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# The Fraternal

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JANUARY, 1946

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## EDITORIAL

### A UNITED FRONT

IN one of his famous war speeches Mr. Churchill spoke of the advantages of Britain and America being "mixed up together" in a common cause. There can be no doubt that without this partnership we should both have lost our freedom.

The time seems opportune for a review of the possibilities of the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society being "mixed up together" in the greatest of all causes. There have been welcome signs in recent months of more co-operation between our home and overseas fronts. The proposed joint Youth Movement, which is entirely according to the mind of the younger generation in our churches, and an article on the Reconstruction Fund in the *Missionary Herald* by the Secretary of the Baptist Union are happy auguries for the future.

There is so much to be gained in effective denominational leadership in the closer co-operation of the two parts of our Baptist work, and through the inter-penetration of all our work at home by the missionary ardour which is at present most closely associated with the overseas front, that nothing should be left undone to secure that the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society are "mixed up together" as much as possible.

Although the time may appear inappropriate because of post-war difficulties we ought not to put beyond the bounds of possibility the housing of the two societies in one building. That in itself would be not only a magnificent illustration of unity of purpose, but would make possible considerable economies in administration. (Money will not always be as plentiful as it is now!).

It is good news that our two publication departments are co-operating in one or two ventures. There is a vast need for books, large and small, which express our distinctive understanding of the Gospel as Baptists. Present difficulties of publishing will become less acute. Could not enquiries be set on foot at once as to how the Carey Press and the Kingsgate Press can *together* face the opportunities before them?

There is one field, that of evangelism, in which immediate action could certainly be taken. Now that men and women are being demobilised in large numbers, there is both a great need and a splendid opportunity to summon them to the service of Christ. We should like to see teams of men and women, composed equally of representatives of the home and overseas fronts, and headed by the leaders of the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society, forming the spearheads of a new evangelistic advance, speaking to the men and women of our day about the cause of Christ at home and abroad. Such a venture would light new fires in the hearts of our people, as well as kindling, by the blessing of God, faith in Christ and devotion to Him in the hearts of others.

We commend to our leaders the possibilities and advantages of our two great societies being "mixed up together" in the interests of our Saviour's cause.

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#### PUBLIC PRAYER (FORMAL AND FREE)

IT is a matter of observation that the use of extemporary, or free-prayer, in public is declining. At one time free prayer was a distinctive feature of Nonconformist worship. Recently, however, there has been a noticeable change, both in the greater use by Nonconformists of liturgical forms, and also in the absence of any considerable body of protest against such a development. To attempt to trace the genesis and growth of this change would take me too far from my present purpose. My intention is to examine from the angle of the minister the nature of public prayer, and to ask what is the real distinction between "Formal" and "Free" prayer—as we may conveniently call the two types. Are they actually so very different, apart from the fact that one is printed or written beforehand, while the other is not? Or is something more fundamental involved? If we follow up this enquiry we may perhaps be led to see more clearly the ground for the traditional Free Church prejudice against liturgical prayer in favour of the "free" variety.

Isaac Watts defined prayer as "that Converse which God hath allowed us to maintain with himself above while we are here below." In this converse with God three features should always be distinguished. First, prayer is, properly speaking, man's *response* to God. That is, our approach to God does not originate with us but springs out of God's prior approach to man. This is certainly true of Christian prayer. So, public prayer properly begins with acts of praise and gratitude. Secondly, sincere prayer involves a frank and sorrowful recognition of human sin. The opening words of

the General Confession are exactly right: "Almighty and Most Merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep." Thirdly, prayer is the expression in manifold forms of man's aspiration after fuller life. This is where we see most clearly the relationship between prayer and desire. Human desires vary enormously in strength and quality. They may be grossly sensual or deeply spiritual; but in one form or another they determine his approach to God and his prayer will be the index of his aspiration whether that be directed towards material blessings or the higher spiritual blessings. "Prayer," said Jeremy Taylor, "is only the body of the bird, desires are its wings."

