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OF THE

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AND
REPORT ON THE CENTENARY FUND.

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LAY EFFORT AMONG THE MASSES.

BY HON. BENNETT H. YOUNG,

Louisville, Ky.

NEITHER national laws nor national songs are a better index of national character than its maxims. Mankind needs and appreciates formulas of truth concentrated in a few words or sentences, easily remembered and yet strong and complete enough to comprehend life's work, and on which the principles and convictions of the soul may be laid.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines, gathered to formulate a system of faith and doctrine, with persecutions and revolutions behind the Church, and with struggles and conflicts before, well understood the necessity for this character of truth. Summoned with the primal object of demonstrating the concurrence of the doctrines of the English Church with that held by the other reformed Churches of that day, moved and controlled by the Spirit of the living God, it lifted itself higher than its source and ignored the narrow lines limiting its being. It considered not alone the English Church, or the Scotch Church, or a conformity, or a subserviency to any preconceived notions or creeds; it went straight to the Word of God, and supplicating for divine guidance, elaborated for mankind a doctrinal basis which, after two and a half centuries, under the severest strains of religious and political change, still stands as a defense of the orthodox truth; its banner is borne by a large proportion of the really active Christian element of the world; it has been and is a bulwark of civil and religious liberty, and originates a type of Christian people always the subjects of the deepest and strongest convictions, intelligent and earnest in their faith, ready to defend their doctrines with fortitude, zeal, and, if needs be, to sanctify them with their blood.

With a sublime conception of man's destiny, with a full perception of the dignity and grandeur of human life in its relations to the Creator, conscious of the courage and faith requisite to defend the right in the days of persecution and

trial, with the belief that man should not "live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God," they laid down as the basis of all human life and human conduct, as the first and greatest of all human thoughts, those ennobling and inspiring words, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." There were no preliminaries nor exceptions; ambition, life, hope, duty, all centred here. Broad enough for all time, wide enough for all eternity; a platform upon which to stand either on earth or in heaven. This is the cardinal Presbyterian maxim by which the Church is willing to be judged.

As these simple, lofty, elevating words seize upon the mind and control the conduct, the best results are necessarily obtained; there is no trifling with names, godfathers or godmothers; dates of birth, parental origin, these are ignored and the mind of the learner with a single sentence is inducted into the highest duties and gravest responsibilities connected with life. The steadfastness of Presbyterians in doctrine, their firmness in convictions, their liberality and their intelligence in all moral and Christian affairs, the width and comprehensiveness of their ideas, and their apprehension of the importance and the source of life, are due in large measure to the prominence of this mighty truth, taught and consecrated by the lips of maternal love; its heavenly force thus augmented and exalted by earthly association and tenderness; and as with unconscious intelligence we repeated those words so fraught with divine strength, we obtained a charter for guidance and from them caught the true conception of man's duty, hope and destiny. These twelve words mean more, and have accomplished more for the good of mankind than any other similar number of words ever coined by human brain, spoken by human tongue, or penned by human hand.

The Reformation introduced a new feature into religious life. A century did not clear away the shadows which followed the darkness of the ages preceeding the coming of the light. The intellect and the thought, and the activities of the Church, had been completely dominated by priestly rule. From the individual standpoint, Christian effort and work were directed to the personal salvation and acceptance of the believer. The chief object of the professed Christian was to please and satisfy the Church as represented by the priest, and the elevating influences of Christianity rose no higher than obedience to the man and the rules of the Church. The love of God was thus narrowed to the extremest limits and the impulse of Christian life was restrained to the personality of the subject. As this feeling was nursed and developed for hundreds of years, all private effort and conception of personal

responsibility for the spread of divine truth were completely obliterated and man knew and accepted no other principle in his Christian state than the mere hope or desire of providing for his own immunity from the consequences of individual sin, and thus religion was shorn of its charms and dwarfed into a hideous caricature. The idea of direct accountability for the dissemination of God's truth was absolutely blotted out from Christian consciousness. Men bore to each other no comforting assurances of communion with God. They interchanged no messages of love from a heavenly Father. The expression of Christian experience was unknown, and the joy, peace and hope of the children of God found no utterance between man and man. All these blessed and consecrated privileges of a walk with God were supplanted by a slavish fear. Intolerance had destroyed the higher aspirations of spiritual life, and ignorance, with its blinding surroundings, had shut out the heart from the helpful associations with the Holy Spirit. Man heard only the voice of God in the appalling thunders of the Church's curse, and repose and quiet were found in anguish of penance, in the deception of papal indulgence, or the hopelessness of unbelief.

