

Our Contributors.

LAUNCH OUT!

BY THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

"Launch out into the deep!" This was Christ's order to Simon Peter after a night of not very successful fishing. Accordingly Peter sets the bow of his little boat towards the deep water where the fish are and after the net has been cast, there is a prodigious haul that requires some extra effort to bring it to shore.

Here is a motto for churches and pastors. "Launch out!" Perhaps the past year has not been one of much success in winning souls to Christ. One reason probably was that there was not enough effort to reach the unconverted either by fervent preaching to them in the pulpit, or by personal effort with them out of the pulpit. Plain, pointed, pungent sermons warmed with love and steeped in prayer are the minister's needed work on the Sabbath. But such arguments and appeals must be followed up. A pastor often accomplishes as much by an hour of close friendly conversation, as by any amount of pulpit appeal. The Sabbath school teacher can reach his or her scholars most effectively by a private visit, and a faithful talk with each member of his class. Personal work does the business; not all the fish are caught by the net; each fisher must drop his own hook and line baited with love.

At the beginning of a new year's work the first duty of faith is to make new ventures. "Launch out," and with the Holy Spirit's aid make the effort. I would not make too much of the word "deep," which in the New Testament incident had only a local significance in fishing. Still there must be a deep down faith in your hearts, and a deep down love of souls and an insatiate desire for their salvation. Shallow interest, shallow feeling, shallow praying win no souls for the Master. The minister who longs to convert souls must lay hold of the deep truths of God, and strive to penetrate the depths of the heart before him. It is down in those depths that lurk the depravity, the besetting sin or the unbelief that keeps the sinner from Jesus Christ. The truth must go far enough down to reach the roots in order to produce deep conversion. Spiritual peace, spiritual joy and spiritual power all depend on Christ's getting full possession of the heart.

It is well also to "launch out" beyond the regular church goes and to strive to reach the outsiders—even those who may be regarded as "hard cases." As in fishing, the fish that bite readily are easily taken, so there are persons brought up under gospel influences that yield more readily to the truth. But the inveterate Sabbath breakers, the open scoffers, the hard drinkers, the profane and openly ungodly class are too often passed by as hopeless. Saul of Tarsus was not a very hopeful case;—cannot the same Divine Spirit that subdued and transformed him, convert the most impenitent and hardened sinner in your community? And when a conspicuously irreligious person in any place is converted, the effect is all the more powerful. Then, my dear friends, if the Master is on board with you—(as He was with Simon Peter)—

launch out into the deep and according to your faith, your courage and your loving zeal will be your ingathering of converted souls.

At this season the ordinary greeting is: "I wish you a Happy New Year." Sometimes it is uttered in empty formality; it is often spoken to those who are making themselves wretchedly unhappy by their own sins and follies. Even Christians often make serious mistakes in their pursuit of happiness. Suppose that any of you should saunter off for a walk, saying to yourself, "now I will enjoy myself." The walk soon becomes wearisome; you are thinking only about yourself, and find no enjoyment. Suddenly you hear a scream of a child that had fallen into a neighboring river; you plunge in, rescue the little creature, and when you deliver it into the hands of its mother, you feel a thrill of exquisite delight.

That illustrates exactly the condition of many Christians both in the pulpits and pews. They try to become happier by thinking about it, and talking about it, they discuss "the higher life," and "twentieth century revivals," and it all ends in vapor. Let them launch out into practical efforts to awaken and save perishing souls; let them begin to win sinners to the Lord Jesus, and floods of joy will pour into their own souls. They are doing their duty, and in doing it they find genuine happiness. Stop talking too much about "revivals," and revive yourself by trying to make somebody better, by helping up some sufferer, and by leading some soul to Christ. Then your new year will be one of joy and gladness. Try it and see.

THE "GIDEONS."

Writing in the *Congregationalist*, Rev. R. P. Herrick tells of the beginning and growth and work of the brotherhood known as "the Gideons":

Several years ago two travelling men thrown together for an evening discovered that both were brethren in Christ. They fell into conversation on the desirability of having some token by which Christian men might be able to recognize one another 'on the road.' Out of this grew the organization of Christian travelling men, extending over the interior states, known as the Gideons. They have adopted a button, worn in the lapel, with the emblem of the pitcher and the lamp on a blue ground.

The organization is simple. Local camps formed in centres where travelling men congregate are united in state organizations, and these in a national society. Iowa has organized into districts with a superintendent in each to increase the membership.

There are now about thirty-five hundred traveling men enrolled in this organization, wearing in the lapel this token of loyalty to the Master. Minnesota has 200 Gideons in its various camps in the large centres.

The purpose of the organization is to carry on a quiet campaign for Christ among men on the road. In the Twin Cities groups of Gideons hold testimony and evangelistic meetings in the churches and in various halls on Sunday evenings, at the invitation of pastors, to which traveling men in the city are

invited. No special form of work is pledged, but each Gideon follows his inclination in finding opportunities to reach other men with the message of salvation.

An incident which occurred lately on a train in northern Iowa indicates the spirit of this organization. An accident had occurred to the engine at a considerable distance from either town. Four traveling men, restless as such men get to be, went forward to look at the wreck, but finding a wait of several hours was certain, returned to the coach. One asked, 'Well, boys, what shall we do to pass away the time?' Another answered, 'Here's a deck of cards, and four is the right number.' But the third man, with the button of the Gideons, thought this might be one of the doors which that brotherhood watch for. Said he, 'Boys, I've got a very interesting book here that I'd like to read you out of and see how you like it.' The 'boys' agreed that this would at least be a novelty and listened as the Gideon read and talked about the Sermon on the Mount. It was new ground to them, and involved them in the deep questions of life and destiny before they were aware. Out of that wait for the repair of the wreck two of the traveling men were converted and later testified to their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The ordinary traveling man is alert in dealing with his customers, ready to meet any argument and pushing steadily toward his goal, the selling of goods. These very qualities fit him peculiarly to reach men for Christ, especially the 'knights of the grip.' At a junction point a train was delayed and a party of traveling men were walking about, fretting, some of them cursing the road, while others were laughing loudly over questionable stories. One man approached a friend of mine and, looking curiously at his lapel, grasped it and inquired: 'Neighbor, what kind of a button is that? I thought I'd seen all kinds of buttons and badges, but I never saw that one before.' Quite a group gathered as my Gideon friend explained the design of the pitcher and the lamp, putting in such items about the association as he deemed tactful. Though the wait was prolonged, that simple testimony of the Christian traveling man to Jesus Christ put an end to swearing and coarse stories in that waiting-room.

—The British Baptist Handbook for 1904, lately issued, indicates, according to the statement of the *London Baptist Times*, a considerable increase and advance in the denomination during the past year. The increase in the membership of the churches was twice as large as in 1902, and the increase in the seating accommodation afforded by houses of worship, four times as great. The total number of churches included in the statistics is 2,875, showing an increase of 72. The membership of the churches has grown from 377,747 to 388,387; the number of Sunday-school scholars from 542,396 to 567,635. The number of chapels is 3,977, affording seating accommodation for 1,368,666 persons, an increase of 24,132 for the year. The number of accredited ministers in charge of churches is 2,117, as compared with 2,072 in 1902. There is an increase of 1,081 teachers in the Sunday-schools, and 411 local preachers connected with the churches.

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