In public worship the minister "leads" in prayer; that is, his duty is to offer to God the thanksgiving, confessions, and intercessions of his people. But, at the commencement of the service, the material of prayer existing in the hearts of his congregation is present there, so to say, in the raw state. The assembled company is not an initial unity. It consists of a number of separate individuals who have indeed come to church in order to pray together, but whose potential prayers are—to begin with—highly individualised. Each worshipper is thinking most intensely of his own experience of life, and this is only imperfectly co-ordinated with that of his neighbour in the next pew with whom he is about to approach God. Moreover, it is safe to say that at the outset, the individual's potential prayers will be not only un-co-ordinated with his neighbour's, but ill-regulated in themselves. The very intensity of his need—joyful or sorrowful as the case may be—means that he will place certain things in the forefront of his prayers. He is naturally unconscious of the fact that quite possibly God's purpose with him in church is to awaken and bring into the foreground of his consciousness other and better desires. He rightly prays as he feels, but it does not follow that, in doing so, he feels or prays aright. Finally, many desires exist in a latent and inarticulate form, so that the worshipper doesn't really know what his own deepest longings and prayers are until he hears them put into words by the minister.

The function of the minister must be understood in relation to this body of "raw prayer" in the hearts of his people. His duty is not merely to "say" prayers nor even to focus and express the existing prayers of the congregation, for many of these prayers are, in their present state, not worthy to be expressed or offered to God at all. The minister's task is to "Christianise" this body of raw prayer, that is, so to frame his words in praying that the thoughts and desires of the congregation are purified and elevated, and led into channels

whereby they become a true offering to God. This is surely what we mean when we say: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight."

It is in this way that we begin to see what are the differentia of Christian prayer. These do not consist in the mere use of some Christian formula, such as "for Jesus Christ's sake," or "in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ." They concern rather the Object of prayer, that is God, and the spirit in which He is to be approached. For the first characteristic of Christian prayer is that the God whom we address is conceived in Christian terms. Too often, when people come to church, the God to whom they are (unconsciously) proposing to pray is a private or family or tribal God. Only as the service progresses, and their thoughts and desires are lifted to a higher level, does their prayer reach out to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and begin to be truly Christian. Further, Christian prayer is prayer which is addressed to God in the temper of filial trust and obedience characteristic of Jesus, and as such it is poles apart from pagan prayer. The latter is genuine prayer; but it is a naked demand upon the deity for help. Christian prayer may likewise be petitionary in form; but, in so far as it is Christian, the petitionary element will be subordinate and not primary. For the fundamental attitude of Christian prayer is one of loyal and reverent acceptance of God's will as supremely good. This we may see from the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane.

Granted, then, that in helping his people to pray, the minister's function is to stir up and make articulate their best mind towards God, it follows that this aim must control his use of language, for language is the medium in which he has to work. He has, in fact, in his praying to create a form of words which will provide an effective medium of communication between the congregation and God, and be not unworthy to be the channel of God's approach to His people. It is here that the distinction between "Formal Prayer" and "Free Prayer" becomes important, for it points to a different conception of what the minister's task involves. The School of Formal Prayer lays chief stress upon the form of the minister's utterance—the pre-arranged choice and ordering of his ideas and language. It assumes that within certain broad limits, the needs of men from generation to generation do not vary greatly and that they can best be met not by spontaneous prayer, but by carefully prepared words which are familiar to the congregation and which, by their beauty and suitability, are best calculated to serve the end in view. If to that there be added the power of hallowed associations which gather

around familiar forms of liturgical prayer, there can be no doubt that the case for Formal prayer can plead many advantages, not least of which is—to many people—its relative independence of the personality of the minister. On the other hand, its disadvantages are not few. The very familiarity of the language can become a snare to the worshipper, leading easily to a formalism and irreverence which stifle true praying. And however carefully chosen a written prayer may be, the rigidity of its form tends to rob it of that immediacy which is of the first importance in religion.

The School of Free Prayer on the other hand, emphasises the material aspect of the act of praying. It asserts that prayer is always living, personal intercourse with God, and that the important thing is its realistic correspondence with the impulses and desires then animating the congregation. This correspondence has a spiritual foundation, and to achieve it the minister must so identify himself with his people, and be so responsive to the guidance of the Spirit of God, that his prayer becomes in a real sense their prayer. To quote some words of Dr. Fairbairn: "For the prayer to be congregational, then, the minister must be the people, and the people must become the minister . . . In prayer the minister is the vicar of his people; he stands in their place and pleads in their name before God. He loses his personal being, and becomes as it were a collective person, his personal consciousness is enlarged into theirs, and he becomes a voice making their prayer articulate, confessing the sins that lie on their consciences, the enmities that slumber in their hearts, the sorrows that corrode their spirits, the graces that adorn and make beautiful their lives." (*Studies in Theology*, p 273f). This indeed is a high ideal and no one would claim that it is always attained in our Free Church services. Yet it is this spirit which has been the glory of Free Church worship at its best, and the very fact that free prayer is so exacting an undertaking, and requires so humble and earnest a dependence upon the Spirit of God, should make us beware lest we should value our heritage too lightly and should choose the easier road of formal prayer, only to find that we have exchanged the substance for the shadow.

