

a community called ...

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CHURCH MONEY-MATTERS.

BY A PASTOR.

MONEY is necessary to carry on the work of the church; money in the hands of the church as such; money enough and to spare. For what the spiritual mystery called "grace" is to the spiritual Church, the material entity called "money" is to the visible Church.

1. The church wants money that it may do its work without the disturbing perplexities which come of a constant material struggle to "keep its head above water." Our founders understood the difficulty, and anticipated the perils, when they put into the Discipline the words: "Let all our churches be built plain and decent, and with free seats whenever practicable, but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable, otherwise the necessity of

raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But, if so, we must be dependent upon them, yea, governed by them. And then farewell to Methodist Discipline, if not doctrine, too." The General Conference of 1872 expunged all after the word "unavoidable." Yet still the bane of church life is that it is always disturbed about how it is to raise money; and, singularly, the increase of wealth in the Church has not materially diminished that disturbed condition! But it must be diminished, or we shall die spiritually by having to abandon ourselves to the mere material business of hunting ecclesiastical "bread and butter."

2. The Church wants money that it may deal justly with the community, paying its employees, and the establishments which supply its fuel, lights, etc. We cannot be spiritual, successfully teaching spiritual things, if we are not decidedly and scrupulously honest, and rigidly prompt in these common obligations which rest upon men, as among men in every-day life.

3. The church must have money that it may keep all departments going regularly and successfully. The preacher cannot be made anxious about his support and that of his family, and at the same time continue a good student and a faithful worker; for while faith may heal some kinds of diseases without medicine, it will not make an empty stomach think itself full nor a naked body imagine itself warm nor a debtor think himself "square." Even the "Christian scientists" and "divine healers" never think of applying their theories to the matter of food and clothes; they think the "unreal material" quite necessary in these departments! So the church must have salaries for its special workers; it must warm up and light up; it must repair roofs when they leak, and foundations when they sink; paint boards when they dry out; put in panes of glass when the boys, or other cyclones, break them. It must increase its room when the congregations increase, and meet the general demands that are made in the common prog-

ress of the church ; and it cannot do these things without money.

4. The church must have money that it may support the benevolent work, extending the blessings brought by the precious Gospel, that the world may enjoy them. A church is not a church of Christ that does not answer the commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel." Money must be raised for every society and board, that the various branches of activity may do their part, until all the world has had a chance to accept Christ's love. No Christian can claim to be such who does not do his best to spread the Gospel ; and as for us, as Methodists, we "lie and do not the truth" when we do not "give according to our ability to the support of the gospel and the various benevolent enterprises of the church," for we have all promised so to do.

5. The church must handle money honestly, sufficiently, and skillfully, that it may subdue the material interests of the world to the spiritual life in Christ. If a professed

Christian man in a community is a grasping man, a scheming, speculating man, a niggardly man, a materialized man by the hardening power of gold, he is not a Christian man in the Bible sense. He is only a *labeled* man cheating the world by his label. A Christian man puts a spiritual quality into every-day life, and subordinates all his every-day affairs to a clean conscience and a loving heart, making commerce another thing in an absolutely Christian community than what it is in a strictly worldly community. Thus evident is the necessity of money, and the true Christian management of it, in the working out of the church mission.

Three motives are connected with the Christian gathering and use of money in conducting church affairs : 1. That God may be honored in the success of his work. This is the great motive that moves a thoroughly good man to give for the cause of Christ. 2. Toward this end, and relating to it, is the second motive : that the giving shall build up the soul that gives by making it unselfish and gen-

erous ; enlarging it by the broad outlook that giving grows out of, and tends to secure, and by the act of giving under the inspiration of the first motive coupled fittingly with the second. 3. The last, and least important, motive is getting the money. Taken alone, and made primary, this aim tends toward a forgetfulness of the others, making the work, of course, perilous and practically inefficient. For when the church says, "We must have money, and are willing to do any thing to get it," they have forgotten God and the soul, and sold themselves for naught. All sorts of devices are made use of to get money without a square "out-and-out" gift of it from generous hearts, and the thing is called "giving." People are taxed, or excited by competition, or shamed by publication, or engaged in a semi-religious trading in "meat and drink," or in the conduct of market sales of trinkets, religiously labeled comic shows, pious theatricals, etc., called—just think of it!—"church work." All this is excused—because it tends to God's glory or the uplifting of the soul? Oh, no!

because "we must have money!" Well, money does come this way, but the people are dwarfed through low motive and debasing satisfaction, and the ultimate results are a withered church and a scantily supplied treasury becoming more and more difficult to fill. The people conclude to give only if they must, or are materially compensated for it; and that it is in perfect harmony with a "class-meeting experience" to give comparatively nothing for the church support, and nothing at all for the benevolent causes. With this view of Christian giving (?) is it not perfectly fitting that the poor and moderately well-off people shall say, "Let the rich support the church, for they are able;" and that the rich shall refuse to give if all plans are not according to their dictation, giving not being with either a duty before God and conscience, but a mere act of raising money? And how perfectly in harmony with such a spirit is it to conclude that, since "God is rich, and is able to take care of his kingdom, he may, without our help!" The outcome of it all is that the

poor become indifferent to God's work, and the rich independent of it. Either of these conditions is bad for the Church.