But religious life was at last to be awakened from the slumbers, inactivity, and barrenness of this dreadful period. A free Bible, a free conscience, and a free judgment were to find their proper sphere, and with these came the opportunity and the necessity for most earnest phases of personal Christian effort and labor.

Here and there, a ray of light had shone and then died away. From Wickliffe, "the Morning Star," a bright beam had arisen, which for a short season lit up a contracted horizon with brilliance and power. He plead for the Word of God to place in every man's hand and understood with that light which lighteneth every man, the truth could never die. The lay readers, with the message which had come down from Heaven scattered throughout the land, carried the glad tidings that God was near, that they could approach to His throne without outside help, and that by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through faith and not through man, the forgiveness of sins by Christ was obtained. This set the heart and tongue afire, the divine message was before them, the translated Bible was free, and each could see for themselves what God required of the sinner. With triumphant peace and happiness which comes from intercourse with God, and with the inspiring message of salvation in God's own Words, was told in every place and every home the wondrously simple story of redemption through the Son of Man. They learned the new truth with tremendous gladness, it carried on its face the remedy for sin, and met the wants

of the stricken soul. Man again saw God face to face, there was no shadow intervening. The gentle, peaceful message gave rest to the burdened heart.

This first Reformation, founded so largely on lay effort, was to die. The time for full deliverance had not come, but the feeble spark had ignited a flame further East, and Huss took up the Gospel refrain, contended for the faith, preached an open Bible with its precious truths, and gave up his life in defense of his Master's work. These two reformers individualized the work of promulgating the Gospel. Theirs had been the only practical work of the kind for centuries. It was now apparent that personal work in the Christian economy was impossible under the existing theological conditions, and these lights, bursting from long spiritual oppression and flaming high, though only for a momentary period, and then sinking back into darkness, yet left behind a spark of hope, and while, for the instant, intensifying the darkness, yet men had seen the ray, walked in the light, and realized that it was good.

Three-quarters of another century rolled away. Human souls counted the years long, but "He, in whose sight a day is as a thousand years," watched the Church and His enslaved people. He would not forget his promise "to be with you to the end of the world." In man, in the Church, hope was fled. Light must come from its Creator, who had said in the ages before, "Let there be light and there was light." Spiritual relief was only possible from above.

In the humble home of the German miner, hidden away in the recesses of the forest, at the despised fireside, the infant voice of Martin Luther breaks the spell of darkness and despair. Providence was watching the chosen instrument who should introduce the dawn of a reorganized spiritual life; was preparing the man who should expound a word and doctrine which should change the destinies of governments and races, under whose labors the old should pass away and the new be brought in; from the depths of whose soul a new light would spring; who would catch from the Holy Spirit the living way; who would learn from the divine pages the same old story that: Life was by faith and "not by works," and that sinners were justified in what they believed and not by what they did.

God sent flashing into the soul of Martin Luther these heavenly words, "The just shall live by his faith." This was no new doctrine. Two thousand years before, the prophet of God stood and watched what he should be commanded to speak, and he was told this same thing, and to "write and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." (Hab. ii. 4.) The mysteries, forms and shams were now torn

away and forever destroyed. The time had come when men understood they need not look to a middle man; that they required no priest, no pope to declare God's will; that God had done that for himself, and that access to Him was open to every soul. That this glorious truth had long been hidden and obscured, only brought out its beauty, sublimity and comfort the more powerfully. Man rejoiced in his escape from thralldom, salvation was now understood as a question between each person and God: no intervention or interference was to be tolerated or allowed.