In conclusion, the question may be asked: cannot we have both formal and free prayer in our services? They are both good, may they not be used in combination? The answer must certainly be that, in theory, they can, for there is no inherent contradiction between them. Yet, in practice, experience seems to show that it is very difficult to combine the two, and that when formal prayer begins to be used, it tends more and more to drive out free prayer.

(Perhaps that is the reason why the tendency in Free Churches to resort to liturgical prayer arouses uneasiness amongst people who are incapable of giving a satisfactory reason for their discomfort, but yet feel that somehow the service is falling away from the high standard of Free Church worship). There is, however, one sphere in which, as it seems to me, there may perhaps be room for thinking that Formal Prayer can be effectively used in Free Church worship, and that is in Intercession. This is precisely that part of public prayer in which the assumption underlying formal prayer is most justified. For in intercession the minister cannot help but lead the petitions of his people along relatively stereotyped lines, and there is more to be said for the use of fixed forms in dealing with the concerns of our common life in the home, the community, the world and the church. Speaking generally, however, I cannot but think that our aim as Free Churchmen should not be to promote liturgical experiments in our worship, so much as to strive to recover more of that "Holy skill" (to use Watts's phrase) whose secret lies in the cultivated mind working together with the devout and sensitive heart.

R. L. CHILD.

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#### THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT.

AS the result of a challenge issued in our *Fraternal*, I have for the past three years pursued an intensive study of the Doctrine of the Atonement. Out of this study, certain convictions have been arrived at, and I have been invited to share them with my brethren.

One thing which comes to me strongly is the organic character of the Bible revelation. The same purpose of God is described in both the Old and New Testaments. We are dealing with the same God throughout, and the variety of method disclosed but serves to show that the same goal was being sought in the earliest approaches of God as in the later. A progressive purpose was at work from the beginning, and it developed over against the conditions which prevailed. In estimating the Divine element in the Bible teaching, a distinction must be made between God's part in the disclosure of His purpose, and the reception of that purpose in the popular mind. We see this best in the attitude of the prophets in their opposition to the popular religion, but it is observable in the whole range of the Bible declaration.

Arising out of this, another conviction has emerged, that is, that the doctrine of the Atonement is the organizing principle of the Christian Faith in a far more radical manner than was formerly conceived. It is in the light of the Atonement that the whole

problem of God, Man, Sin and Good must be solved both in thought and experience. The truth is that we are here at the burning centre of all the relations which concern God and man, and man and man. The Cross is indeed the centre from which radii issue to the whole circumference of life. Our world is remade at the Cross.

But what is this centre, or, how shall we conceive it? The answer is that it is essentially Divine; it is God Himself in action, God taking the initiative, shouldering the whole human problem, and ultimately the whole cosmic problem as well. In essence, it is not different from the original purpose of Creation; Redemption is but Creation finished, though the respective methods may break upon our perception in different ways. The frequent appeals in the O.T. on behalf of His People to the God who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and the appeals made by God Himself in the same kind of language but confirm this view; the N.T. is no less emphatic in the way the Creation of all things and their restoration is joined together. Stated theologically, it may be said that Cosmology and Soteriology are one; stated poetically,

One God, One Law, One Element,  
And One far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves.

For this reason, the term to express this point of view is *theocentric*; other terms are either partial or misleading; for the same reason, all conceptions of a transaction between God and Another, though the Other be His Own Son, cease to be conceivable. They are too human; sometimes they are not human enough, because they deal with abstractions; they proceed from conceptions and situations which are not applicable to the relation in which God stands to His world. Moreover, they do not accord with the Biblical account of the Divine procedure. Biblical terms must be construed Biblically. It is, therefore, irrelevant to ask what terms like *kipper*, or *hilasterion* meant in extra-biblical thought, because they undergo a change, and their meaning transcends the pagan use of them. Usage is more important than etymology. The Biblical writers had to use the terms which were to hand, but they breathed their own content into them. To insist that these terms must retain their pagan significance is to do violence to Biblical thought; the ideas cannot be construed apart from Biblical usage and it leads to confusion to attempt to interpret them otherwise.

