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TRACTS, AND HOW TO USE THEM.

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A TRACT is a short treatise. It may be dull, unintelligent, irrelevant, incorrectly written, but it must not be lengthy. Tracts are written on all subjects, political, economic, military, but more largely than on any other subject on that of religion. The central and associated themes of religion are peculiarly well adapted to presentation in this kind of address. The tract plays the part of a text in preaching. To so much, at least, we are able practically to coerce public attention. Almost any one will pause long enough with
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a tract to peruse it if suitable means be organized and carried into effect to invite him. We all so live as to gain at least a small measure of self-respect. Our acquaintances are ready to pay us respectful consideration if we are careful not to overtax them. We do not ask too much when we hand them each a tract and pledge them to read it. Possibly we can do no more than this; but our fidelity to our neighbor has given the Holy Ghost a new opportunity in dealing with him. We have played our little and yet vital part of instrumentality, and now God's Spirit rejoices in the fullness of his convicting opportunity.

Why do we advocate this kind of literature? For three reasons mainly:

1. *It is easily read.* Men, women, and children are pleased to read it when it is placed in their respective hands. Almost every one enjoys reading on serious themes, and is disposed to be accommodating to friendly solicitation urging him to do so if he can be assured that the task is not as dry as summer dust and correspondingly
disagreeable. Tracts are fresh, entertaining, short.

2. *It is simple.* No mastery of preceding literary duties is required. The tract is as informal and as universally adapted to the human heart and head as the evangelistic address or the Gospel song.

3. *It lasts in conscience after being read.* This is owing largely to its pointedness and brevity. All parts of the tract are retained in memory with equal freshness, so that it assails the soul in sin as a unit. This is not so with the elaborate evangelical volume.

A few objections to tracts we may briefly consider:

1. *They are not sufficiently elaborate.* They cannot, it is alleged, deal justly in dealing so briefly. They are unavoidably fragmentary, and therefore unsatisfactory. To be sure, a tract is a tract. It purports to be a short treatise, a point, a word. Length, however, is not necessary to unity in a literary production, nor is elaboration always an assurance of completeness.

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2. They are fragmentary. That is, the tract is a piece of a literary unit, and in consequence unintelligible. This objection is invalid. The tract is a condensation rather than a fragment, a specimen of compactness and not an illustration of rupture.

3. They are unreliable. Because of undistinguished authorship, unpretentious preface, unhistoric merit. Must a thing be big to be reliable, weighty to be meritorious? Many an aphorism is as reliable as the wisest oration; and it is the mighty "sayings" of men that are immortal.

4. They are delusive. Tracts affirm the presence of danger. They declare that another instant of delay is inexcusably perilous. A tract is not intended to be a consideration of a theme so much as a source of instant inspiration to an individual. It is not its mission to arouse men to reflect, but to act. We are told that all this is illusory; that there is no occasion for fear; that men need calm culture, not ignoble fear.

5. They are undignified. Undignified be-
cause diminutive and ephemeral. No one, it is declared, can respect a production so easily read and so soon forgotten. It will be observed, however, that these critics do not inveigh against their foods on account of their condensation and transitoriness.

The value of tracts is undoubted. I am astonished to find this great agency for good practically unused by the Church. What shall be done? Change. Begin at once to use this efficient auxiliary.

But what have reason and experience to say of methods? Has any church, or any pastor, succeeded largely in utilizing this appointed and commended agency? Assuredly. What must be done?

1. The pastor must resolve to use tracts in doing church work. This pastoral resolution must also be announced; it must get abroad in the society and in the community. The pastor here as everywhere else must take the initiative. The full weight of his personal and pastoral influence must be thrown on the side of tracts. The position of the pastor in this
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matter should be announced from the pulpit, declared in Sunday-school, not forgotten at teachers’ meeting, and devotionally alluded to in the prayer-meeting.

