

The Possibilities of the Unused Forces of our Churches.

BY ZENAS L. FASH.

We are told that every hour 100,000,000 tons of water are hurled over Niagara Falls. Until recently none of this power in its onward march to the sea was utilized. Now a fraction has been gathered to thrill industrial centres with life; but Niagara has yet much unused energy. The electric current has been circling the earth for centuries, but not till lately has it been harnessed for mankind; and the end is not yet. We are just in the beginnings of electrical wonders. For centuries powers have lain dormant. At the present moment they are waiting to spring into action. Every new invention shows the tremendous possibilities about us. At the Centennial of 1876 there was no electrical display. The telephone was a toy, the electric light a dream, the dynamo as remote a thought as aerial navigation to this generation. But at the World's Fair, after a lapse of 17 years, we find an electrical building 345 by 690 feet, covering 5½ acres, devoted exclusively to the industries yoked with lightning. It may be said that within the brief space of these 17 years a new power was born in the mechanical world that bids fair to supplant steam as completely as steam supplanted horse-power, and create a new civilization in the next century. No prophet can foretell what will happen the coming twenty-five years, the possibilities are so great. Liquid air is reported to be more marvellous than X rays. There are mightier forces yet to be brought into play.

In the church of Jesus Christ there are latent forces. If we could call these forth, and turn them into the channels of Christian progress, we should have as great power for God in spiritual things as we have in Niagara and the electric current for material things. If the church of today is true to its position and worthy of its calling, the church of tomorrow will be a still more powerful agent for God and mankind. The church has untold possibilities in its unused and undeveloped forces.

Dr. Parkhurst had the right idea when he said, "I have got past calling my church my field. It is not my field, it is my force." The spiritual world, like the natural, is tremulous with the hidings of God's power. These mighty forces are diffused and concealed. The electric energy is scattered everywhere. It slumbers in the earth and throbs in the air. God wants us to harness this spiritual agency to the soul's chariot, that it may be drawn from dead self to the living Christ. He wants the individual to make connection with the great storage battery of spiritual life. Nothing then is impossible.

John McNeil has told us in his "Spirit Filled Life" that the bankers of Scotland have lying in the great vaults the vast sum of 40,000,000 pounds of good English money in unclaimed deposits. The people may have the money for the claiming of it, but, alas, some of them, who may be in the alms house, know not it belongs to them. Well does the preacher add, "What vast unclaimed deposits are lying in God's treasury! Some of his people have died spiritually poor; some are living today in spiritual penury, a hand to mouth existence, with such untractable riches lying at call, at deposit in their name." There are the possibilities of our churches "in Christ."

And yet much that is gone through with in heartless, perfunctory ceremony, nothing but wall-flower religion. Like Raphael's cherubs it is only fit to adorn a frescoed ceiling, or like Apollo Belvedere, to fill a niche in some temple of art. It is an insult to Almighty God to pray "thy kingdom come" and never lift a finger to bring it to pass. The gospel will go to the hearts and homes of the unsaved only as we carry it. The gospel wants to go. The pent-up waters are pressing mightily in the great stand-pipes of salvation. The great heart of Christ is throbbing to save men. The spirit of God is striving. But we have too many spiritual invalids who, in their nervous anxiety that everything may injure their health, have made themselves weak. They persist in regarding the church as a hospital, the "Saints' Everlasting Rest," instead of an army in the field intent upon the enemy. For fear of overtaxing their strength they neglect proper exercise; for fear of draughts they shut out the fresh air from their rooms. They spend weary hours in morbid analysis of the symptoms. Spiritual invalids have only one concern, that is to keep alive. They are infants for the second time, having need of milk, and not strong meat. Such cannot develop the possibilities of any church. They are not positive but negative forces.

Many devote their best hours and best energies to worldly pleasures and secular interests, and give the few remaining moments of their enervated energies to the spreading of the gospel. People boil over with enthusiasm in the pursuit of amusement and business. They are like engines blowing off steam, throbbing with pent-up power. Such need to have their energies turned into the channel of consecrated Christian service. What possibilities are here? Many in our churches are dying of laziness. To them home mission work is local, and foreign mission something exceedingly foreign. Giving

is unknown; getting is all. One has divided Christians into three classes,—workers, shirkers and jerkers. The forces of our churches would be mightily increased if the latter two classes were speedily and forever abolished. They clog the chariot wheels. They clip the wings of progress.