A reverse procedure seems to have been taken in the meaning placed in modern times upon the English word "atonement." Un-

doubtedly, the original significance was "at-one-ment," and the verb "atone" is to "at-one," and the translators of 1611 were nearer to the Biblical idea in their translation than modern exponents who have given it another content.. The concepts we need are those conveyed by terms like "reconciliation" and "reconcile," and the key-passage is, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." It is impossible to reconcile this point of view with the notion that action took place on God. The whole Biblical representation is that the action proceeds from God. It is God Who takes the first step; He is not moved by anything or anyone external to Himself, except in so far as the need of the world may be regarded as an exciting cause. It is God Who loves; it is God Who comes to man in His servants the prophets; it is God Who sends His Son. He is not moved by any other than Himself.

To say this, is the same thing as to say that God is Love; to say that God is Love is to say that God takes the initiative—Love has no meaning if we affirm that it can be bought. Grace cannot wait upon a bargain.

It is likewise impossible to maintain that there is any conflict of attributes in God. His love cannot be held as opposed to His righteousness. The Biblical representation makes these synonymous, or nearly so; His saving energy is His righteous act. "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our Salvation," here righteousness and salvation are not to be taken as antithetic; they are but instances of Hebrew parallelism, the Psalms and the Prophets are sufficient evidence of that. The same parallelism should be sought in the N.T. passages which have given so much trouble, for example, Rom. i. 16. 17. Rom. iii. 25 will yield the same interpretation if Paul's whole argument is regarded and we guard ourselves from building up our theory on snippets. The bane of much theology has been the habit of quoting verses instead of paragraphs, or, whole sections of the Apostle's thought. To build up a theory on passages torn from their context is a ruthless murder of the thinking of the writer.

If the conception of God as love be accepted as determinative of our thinking, another conclusion follows. Place must be found in our theology for the idea of a Suffering God. The notion of God existing in everlasting calm must be repudiated. It is more Greek than Christian. Certainly the anthropomorphism of the Hebrew prophets is nearer to reality than Plato or Plotinus, von Hügel notwithstanding. But more important still is to realise that

the Greek point of view really bows out Jesus as a revelation of God. God is not revealed, and we are left in the dark as to the nature of deity. The words recorded of Jesus: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" have no meaning. Job's cry must still be ours, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him?" Christ on this theory, ceases to be the image of the invisible God.

But if sin involves God in suffering, then the problem of sin is seen in all its magnitude, and it is impossible to argue that sin is not taken seriously. In the long run, I think it will be seen, that it is the only theory which treats sin as the problem it is.

Yet the purpose of the Atonement is not to leave sin a problem—it is to solve it. The solution is found in the reconciliation of man with God; in the creation of a gracious personal relationship. That is to say, sin is dealt with by God and man together; in the fellowship set up by the action of God in Christ, responded to by the believing soul. This is the meaning of the doctrine of Justification by Faith, for faith is the trust of a child in its father, and the heart of the doctrine cannot be stated in the categories of the law-court, but in the atmosphere of the home. Faith is a personal response to a personal God; not acceptance of a scheme of salvation, but acceptance of a Saviour, and in that acceptance the whole moral issue of the new life is provided for. It is in fellowship with God in Christ that the soul grows, and rises to its full stature.

Finally, I have been led to see with increasing clearness, that the problem of the good life is religious. All morality involves personal relations, and such relations between man and man are really rooted in the relation in which man stands to God. Apart from this, morality becomes only a convenience, not the voice of the Eternal, but the reconciliation of man with God in Christ accepted in all its bearings, involves the acceptance of all life's relationships as personal. We pierce through the apparently impersonal character of modern life, and see that everywhere it rests on personal contacts. Therefore, reconciliation is the key to the whole human problem. Morality is not an abstract thing, but arises out of the relations with the brother for whom Christ died. All ethical responsibilities are born anew at the Cross, which becomes the new Sinai.

The working out of this in the details of our complex civilisation involves the consecration of all our powers and of every department of life, but ultimately means the reconciliation of all things by the Cross. In principle the world is saved there, and only there.

S. B. JOHN.

## STIMULATING A WAR-WEARY CHURCH

MY church at Balham manfully endured the years of war. But, by the end of 1944, signs of war-weariness were apparent. An easing off in attendance, a certain lethargy in service, occasional moral lapses, and a noticeable dearth of conversions all combined to suggest that the church needed to renew its life in God. Among the keenest and most loyal officers and members there was frequent talk of special meetings. Finally, the Deacons asked me and the Elders (who handle all church membership business) to consider the situation.