2. The church should appoint, on pastoral nomination, a tract committee to manage all the interests of this trust. The pastor is ex officio a member of this committee. Upon him mainly will it rest. It is, however, no small share of his opportunity. Every pastor should see to it that the choicest of material compose that committee. Its efficiency, especially its acceptability to associate workers, will depend upon the men and women who constitute it. The “tract cause” in any local church will be voted up or down according to the character and tact of its tract committee. Attention to the fact and quality of this committee should be classed by every pastor with his paramount concern. The tract committee should meet for work at least weekly, the pastor always being present and occasionally presiding.

3. Abundant and selected supplies of tracts No. 215.
should ever be kept on hand in the "tract library" in the "tract room." Tract literature now covers a wide range of subjects. Almost all current and historical learning, scientific, biographical, moral, political, and religious, have here a wise word. It is, however, the value of the religious, especially the evangelistic, tract that we would emphasize. The tract committee should keep up a fine variety of religious tracts which, having been tried in the balance, have been found not wanting. Money to pay for tracts is easily obtained. One half of what is annually contributed by the local church to the general tract cause is, if it is desired, returned to the same in tracts. The pastor can thus, by urging the tract collection on his people, obtain a good supply of tracts for local distribution. Special contributions can often be obtained from private sources for purchasing them.

The tracts being obtained, what then?

Systematic provision should be made not to scatter them promiscuously, but to use them personally, intelligently, economically.

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1. The pastor must ever be accorded the honor of being the leading tract circulator. House to house visitation affords the pastor rare facilities for tract reading and distribution. Indeed, in the use of tracts pastorally may be perfectly solved more than one of the manifold vexations of pastoral visiting. The thought in this form of ministerial service is to bring the pastor into intimate personal association with the families of the community where his church is located. But in fact such association is found to be impracticable. The family in its entireness cannot be found. The husband and father is at business, the children are at school, and the wife and mother, if at home, is not infrequently domestically preoccupied. The pastoral call, notwithstanding these embarrassments, ought, however, to be made. An appropriate tract should be chosen as the text for the remarks of a pastoral call. One for each member of the household, present or absent, should be the number of tracts used in paying a pastoral visit. In this way, too, the pastoral visit
may have a theme. Every pastor knows how embarrassed he often is to get something appropriate to talk about in his necessarily promiscuous visitations. The tract relieves his embarrassment. The theme chosen can be pleasantly and prayerfully spoken of conversationally by the pastor in so much of the domestic circle as in a particular interview he is able to reach, tracts on the same subject given to all present or absent, and a tender request made that the subject be resumed and finished at the evening service of family worship, or at the family board where worship is unobserved.

2. In arranging a list of subjects for a year's work in the young people's meeting let the themes of tracts be chosen. This expedient is of inestimable value. It insures suitable subjects for such a meeting, at least a suitable opening of each, and an admirable opportunity for subsequent reading and review. By all means let the tract whose theme is to be the devotional study of the evening be read by the leader at the outset; and dis-
tribute to each attendant a copy one week in advance. Our devotional meetings, and especially our young people’s devotional meetings, lose immeasurably by not having proper and well-presented themes. The suggestion I offer will make every one who goes to such a meeting not only a better, but a wiser, soul. In this way systematic Christian indoctrination can be afforded, and an intelligent devotional spirit cultivated at the same time.

3. Once a month, at least, at the weekly prayer-meeting the devotional service should be opened by reading a devout, instructive, inspiring tract. This service should be performed by different persons, brothers and sisters in turn, and a copy of the tract read should be given to each family representative present at the close of the meeting. It is customary to open a church prayer-meeting with a Scripture selection without note or comment. This may be advisable occasionally, but not very often. When a portion of the word of God is being read to a company of Christians I always feel like saying to one

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near me, in the language of Philip to the devout Ethiopian, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The answer I get when I venture thus familiarly to interrogate is, almost without exception, "How can I, except some man guide me?" Sure enough. How can any one know God's word unguided? The tract is the human guide to an understanding of the things which are divine.

