-school teacher, the pastor, the friend, that helped that boy to find himself and his capacities, was wholly unaware that he was having part in shaping one of the most blessed careers of history. Dwight L. Moody's do not come under the formative influence of us all; but no one knows whether some boy that he is guiding and molding may not some time be a powerful helper toward the world's good, nor whether some girl similarly inspired may not be the Mary Lyon whose life shall prove a benediction to multitudes.

If we always have sympathetic touch with "the common people": if we always carry the individual soul upon our heart: if we always self-sacrificingly serve others: if we always are unquenchably aflame with the love of souls: and if we always magnify our sphere of labor as infinitely influential for good—then, under God, it may be prophesied that ours shall be effective Christian work.

One, mere flesh and blood like ourselves, for

years carried these five elements of Christian labor into his own life—and today the whole world declares that they did very much to make the work of Dwight L. Moody effective for the Master.