When we met, I judged the time had come for plain speech. I asked the Elders to consider me. I myself was not in a position to lead special meetings. The war had left me weary and stale. The church's service made enormous demands on me, while the church's corporate prayer, on which I depended for spiritual sustenance, had of late been insignificant. My output rate was far exceeding my intake. It was, first and foremost, essential to restore and gladden my heart. This frank talk opened up an evening as sacred as any I can remember. All present covenanted to pray for me, as I for them. I left the meeting at the close already greatly refreshed, and commissioned, together with a younger Elder, to prepare a plan for stimulating the inner life of the church. The plan as later presented and adopted provided for:

THE AIM—to make us Better Christians, Better Church Members and Better Witnesses.

THE THEME—to study Our Life in Christ (Communion with Him and obedience to Him); Our Life in the Church (standards and obligations of Church Membership); and Our Life in the World (personal behaviour and active witness).

THE MEETINGS—no special meetings. We wanted to avoid the *flop* which always follows them. Instead we proposed to work as far as possible within the existing timetable of the church, in order to increase the flow in the ordinary channels of church life and worship. We suggested the use of three consecutive Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, covering the three phases of the theme. The Saturday meetings were to be for under 30's only, plus their leaders. The other gatherings were to be open to folk of any age.

THE AUDIENCE—no attempt was to be made to draw in all and sundry from other churches. The Mission was to be *private* to our own church, open only to Church Members, to enrolled applicants for church membership, and to any professing Christians normally worshipping and working with us.

THE SPEAKERS—we rejected the idea of getting outside speakers. They are difficult to get at short notice and they often cannot speak with accurate knowledge of local needs. We decided therefore that all speakers must be from within our own ranks. We believed that we should discover unsuspected talents, that those chosen would hit nails on the head, and that the Holy Spirit could be trusted to guide them and empower.

THE ORGANISING—we felt it vital to bring the whole inner leadership of the church into intimate relation with the Mission. To that end we made the Deacons wholly responsible for arranging and running the Wednesday meetings, the Youth Council similarly responsible for the Saturdays, and I myself for the Sundays. The first Sunday was to end with a Communion service, the second with Baptisms, and the third was to be a Guest Sunday, everyone bringing a friend.

EXPLAINING THE PLAN—every care was to be taken to familiarise Deacons, Youth Council and all Departmental Leaders with the scope and details of the plan. Several conferences yielded valuable results in suggestions and co-operation, as well as in prayer.

PREPARING THE CHURCH—letters of invitation were issued to all entitled to come. All recipients were asked to consider the invitation as coming from Christ Himself. One hundred members covenanted to pray constantly for Divine blessing.

The meetings, held at the end of May and in early June, were notably good in attendance throughout. The Wednesday evening gatherings were like a Sunday morning service. Sixty to seventy under 30's came every Saturday night. On the first Sunday we had the largest Communion since pre-blitz days. Church members brought many strangers to the Guest Services. The speaking, by both laymen and lay-women, was extremely good. It was to the

point, all of it, and some of it very moving indeed. The Holy Spirit was obviously at work. There was a wonderful atmosphere.

The result has been a manifest "lift" in the whole life of the church. I have, in my own heart, benefited more than I can say. Everywhere there is a fresh resilience in people, a buoyancy and ardour of spirit, a new keenness for work and worship and prayer. Conversions have been numerous. Financially and spiritually the church is genuinely stimulated, and we feel that, under God, we owe it to this internal mission.

W. D. JACKSON.

### A PASTORAL PROBLEM

I WAS interested in your Editorial note on "A Pastoral Problem" in the April *Fraternal*, to which you called special attention. The questions culled from your correspondent's letter are more forcible than a formal statement of his problem, and I am thankful for the "outburst" which led him to reveal his honourable discontent in the matter of pastoral visitation. I am now offering my own thoughts, based upon an experience of forty years of pastoral work, in the hope that others may find some measure of guidance.

Let me at once say that I am writing as one who from the beginning of his ministry has regarded his pastoral labours as a solemn obligation and a sacred privilege, never to be neglected by a minister worthy of his calling. Your correspondent asks: "Why should a man be expected to visit every member of his congregation once a year at least." Why? indeed! surely visitation on an arithmetical basis is likely to become a "soul-less business," whether it be one visit or one hundred. I had hoped that such an approach to pastoral work had died a decided death. If your correspondent feels worried about this idea, the remedy is in his own hands—let him cut it out altogether. There are "duty" calls, in order to keep in touch with the individuals and the homes of the church and congregation; but they are of no value if the minister reckons them up as so many tasks to be done.