4. The preacher of the word can with great profit now and then give a series of sermons on the themes of tracts. At the close of each service of this kind, as the congregation is retiring from the house, members of the tract committee can distribute to each attendant, or, better, it may be, to each family represented, a tract representing the theme of the sermon. In this way the sermon of the minister is reapplied to the family circle, and not infrequently to the wider influence of domestic social life. It is actually disheartening to observe the enormous and uncalled for waste of sermonic material. Vast schol-
arship, enlarged experience, real genius, cultivated rhetoric, mature spirituality, are being every week turned into sermons whose oblivion is immediate after delivery. This immediate sermonic mortality ought to be arrested. This impoverishing waste ought to cease. The influence of the sermon ought to be conserved. The practicable expedient I suggest is more than a partial remedy. Criticise the plan by thoroughly testing it.

5. *Sub-pastoral visiting by the class-leaders, or by special district committees, is largely valueless without a wise and liberal use of tracts.* But few such sub-pastoral visitors know what to do in the emergency of such an interview. Who of your church workers, dear fellow-pastor, are able to make a really profitable sub-pastoral call? Wherein do they lack? Not in motive, not in heart, but in art, in knowledge, in expedients. They mean as well as under the same circumstances an archangel could mean, but they do not have the confidence, the experience, the spiritual fertility. If the theme were furnished them they would
be wholly unembarrassed. They are all able to comment upon a theme, to lead a conversation upon a topic just read, and to guide Christian devotion in the line of impressive suggestions.

The pastor is the one to supply his assistants appropriately in the particular to which I refer. Let him select the tracts for them, and show them how to use them. It must always be borne in mind that the visit to which I am now referring is to be pastoral, and not social. It can therefore be proceeded with without apologetic formality. Let the visitor, as soon as may be, read his chosen brief, previously well-considered, tract, with such words of conversational comment and application as are deemed suitable. A copy, or more than one copy, of the tract can be left with the family to remind all of the visit, and to re impressions its instructions. Sub-pastoral calling in this way, with a clearly defined purpose in view, systematically conceived and carried on, can be made immeasurably efficacious. Otherwise it is almost impossible
tract literature. Let the superintendent be ex officio chairman of the committee, constituted by the Sunday-school board and recognized by the quarterly Conference, on Sunday-school tract distribution. The teachers of the school are also members of this committee. Not less than three grades of tracts on the one theme of the Sunday-school hour—Bible, intermediate, and primary—should be prepared and secured for use on this superlative evangelistic and doctrinal occasion. What an opportunity the sensible and consecrated Sunday-school teacher here commands! What readiness of access to the house and social acquaintance of his
pupils is here engaged! What unembarrassed and easily understood material to use for God these "Lesson Tracts" afford! In closing the exercises of the Sunday-school the superintendent should read the tract to be issued that day, explain its illustrative relation to the lesson just studied, and dwell on the right way to peruse it on returning home. No more serviceable device than this was ever employed.

7. The Sunday-school "after-meeting" is another great opportunity to employ this noble Christian agent—tracts. A Sunday-school without an evangelistic "after-meeting," not having organized provision to lead the Sunday-school pupils into an experience of Jesus, the Lesson Truth, is wanting in a crowning particular. And yet an "after-meeting" is not held successfully without reflection and experimentation. To get young impenitents convicted of sin, converted to God, and classed with Christian confessors is the threefold design of the "after-meeting." To the first the Holy Ghost attends through the
word, the second is accomplished through the teacher as class evangelist, and the third is brought to pass through the leader of the “after-meeting” in the use of the theme of some adapted tract. The aforesaid leader reads the chosen tract, summarizes it in a brief and pointed proposition, and invites any young or old disciple to avow his faith in Jesus Christ by rising in his place and reciting that summary as his public confession of the same. The “after-meeting” as thus conducted is the most fruitful service of the church, for reasons easily seen.

Such, then, is an intimation of “Tracts, and How to Use Them.” I wonder that they are not more largely employed in personal and church work for the Master. The scheme suggested here has been tested largely in long and varied pastoral experience and observation. Try it. Add personal suggestions. Enrich the methods mentioned by the fruits of personal experience and reflection.

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