Dr. Lawrence, of Chicago, was talking of the tendency of men in our churches to shift their responsibility in such matters as missionary interest and information, if not in missionary giving, and to illustrate this he told the tale of two Jews who met one day on the street corner. One said to the other, "Ikey Rosenthaler has got religion." "What? got religion? That can't be so." "But it is so. Ikey Rosenthaler has got religion; he's going to join the church." "Well," replied the other, "if Ikey Rosenthaler has got religion, you can just depend on it, he's got it in his wife's name." I am afraid that is the way with some in our churches. They belong to the church, they have got religion, but it's in their wife's name.

The Bible closed and laid on the shelf has no more power than any other bundle of paper. Spurgeon once said: "There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write damnation with your finger." The book opened with human hands and interpreted by human lips touched by the Holy Spirit becomes the power of God unto salvation. The Bible is the granary of the church. Like Joseph's store houses during the years of plenty it is ever filled; unlike them during the years of famine it can never be exhausted. The more the church feeds upon the Book the more it grows. It is charged with the leaven of eternity. The possibilities of the church grow out of the Bible and cannot grow without the Bible. With every member of the church a diligent student of the Word what could not be accomplished? The great need of our churches today is spiritual power. The church ought to be a Sunday School ever in session for Bible study.

The ideal church is not intellectual or social, but spiritual. The astronomical observatory is for study of the stars; and the knowledge thus gained is used upon the seas. The stars control the commerce of the world. The church is a spiritual observatory. The knowledge there gained guides upon the sea of life. A church is a body of believers bound together for the development of spiritual apprehension. We need churches inspirational more than institutional. The prayer meeting is essential to the spiritual development of our churches. What possibilities are here? Woe to the pastor who turns his prayer meeting into a literary club! Woe to the church that allows its prayer service to die.

The church can never see her possibilities with a microscope. She needs a telescope to scan the uttermost parts of the earth. The plain truth is that the Christian church has no adequate conception of what is meant by the evangelization of the world. That does not include foreign missions only, it includes all missions. The church needs to come to the place where Wendell Phillips, the American Demosthenes, came when, after hearing Dr. Lyman Beecher preach, he repaired to his room, threw himself on the floor and cried, "O God, I belong to thee. Take what is thine own. I ask this, that whenever a thing be wrong it may have no power of temptation over me, and whenever a thing be right it may take no courage to do it." That is what the church must do.

The church is asleep. As much money is spent in 27 days for liquor or is puffed away in 54 days in tobacco smoke as has been spent in 80 years to redeem souls dying in heathenism at the rate of a soul a second. The American nation voted hundreds of millions of dollars to free a few down-trodden Cubans by carrying on destruction and death in Cuba and Manila and Porto Rico, but she allows the various Mission Boards to struggle with debt and to practice retrenchment in their struggle to free the countless millions of heathen with the gospel of peace. The church has not yet begun to realize her missionary possibilities. Our fathers took their lives in their hands and went to the foreign field. They traced with bloody footprints their way into the country; they spied out the land, but we have yet to enter in and fully possess it. From every missionary who has entered the foreign field there comes the added voice calling others to come. O Church of God in the Maritime Provinces lift up your eyes and take a long, long look at your promised land in mission work! Sunday Schools, Women's Missionary Aid Societies, Mission Bands, B. Y. P. U., prayer service, all should unite in this! We should not be a number of bands working for different causes, and considering each other only, but every one of us for every part of the work, until we shall blend in one great effort to take the world for Christ. How the possibilities glitter on the mountain tops before the church of God! What mighty agencies are at her disposal if she will only use them!

The church cannot forget the mighty unused force of gold and silver in the possession of its members, and not yet consecrated to the service of Christ. The work languishes in home and foreign lands for want of funds, and yet Christian people have the money. They use it for other things. Covetousness in the days of the Apostles

was an occasion for church discipline; but who ever heard of a man worth \$50,000 being expelled from the Christian church in these days. We have the money, but we are determined to hold on to it. Thank God there is much noble giving. A John D. Rockefeller, a Randolph, a White, in our own Acadia Forward Movement have set a noble example amongst the rich; and amongst the poor, who are always the most liberal in their offerings to the Lord, there are many who have done more than them all. It is not the quantity of the offering, but the quality of the sacrifice involved that counts with God. The giving of money enriches life, and he who withholds with a miserly hand has not yet begun to live. Giving adds to soul qualities. It dignifies business and gives money a place for investment in the highest kingdom of all. Giving makes it possible for our daily toil to have a place in the plans of God for the conquest of the world. That grace holds the secret of a brighter, fuller life, and life, for self and fellow man. God always gives richer life and fuller to the giver, as when the minister at the altar gave the silver candle sticks to the distressed and needy pleader:

"He woke to find the chapel all aflame
And dumb with grateful wonder to behold,
Upon the altar candle sticks of gold."