But let us reverse the order of these motives and we have the normal condition of things. Give for God's glory and for the growth of the soul, and the third motive sinks out of sight as being too low to be considered from so high a stand-point, and as being, indeed, wholly unnecessary, for liberal and systematic giving will keep the average church well supported; and the rich churches will fully supply all the lack among the poor. Can we doubt that if the Christian Church gave only to glorify God and build up character there would be money in abundance? Is not the word of God, based on the nature of spiritual things, a guarantee of it?

The secret of success lies in the quality of the giving act. It must be like praying, testifying, visiting, teaching, and all other religious duties—a spiritual grace educating the giver and possessing inspiring dignity.

1. It must be intelligent. Every giver must

know what is being done with the money ; nothing must be kept secret in official management ; nothing must be done that requires elaborate explanation for clearness to the ordinary mind. Every body ought to have the fullest opportunity of criticising the management of affairs. Criticism is the harrow that breaks up the clods ; the hoe that cuts out the weeds ; the wind that sways the sapling and makes it take deeper root. Criticism shows the mistakes of administration and helps to reform ; and it is the confession of many a stingy critic who only finds fault to get clear of paying. A good understanding of our benevolent work in all departments would, to a real Christian, make support of them a keen delight.

2. It must be deliberate. Excitement toward giving, like that which leads one to give because another has done so, and regulates "sense of duty" by the spirit of competition, is unbalancing, and ultimately brings harm to both contributor and cause. It is not thoughtful ; it is not essentially voluntary ;

nor is it from pure motive ; and the reactions are ruinous.

3. It must be unselfish. True giving recognizes the need of the cause, and the duty to supply it. Suppers, fairs, concerts, lectures, and other compensating methods, simply turn churches into bureaus for entertainment or saloons for refreshment. It is said that "private houses and halls may be used, but not the churches, for these things!" Indeed! which is the more holy, the brick or the people? If the building should not be turned into a saloon, why should the people be turned into saloon-keepers? Does not the church in doing things for pay confess its failure in the Christian grace of giving? Socials, literary circles, and lectures ought to be part of the church activities, but why for pay any more than the sermons, the Sunday-school, and the prayer-meeting? Is not the solution of the problems that have been raised as to "salaried preaching in the Gospel plan" found in the voluntariness of the support? and should preachers accept salaries which are not through

voluntary gifts? Should the church do any thing for pay? And is there any thing needed to make the church an efficient helper of the people that could not be done freely and generously, if the principles here indicated were made the basis of the management of church finance? And are not these principles founded in righteousness?

System in giving is the great need of the people, as a mere impulse cannot be a safe guide, nor can compulsion, by a requirement of assessment or the price of sitting, determine what a member of the church ought to do; and certainly the attempt to imitate one another must work injustice; and as for being "bled" by entertainments and appeals to the appetite and the fancy, the life-currents of a soul must be sapped by that! But if a standard, fixed by a conscientious man who knows what his incomes and outgoes are, and who recognizes himself a "steward of the mysteries of God," is made in faith and resolution, there will be no difficulty in adjusting church plans that will conduct this most important

part of the church work to its ends without friction and without failure.

Toward this systematic decision, and that education in it shall be a part of the financial work of the church, and that money gathered shall be wisely applied to the satisfaction of all consistent people, the following hints may be worth heeding:

1. Give information to every body about every thing the official bodies are doing in getting and using money. Begin the year by full statements, showing what is to be raised and how it is to be applied. Show the probable resources, impressing personal responsibility upon each member as a partner in the "concern." Publish full and frequent statements of accounts, not less frequently than once a month, giving particulars minutely, and so plainly that none can misunderstand them. Explain the workings of our benevolent societies and boards by the literature they furnish, as well as by condensed original "puttings" of the work. Do not give these all at once, so that the average member will be unable to

see the distinction between them, and the need of each, and be only set to growling about "so many collections;" but let each cause go by itself before each member, that its character and importance may be impressed, and concentration upon it may be given. Give all this information about church expenses and benevolences, not only in sermons and addresses before the miscellaneous congregations, but in published forms sent to the houses of all the people and to those of the families represented in the congregation and Sunday-school. Thus the home life and this church line of duty will mingle, and conversation, whether in approval or fault-finding, will lead to educational thoughtfulness.

2. Use envelopes. For the regular church work weekly envelopes, with the date of the Sabbaths upon them, so that each week will outlaw the unused one, and the new one will stare the business partner of the "concern" in the face as a reminder and a reprover! Envelopes are cheap, and have an advertising and an educational power as they lie around

waiting for use, suggesting duty, or developing the "old Adam" which leads to their being torn up in anger; for, indeed, when a man is hurt by an appeal for money for a good cause it shows that he has a sense of duty that he does not want to meet, and therefore needs to be stirred into some sort of sensation—of warring wrath, if not of loving activity. These envelopes ought to be sent to the houses of the people in packages for three or six months—a package for each member of the family—with a plea that they be sent back, one a Sabbath, empty, if not with an inclosure. Prepare benevolent envelopes for all the collections, each cause named and a day set for the return of its envelope; each cause being thus considered upon its own merits, and contributed to because of its own worth. Do not appropriate the collection of the day to the benevolent work of that day, but secure a gift extra to that for the specific cause in hand, that it may be a benevolent collection indeed, with all the direct and reflex results which should come of such a gift.