Your correspondent also asks: "How to get people to recognise this higher conception (of dealing with the sick in mind and soul, as well as in body) of a Minister's pastoral work is the problem." If this really is the problem, the solution is with the minister. If the minister is sensitive, human, and loving, his "friendly visits" and "duty calls," both to his own people, and to those not connected with the church, will frequently lead to opportunities for dealing

with mental and spiritual sickness. The problem is a personal one for the minister to solve.

The minister's regular call upon the aged and sick stands first in his pastoral work, and these often lead to wider usefulness to the families. The visits made to persons and homes in times of trouble, have effects more far-reaching than to the individuals visited. He is in the midst of troubled folk, a sharer of their burdens, and beyond the immediate comfort given, frequently those who have lapsed from church fellowship are recovered—and in homes outside church fellowship, a new interest in the church is awakened. In times of sadness, a live minister will find opportunities of entering the homes of those who live apart from the church, and barriers of indifference fall before his human interest and Christian sympathy. I have no regard whatever for mere "social callers," or ministers of the "hail-fellow-well-met" sort; but we do well to remember the old saying, that a visiting minister makes a church-going people. I want to rebuke the state of mind that supports an endless succession of public-meeting efforts "to get at the outsider," while at the doors of the church there are homes which the minister passes by.

Love sets the going. The large-hearted minister, out of the stores of his spiritual faith, carries the blessings of healing and awakening influences wherever he goes, and should he be graced with the pastoral soul, let him guard the precious gift, and nourish it by dutiful pastoral labours. But this requires the strictest discipline of life, for this is where we are known only by what we are—and if we desire to mediate God's help to human needs of young and old, see what is needed in ourselves! You can "get away with it" in preaching, but not in the personal intimacy of pastoral work. Our words and deeds drop flat, if they do not well up from eternal springs. I have known very successful preachers who have been indifferent men, but I have not known a true pastor of souls who has not also been a true man of God.

Your correspondent uses two words which are misleading—"problem," and "technique." These two words are out of place in a pastoral vocabulary. If we approach our pastoral work as a "problem," we are carrying with us the thought of a matter difficult of solution. But it is nothing of the kind. It is just loving-kindness knocking at the hearts of young and old, and why not believe that many more than we fearfully suppose, are waiting to open the doors? "Technique" prescribes rules to reach assured results. But how can we prescribe rules to give assured results, as

in the mechanical arts, when we are dealing with human beings in all the manifold workings of the human soul?

Let young ministers regard their pastoral office as important, side by side, as their preaching office. The good pastor may not be the "special" preacher, but he will preach home to the hearts of his people—unto the edifying of the body of Christ. Looking around upon the ministry to-day, I desire to see our young ministers turn from the distractions of running hither and thither upon errands which can well be done by those who are not called to the highest of all vocations—the preaching of the Word, and the Cure of souls.

W. H. HADEN.

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#### THE CHURCH AND THE YOUTH CLUB.

DR. TOWNLEY LORD in a timely "B.T." article under the title "Priority for Youth" quotes another minister as saying "The only churches likely to make progress in the post-war world are those with a sound and vigorous youth programme." Dr. Lord then asks "who are the keenest supporters of our churches to-day? In the main those who grew into the church fellowship through the double influence of the Christian home and the Sunday school." With both these propositions we agree. But for how much longer shall we be able to speak about "the double influence of the Christian home and the Sunday school?" With monotonous regularity I have heard leaders at Sunday School Conferences say "The children of our school do not come from the homes of our members." I have almost come to the conclusion that Baptists, unlike the Roman Catholics, are nearly a childless specie. Quite clearly so long as this situation exists our survival depends upon our ability to win the children and youth of non-Christian homes to Christ, His church and The Baptist Cause. This is not a new problem but the absence of children in Baptist homes does accentuate the challenge it presents. We lose 80 per cent. of our scholars in their early 'teens largely because the bias of a non-Christian home proves a greater influence than the school. The result is that in a few years former scholars become full-blooded pagans. How can we recapture their interest and re-direct them back to higher things? And how can we contact and capture for Christ that large area of youth who have never been in touch with school or church?

I am mindful that in our churches an excellent work is proceeding among youth. For the benefit of the young people we

retain our churches are full of youth societies all of which do splendid work with varying degrees of success. But one thing is common to most of our existing organisations. They are "inside" organisations and they fail to attract "outside" youth. I believe the Youth Club can attract outside youth and provide the church with a new opportunity for evangelism. At the request of the Editor I write of a Club venture in my own church.