The church of Jesus Christ ought to have social magnetism. Friends who travel north, south, east, west, when they come home will have the warmest words for the church where hands of welcome were thrust at them on right and left in unmistakable Christian hospitality. Baptist churches ought to be the most social. I wonder if they are? A church can be a misanthropic puddle, or bubbling, sparkling spring. The holy bond of brotherhood should not be subordinated to social caste. Wealth and culture should make no distinctions among the family of God. Sometimes in large cities, mission churches are built, and suitable preachers chosen and maintained for them by the wealthy members of the uptown churches, who by this very act say, "we do not want you here."

Jesus Christ offended the elite of Judea because he ate with publicans and sinners. He chose to be a peasant and rigidly avoided the palace. True the cultured and refined will suffer if thrown into the company of the ignorant and the vicious. But is not such suffering made glorious by Christlikeness. Is not this truly walking "In His Steps?" In our anxiety to popularize religion, and to crowd our churches, we are letting down the bars and lowering the conditions of church membership, until there is danger of utterly eliminating the heroic element of self sacrifice. When the Lord would enlist Saul of Tarsus under the banner of the cross, he did not invite him to a picnic or a pie social, but he rather said, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my sake." That put him on his mettle by appealing to the noblest in his manhood. The rich dwell among flowers, pictures, music, statuary, with all their refining influences; but these are not higher in God's sight than the coarse amusements of the common people, if they exist only for selfish gratifications. It is evidently a part of God's plan that some shall have superior powers, but they are his gifts and must be submitted to his service. Wealth can prevent the poor from suffering hunger; culture uplift them; knowledge instruct them; sympathy and love soften them; delicacy refine them.

But one tells us that sacrifice has gone out of fashion amongst Christians. The very meaning of the word is almost forgotten. To sacrifice is to give up some lawful gratification for the good of others. It is the voluntary subjection of one's self for the sake of others to some danger, loss, or suffering, which we could avoid if we would. It is to transfer our talents, powers, influence, from the altar of self to the altar of God and humanity. In other words, sacrifice is love made manifest. It is the revelation of love. It is the language of love. Love without sacrifice is a fire without a flame, a tree without a leaf, a stalk without a flower, a bird without wings.

A John the Baptist wearing purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, would never have moved all Judea to listen to his denunciation against sin. A theological professor of long experience used to say to his class, "I have observed that a two thousand dollar minister is most likely to be successful in a thousand dollar church." Peter the Hermit would never have aroused all Europe to rescue Jerusalem if he had indulged in the common comforts of life. The Salvation Army has won for itself a place of honor by its self denial. When Christians are moved to show their sincerity and the strength of their love by some notable manifestation of self denial, there will be a mighty revival. The submerged class in the shadow of our church spires will begin to have faith. The world must be saved by cross bearing. What glorious possibilities are before the church, through the baptism of sacrifice with the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Then the church will not wait for commands to compel her to voice the pent up feelings of her inmost soul. Then she will not pause to reckon up the evils that may befall her. The divine compassion of love will be upon her. The wings of sacrifice, too long folded, will expand of their own accord, and will bear her swiftly through all the world as an angel of mercy and a messenger of hope.

Prayer, preaching, music, missions, Young People's services, social influence, education, are all gathered up by self sacrificing service, which the Holy Spirit inspires and nourishes, for the salvation of the world. The supreme work of the church is soul winning. Jesus Christ did not consider his first work to educate men or even to make them better; he came to "seek and to save the lost." He never would have left heaven and suffered what he did merely to mould human character for earth. His heart was moved with pity when he saw men in danger of an eternal hell. If the world is not lost, it has no need for the Christian church. If it is lost the church must prove its claim by putting its whole energy into saving the lost. There should be no place for retired pensioners on our church books. Every member should be in the field investing the ramparts of the enemy. We have the B. Y. P. U., Baptist Young People's Union; but we need the B. S. W., Baptist Soul Winners. What possibilities are before us. The harvest is whitening for the sickle. The church of the living God must gather in the golden grain.

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