3. Divide the church into neighborhood classes after the old Wesleyan fashion, putting a "leader" over about a dozen families. These leaders should help in spreading information, answering complaints and criticism in relation to finance, as to other matters, in church work and Christian life. They should pray and labor for the up-building of the people in every department, "and in this grace also." They should see to the distribution of envelopes, tracts, leaflets, and other healthful literature; visit the delinquents as godly advisers, aiming, primarily, not to get money, but to lead to the discharge of duty, and the growth in this as in other qualities of Christian character.

4. Have one fund only—one treasury. Put all money from congregation, Sunday-school, prayer-meeting, class-meeting, special solicitation, into that one treasury. (Of course, all benevolent money should go at once to the societies for which it is collected; the church has no right to retain it a week.) Draw from this one treasury for all departments in right-

eous proportion. There will then be no damaging competition in the working out of plans; no contraction of interest; no "robbing Peter to pay Paul," as where a general treasury is full and the Sunday-school is without papers or a decent library; or the school has a surplus, which it carefully guards, while the church cannot pay its bills. There will be no disposition to minimize the value or ignore the claims of any department. The whole church will be educated as a unit to value all its work, and the children, as well as the young and the older people, will be given a share in all work, and they will have an interest in all that increases church love and labor. Then our children will not be brought up to be indifferent to the Church as a whole, and to all but the single cause of missions in the benevolent work. Then fathers will not do all the church giving for their children, depriving them of the training, responsibility, heroism, and joy of Christian giving. Then our Sunday-schools will not call that "self-support" which ignores their share of salaries, lights, fuel, repairs, in-

surance, etc., for which that department is just as responsible as any other. Then our "old people" will not ignore the right of the Sunday-school to support; then, in a word, every man, woman and child in the church will be taught to give to every department and every cause intelligently, regularly, cheerfully.

5. Finally, emphasize, all the time, that the one thing you are doing is to give opportunity, and not to make requisition. Why should giving be compelled any more than any other Christian act? An inquisition with "screws" made out of charges and "committees" is little better than one whose "screws" are of iron and steel! Members must be tried and expelled, sometimes, but it should be for acts of sin, like falsehood, as in breaking the promises made in joining the church, and other sins of that sort. Every member, having pledged to pay, and having practically rented a sitting, is obligated, until he withdraws from the church. The best we can do is to teach and exhort, and lead to the Christian sponta-

neity which makes giving religious because voluntary. "Omnibusing" benevolent causes is unjust to both cause and giver, since each cause should stir each giver to delight in giving to it for itself. Put the envelope into the hand with reasons for using it, urging that it is a privilege to a true Christian to give.

There are difficulties :

1. Success is questioned. But success financially is not the end sought; better fail in using legitimate methods than succeed in using doubtful ones. Why is not money raised for God as prayers are offered to him, or testimony rendered? Any motive but the holiest is, like all the sacrifices of the wicked, an abomination unto him. But success in making wholesome character, by intelligent, voluntary gifts among the few, is better than labeling a company of worldly, self-seeking people "a church" because they can raise money without giving it for Christ's sake! But right success is certain. Cheerful giving increases with study and consecration until the church becomes a fountain of power, as this and all

other graces flourish wondrously, the force-pumps of worldly devices being unnecessary to get the living water! And why compensate for gifts, when not for prayers? Suppose a mother begins to give the child sugar-plums for prayer. The boy will learn to say his "Now I lay me" for a wager, as freely as some of the older people eat ice-cream at the church festival, and call themselves "church workers!" And that same lad will chew confectionery over his "Our Father," which secured it, as cheerfully as do our older people have their jolly times over their "Christian giving" (?), while they fill their stomachs and addle their piety with refreshments out of season and out of place, calling it "Christian endeavor!" Is not our distinction, therefore, between giving and praying simply and wholly a matter of education? And since the praying for pay is despicable, why shall we train our children and young people to so sin in giving?

2. This plan will make much work. True, and therefore fortunate. Class-leaders should be aided by young people in keeping accounts,

in distributing envelopes and circulars, in working up right feeling on the subject, and many a rusty member would polish up by this practical activity.

3. There would be opposition. Yes; fault-finders would give less to make the plan a failure; croakers would cheat God to beat workers; stingy people, who give only when bought or excited by self-gratifying competition or publicity, and are generally bitter over the money question, would interfere. But all these would be exposures of human nature that do the church good; it is good to take the measure of men. But it would be found that the average common sense would practically vote for the one true way of giving, namely, only for Christ's sake: frequently, regularly, openly; without compulsion, excitement, or compensation.

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