Men, then, each thought for himself; the press multiplied the sacred Word; every one could hear and receive the divine message, and not this alone, but could tell it to others. Rejoicing himself in the light, he was commanded to declare to every creature the will of God, and that will was, "That ye believe upon Him whom He hath sent."

Millions wondered how the human soul and mind could so long be darkened with such brightness streaming from the Word of God. With difficulty they realized how near they had stood to the light, and yet how intense the darkness in which they had walked. With joy unspeakable, they drank from the pure fountain; thankfully, they took up the glad song. They now comprehended their privilege and duty to proclaim God's message to every creature, and caught the glorious inspiration of those words, transmitted to earth by a glorified Saviour, sixty years after his ascension, "And him that heareth, let him say come."

The opportunity of every being to speak for Christ was thus again established. The layman was restored to his true relation to the Gospel. The fire now kindled could never be quenched, the hour of redemption was at hand, the seal was broken, the message was open. It was not now required to buy absolution; salvation was free—free through Christ. The dust of centuries, with a few words, as read by the guidance of the Spirit, was brushed away, the revelation was again revealed, and it was as beauteous, as glorious and as refulgent as when, fifteen hundred years before, the Pentecostal blessing had been poured out, and the Holy Spirit, with its vitalizing presence, had come to dwell in the heart of every true believer.

The true Christian elements for the spread of the Gospel were at hand. The hearts of the people had experienced the glowing touch of the Spirit; their souls were afire with love to God and love to man, and, as the world is always readier to hear than the Church is to speak, it was only necessary to send them forth. It appeared as if the scenes of the earlier days of the Church were to be restored when the Master allowed

the hand of the persecutor to prevail, as men and women were driven forth to every part of the known world, and, wherever the followers of Jesus came, they told what they had seen, heard and felt, and the Word grew mightily, and thus the Head of the Church inaugurated the greatest lay effort Christianity has ever known, and in every part of the earth was the power of Christian zeal and Christian testimony understood and rendered so effective that, in less than forty years after His death, the Gospel had gone into every land.

It will be thus seen that successful lay effort is only possible under the energizing and aggressive ideas of the Protestant Churches; that a free Bible goes with a free Gospel; that much of the true efficacy of Christian life is dependent upon the part of Church labor assigned to the private members in the work of the Church. The spread of Christianity in its infancy would have been impossible under any system which did not recognize and use the layman as an essential factor in the dissemination of truth and in fostering and maintaining the spiritual forces of the Churches.

Religious ideas change more slowly than either political or social ones, and the lapse of nearly three centuries has not entirely removed the feeling that the minister is in some way different in spiritual life from the layman, and consequently there is, among many people, a feeling of both reserve and reluctance in approaching him with the less important spiritual difficulties and experiences. The warm sympathy, the kindly counsel, the friendly encouragement, the gentle admonition, come with peculiar power and effect from one who holds no teaching office in the Church.

Not long since, it was my privilege to observe a remarkable illustration of the influence of layman upon layman in the discharge of religious duty.

In the extreme southern portion of Florida, in a town without a church building or regular Gospel ministration, a Presbyterian divine on the Sabbath had an appointment for service. A few strangers from the hotel attended preaching. Some of those earnest in Church work at home, took an active part in the singing, and, at the close of the sermon, the minister asked some one present, all unknown to him by name, but whom he said were apparently Christians, to lead in prayer. One of the party being in spirit on the Lord's day, uttered an earnest and in some respects a very touching petition. No mention was made of any unusual impression at the time, but, on the day following, the stranger, since known to be one of the largest manufacturers in America, approached the gentleman who had offered the prayer, then together on the steamer

far out on the Gulf of Mexico, and said to him, "I heard you pray yesterday ; you are evidently a man of culture and ability. My wife is a Christian woman ; she has long earnestly desired my salvation. I have heretofore doubted the reality of religion. Your prayer greatly affected me ; there must be a great and real power in religion else it would not have made you talk and feel as you did. The whole matter has touched me deeply. I have put my faith in Christ, He has given peace and comfort to my soul. I am going home to live a Christian life, and my dear wife will be the happiest woman in the world to-morrow when I tell her what a change has come over me. Stranger, I do not know your name, but we will in my home always love and bless you for the prayer you made yesterday.'