When I came to Ilford the Youth Club was already there. It had an attendance of 40, 90 per cent. of whom were "outsiders." It commenced through the enthusiasm of two workers who asked the Deacons for facilities and a free hand to experiment. They obtained both and a monetary grant. The beginnings were small and difficult. The youngsters displayed no interest in church or in things spiritual. They took all and gave nothing. There was disquiet among Deacons and members because the organisation appeared to have no spiritual centre or purpose. Truth was, these young people were pagans, they were more familiar with swing music than sacred melodies, and the church was not accustomed to work among that kind of youth. But behind the scenes the leader plodded on. Week by week, in addition to Club evenings, 30 young people met at his home for a cup of coffee and informal fire-side talks. This led to a request for a discussion hour in the Club, an institution which nowadays usually extends to two hours of lecture and questions. A listening group, a singing class, the Padres talks on essentials of the faith and a well-attended Sunday afternoon fellowship have followed. Best of all during the past year I have baptised five Club members, one is now a keen chorister and another a teacher. Club members have also rendered practical service by decorating a room at their own cost and are now tackling large our bomb-scarred hall. The fruits of four difficult years are being seen.

My conclusion is that the Youth Club meets a special need of our time and offers a new field for evangelism. Side by side with our other youth organisations it extends the range of our work. It is a modern development which we should exploit for the sake of the Kingdom since it reaches youth who have no Christian background. The work demands strong Christian leadership, the patience and zeal of a missionary and good organisation. The Youth Club does not produce quick results but if it is inspired by a vital Christian purpose God will use it to pluck some brands from the burning.

W. CHARLES JOHNSON.

## THE RE-MARRIAGE OF DIVORCED PERSONS

THE following is a personal contribution to an important question which Fraternalists are asked to consider. It represents a "non-rigorous" point of view. Argument for the opposite case is best propounded by a convinced "rigorous."

There would be no difficulty apart from the Christian standard in marriage. Marriage, divorce and re-marriage could be looked upon as matters of convenience except when the sanctions of the Christian marriage vows were involved.

The New Testament data for our subject is scant and difficult of interpretation. The tradition recorded by Matthew (5.31f. and 19a) allows divorce on the grounds of adultery while the parallels in Mark 10, 11 and Luke 16, 18 admit of no exception. Space forbids examination of textual issues. A good short account is given in Dean Inge's "Christian Ethics and Modern Problems." Most scholars are convinced that the Q tradition represented in the Marcan-Lukan agreement is original and therefore that no case for non-rigorousness can be built on Matthew. But this by no means invalidates that point of view, as Dean Inge ably argues. The exception of adultery only would, in fact, seriously embarrass the more liberal view which is founded upon a rejection of the Judaic legalism illustrated in that exception. Jesus was not a law-giver and He avoids entanglement in the maze of rabbinic controversy.

The rigorous have concluded that when Jesus says "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so," He is therefore against all divorce and consequent re-marriage. The passage in Matthew reads as if the questioners wished Jesus to take sides between the Rabbinic schools of Hillel *v.* Shammai. Hillel would allow divorce for trifling causes. Shammai said "A man shall not divorce his wife unless he has found in her a matter of shame." Jesus however, is not to be drawn. He cannot take his stand upon the level of legalism at all and goes back to the Creation to discover the original intention of God. That is, he seeks the perfect ideal as the inspiration for his attitude rather than the prudential considerations of the law.

This is the important point. Jesus is dealing with the sublimity of an ideal relationship, viz., in Adam and Eve, who were intended solely for each other and it is not therefore to be expected that He can be content with any less ideal view. But does this ex-

clude the necessity of some concession to Nature when, *in fact*, men and women have already descended from the ideal plane and are living grossly in the realm of low estimates of each other? We find that Paul is prepared to countenance the dissolution of mixed marriages as if he were unaware of any inconsistency with Our Lord's teaching. And there is evidence of a wide disparity of practice among the early branches of the Christian church. Eastern orthodoxy has consistently permitted the innocent parties to remarry. Dean Inge concludes that "those Anglicans who maintain that since by Christian law marriage is *per se* indissoluble no divorce should be granted in any circumstances are making a claim which is historically untenable."

This view is powerfully reinforced by an examination of the attitude of our Lord to other questions. The legalism of the Pharisee was the chief stumbling block to His gospel. The woman taken in adultery was treated with marked courtesy in contrast with the things He said about the "whited sepulchres." The Sabbath could not be allowed to become an end in itself above the needs of common humanity—institutions were not ultimate but secondary to the primary ends of living personalities. Blind acceptance of dead customs must be done away in the interests of sacred personality.