The layman approaches his fellow-man from a common plane. There are no barriers that need to be broken down, there are no prejudices to be removed ; social caste vanishes with the presence, the influence of Christian love. The Saviour was never required to tell the suffering and distressed that he cared for them. They knew that more readily by what He did than they could have done by any of His words, and they came confidently and earnestly to have their sorrows soothed and their ills removed. As soul looks into soul, as the love of Christ is reflected from heart to heart, the sweetness of its power is demonstrated and the world draws from the acts of His followers, noble conceptions of the Saviour's mission and purpose.

Society is prone to regard the ministerial profession with a sense of awe. Their distinctive dress, peculiarity of style, method of thought and dignity of purpose, combined with the singularity of religious emotion, as well as the Church's history, cultivate this sentiment. It is neither unreasonable nor improper. The general estimation of the piety and consecration of the clergy adds greatly to their usefulness and success, but in some respects it renders the masses more reserved and hesitant in approaching them for comfort and advice, and thus opens wide the way for the work of the layman. Excellence of every man in his profession is expected and required by public sentiment, and that those whose minds and whose lives are absorbed in the service of God should attain greater perfection and enjoy fuller benefits of divine blessings, is not only right but it is just. God forbid that I should in any way, by magnifying the office and duty of laymen, depreciate or detract from the work and mission of the ministry. Human history offers for man's consideration no nobler object lesson than the devotion and self-denial of clergymen. Ignoring all else but the call of God, surrendering all financial calculations and considerations for self and family, entering upon a calling

Nor must it be forgotten, in this connection, that the Scriptures and the world place such strong reliance upon testimony. One of the noblest missions of Christian men and women on earth is, by a godly and consistent life, to testify to the influence and power of the grace of God in the heart. The great Apostle said, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts and known and read of all men," and the completest and grandest testimony of earth to religion, outside of martyrdom, is a human life controlled, directed and fashioned by the precepts of Jesus Christ. It is scanned oftener, read more attentively, and produces a profounder impression than any other theological treatise. It is more eloquent than human tongue, more beautiful than any rhetoric and more impressive than any painting. Preaching is not confined to the churches; these and their ordinances are the foundation stone upon which the Gospel fabric rests, but real, sincere, earnest, devoted Christian lives teach millions who will listen to these lessons willingly and yet turn their steps and hearts away from the other messages of God, and the most effective and exhaustive presentation of Christ and Him crucified among His professed followers is consistency in His commands, and the exemplification of His teaching in daily conduct.

The limited space assigned speakers in this place forbids any extended discussion of the best plans for inciting and increasing lay effort. In this day and generation it is practically impossible under the Presbyterian system to secure a ministry strong enough numerically to carry on the Church's work as required by the exigencies of the times, or at all commensurate with its responsibility for the work of the Lord among the American people. The truest and best incentive to the fulfillment of the mission of the laymen is a heart aglow with the love of Christ. All successful Church work is impossible without this. To carry on the work of Christ, men must love Christ and love Him as He required, "With all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke x, 27), and to keep this sense of obligation before professed Christians and to impress its importance upon their hearts is the surest and most effective means for the spread of Gospel truth.

In the past the Presbyterian layman has not met all the requirements of his exalted opportunities. The best trained in a knowledge of the Scriptures, nurtured upon the splendidly told truths of the Shorter Catechism, with its teachings burned into his soul by the holy association of maternal solicitude and tenderness, and raised under a system which requires intelligence in the Scriptures, and the core of which is the diffusion of Biblical and intellectual knowledge, blessed