Even in regard to the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper scholars are now convinced that Christ never instituted them as rites binding upon Christians in any legalistic sense. The scriptures say in regard to the former that Christ Himself baptised not; and in regard to the Supper, "Do this" surely does not refer to the bare bones of a particular method but to the spiritual fellowship engendered upon that significant occasion. We Baptists believe that our characteristic mode of expressing our faith has its own intrinsic value which "institution" does not make more or less valid.

So with marriage and divorce. Laws, customs, organisations—all must be regarded as the servant of man and not his master. Anything which allows man to come nearest to God's original intention of perfect mutuality of union between man and woman must be allowed. I am quite sure that Christ would regard it as a desecration of personality to tie an innocent person to a sexual pervert whose vileness was not disclosed till after marriage. The Christian experience of the man-woman relationship is not possible on these terms. And what of second marriage apart from divorce? If the argument holds for the rigorist that such a person must keep to the marriage bond because of the promise "for better or for worse,"

does not death come into the same category? Why should physical cessation of life be spiritually superior to that living death which some poor victims of vicious brutes have to undergo? Yet in our experience many second marriages are productive of more spiritual good than the slighter first contracts. Is it God's will that a vigorous life bereft of a partner should go through life childless, companionless, and chilled by the dead hand of disaster? Personally, one would testify to the opposite.

What is this vague entity called a Marriage Vow, which has such overriding powers? The early Quakers wore no ring and dispensed with oaths, yet who dare say they did not exemplify Christian marriage?

All this, however, is not to argue for laxity or promiscuity. It would be quite wrong to drive a coach and six through the marriage laws. They may be of secondary importance but they are none the less necessary.

Matters are serious. How serious is best seen in a supplement to the *Christian News Letter*, April 4th, 1945. One in four of first maternities are illegitimate. At least one in six unmarried women have abandoned their chastity. One in ten of the marriages contracted will eventually suffer divorce or separation. The year 1944 saw 4,000 more divorce suits started than its predecessor—19,000 in one year! 38,000 people turned adrift on society in one year to exert a baleful influence upon the Christian standards of ideal marriage. How portentous are the issues we face!

Several things must be said. First, the problem is not simple. Shall we re-marry divorced persons or shall we not? It is the behaviour of the ostrich to expect one regulation to stop a rot which is apparent over the whole field of human relationships. Divorce and subsequent re-marriage are but symptoms of a more radical disorder. Human life is held cheap in almost every realm of experience. This age of State-machines; wars, social injustices must expect the evidence of reaction to appear in the most delicate and spiritual of all human adjustments. A concerted attack must be made on all the conditions which wear down human life into brutishness or slavery. Slums, economic exploitation, wars, and spiritual hopelessness must all yield to the Spirit of God before one can expect the Christian ideal in marriage to be fully maintained.

I do not see how any external principle can be rigidly applied. Some have proposed that guilty parties in divorce should be definitely excluded from re-marriage in church. Others that innocent

parties should be allowed to re-marry. We can only accept such rules by acceptance of the standards of guilt and innocence which are valid for a court of law. The whole argument here is against such judgment. Sometimes the party who is technically guilty of physical infidelity has been the victim of a technically innocent person whose spirit and temper have been so un-Christian as to vitiate the mutuality of the marriage vow. The inner story of other people's lives is not apparent except to perfect insight which is found only in Christ—and He refused to condemn. The sin of hardness of heart was more scathingly condemned by the Master than any failing of the flesh—not that He condoned either.

Free-churchmen cannot escape the responsibility of judging each case upon its merits. We believe ultimately in the authority of the Spirit of God, bearing witness with our spirits, and we must trust to such guidance in any issue. The mind and experience of our fellows in the ministry is one of the factors in determining the way of Divine leading; and the Christian reaction of those who may seek re-marriage in our churches ought not to be ignored. The situation ought to be explained to them not only from the personal standpoint but from that of its repercussions upon the position of other people. If all the 38,000 persons from last year's divorce courts are re-married in church there will soon be no clearly defined Christian standard for marriage. I think were I even an innocent party in such case I should refrain from provoking such confusion of mind in young people setting out on the greatest adventure of their lives for the first time.

Personal practice, therefore, would be to put these points very directly to any applicant, pray with them, seek the mind of other trusted Christian friends and if the couple still felt it right to adhere to their purpose, exercise my own discretion according to the facts as I knew them. If after such challenge they persist, who am I to forbid them? Like Our Lord I refuse the responsibility of being finally a judge or divider over them.

E. J. E. BRIGGS.

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