with the home teaching and influences which have given the denomination a power and control which outruns numbers, the work of the Church at large has not been equal to the reasonable and natural demands of its circumstances, and it is commonly urged that the Presbyterian Church is more respectable than active. Lay effort is possible and will be profitable to the Church in so many directions that here it will be unnecessary to point out the enormous opportunities for utilizing this tremendous army of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a superb host of Christian soldiers the Presbyterian organizations of America can send forth on the conquering missions of the Son of Man! An army of more than four millions of defenders could be gathered from these Presbyterian tribes. Men and women who have enlisted for the Messiah, who name His name and owe their allegiance to His cause. They need only to feel the influence of the Holy Spirit, to have the fire burn in their hearts, to make all things possible in the salvation of the race. If only the hand of persecution should fall, if God should let their enemies prevail and they be driven forth as His people of olden time and scattered throughout the world, if all these be once drawn close to the Head of the Church and compelled by chastisements to exercise the highest and profoundest types of faith, with these millions declaring His love, teaching His truths and saying, "Come," the world would be converted ere the close of the present century.

The Gospel of Christ is peculiarly a missionary Gospel. Its laws and requirements are the same for every clime and every race. There are neither qualifications or distinctions in methods or application. The call now is the same as "in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." (John viii, 37.) Or when nearer the shadows of the cross He said: "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John xiv, 6.)

The soul that seeks rest from sin, whether in the snowy abodes of the Himalayas, whether amid the sands of the desert, from the fastnesses made sacred by the blood of the Waldensians, or among the tenantless plains of Patagonia, be it savage or savant, finds one, and only one way, simple, clear, complete, free. This simplifies the work and duty of Christian men. There can be no mistake in means. There is no diversity of plans. There's one word, and that word is Christ, and every tongue can tell and every heart can receive this blessed truth. History contains no account of any human being who could not understand and receive the Gospel. The world is full of those who are unwilling, but among its innumerable millions there never was one who was unable to

comprehend the way of salvation through the risen Lord. This wonderful truth intensifies and magnifies the obligation of every creature to obey the command: "Go work to-day in my vineyard." (Matt. xxi, 23.)

The ministry must be the chief instruments to arouse and encourage the laymen to the proper discharge of these duties. Engrossed with business cares, this enormous power lies dormant until quickened by the Spirit of God and directed by its true spiritual leaders. Every possible talent is at hand, hundreds of avenues open, and under God's help the work can be done. The future of the evangelistic missionary work of Presbyterianism is largely with the members of the congregations. The cause of Christ requires means, the sufferings of the race demand hospitals, the intelligence of the people calls for colleges and universities, and the high standard of Christian teaching and the prevalence of human distress claimshomes for the aged and poor. Presbyterians of the past have led the very vanguards of charity and liberality. May the future find them as forceful and earnest.

The last decade has forever silenced the oft-repeated calumny, that Presbyterianism is not suited to the masses of mankind, and cannot, therefore, be an active, aggressive Christian factor. A thousand facts repel the unworthy charge, and the immediate past of Presbyterian development in this country has demonstrated that our faith can grow wherever sin abounds, and men and women need the help and grace of a Saviour.

With a future before America which thrills every patriotic heart with emotions of delight, with a land whose laws are the admiration of mankind, producing annually one-third of the increase in wealth of the known world, conquering a continent and peopling it in a century with the most intelligent and aggressive race of modern times and creating the greatest government of the world in one-tenth the space it requires other nations to build a first-class city, with the most tremendous national possibilities, well may we ask ourselves what is to be its future relations to the religion of Jesus Christ?

We answer that America, the home of religious freedom, the asylum of those who have in any land felt the touch of civil or ecclesiastical tyranny, shall be the land of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Presbyterian Church, with its millions of laymen, intelligent, liberal, consecrated to the service of the Saviour, will lead the hosts of the King of kings, and in His name carry on the struggle until our country shall be as renowned for its Christianity as it is illustrious for its progress and liberty. Without laymen and lay effort, this great

victory cannot be won. With them, consecrated to God's work, it is as sure as His throne.

“Arouse thee, Soul! It is no human call;
 God's Church is leagur'd, man the wall;
 Haste where the red cross banners wave on high,
 Signal of honored death or victory!”

If the great body of believers be true and faithful to Christ,

“He shall come down like showers
 Upon the fruitful earth,
 And Love and Joy, like flowers,
 Spring in his path to birth.
 Before him, on the mountains,
 Shall Peace the herald go,
 And righteousness in fountains,
 From hill to valley flow.”