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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

THE CALL TO PRAYER

THERE never was greater need for united and earnest prayer on the part of Christians all over the world that the love of Christ may be shed abroad in the hearts of men, that the work of God may not be hindered among unbelievers, and that all may speedily learn the lessons of the awful conflict now baptizing Europe and parts of Asia and Africa in human blood and tears. We will mention a few of the many conditions and events that call for prayer. They have been mentioned in the REVIEW or will be found in this number:

1. The warring nations—for rulers, soldiers, prisoners, doctors, and nurses, widows and orphans, and Christian workers—that the Spirit of Christ may drive out the spirit of hatred; that the earnest seeking after God may spread, and that the campaign against in-

toxicants and other evils may be extended and may prevail.

2. The unfortunate land of Mexico—that the internal strife may be succeeded by true liberty and the knowledge of God, and that the Protestant missions may soon be able to carry forward their co-operative campaigns.
3. The Latin American Conference at Panama, in February, 1916—For the commissions preparing for this conference and for the missionaries, the Church, and the unsaved multitudes.
4. For Persia—that the suffering Christians may be relieved and rescued, and that the present sad experience may be used to turn the thoughts of both Moslems and nominal Christians to God, as in China after the Boxer troubles.
5. For Turkey—that the missionaries may be protected and guided, and that the Christian religious teach-

The editors seek to preserve accuracy and to manifest the spirit of Christ in the pages of this REVIEW, but do not acknowledge responsibility for opinions expressed, nor for positions taken by contributors of signed articles in these pages.—EDITORS.

The Diet for a Sick Church

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MORE churches die of dry rot than of heresy. More churches become infirm through misdirected efforts than from overwork.

More churches rust out than wear out. When the funeral of a church is held—and such mournful obsequies must sometimes be performed—a careful canvass of the situation will discover the fact that it was not poor preaching, or a bad neighborhood, or the removal of wealthy members, that accomplished the decease. The church sickened and *died from malnutrition.*

There are churches that feed on food which does not nourish. Their hunger is appeased. They are not conscious that they need anything. But they are slowly starving, and, unless the diet is changed, their doom is sealed.

The Value of the Church

It is a public calamity when a church gets on the sick list, for the church is the saving agency of society. Its business is to look after people, and to lend a helping hand to every movement which makes for human betterment. The public does not exist for church welfare, but the church is for public welfare.

The church is the social dynamo. Its business is to start and keep going all kinds of good enterprises. All benevolent and philanthropic

work trek back to the church for their inspiration, initiative, and maintenance. It is a significant fact that there has never been a hospital in any country until Christianity had entered that country. If the support given, as the output of influences generated by Christian ideals and impulses, were withdrawn, humanitarian work in the world would be hopelessly crippled.

The product of the church is redeemed men and women, and its business is to give to these a motive big enough to drive life uphill. Social redemption can come only as a result of the redemption of social units, and so the work of the church in personal regeneration lies at the very foundation of any scheme for a social millenium. We can never have a sanitary world as long as the sources of life in the human heart are uncleansed.

The church is the divine instrument for the establishment of the Kingdom, the one piece of machinery which God has set up in the world to bring to pass the civilization that is to last forever. The state is important, but the church is more important. The state may be infirm or despotic, but if the church remain loyal to its mission, and faithfully and fearlessly discharge its ministry, the day will come when society will build a new state on the ruins of the old. But if within a sound state there rots a de-

cadent and decaying church, society's life is fouled at its sources.

It becomes, therefore, of first importance to all human interests that the church maintain a vigorous life.

When Is the Church Sick?

A church in a poor state of health is usually absorbed in its own troubles. Like most sick people, it is self-centred. Its daily round is a recital of its aches and pains, its moods and temperatures. But the trouble a sick church is to itself is the smallest part of the disaster. A sick church is a social infirmity. Many of the troubles in the family, in the school, in business, in government, originate in the failure of the church to maintain a vigorous life.

Often the explanation of the increase in crime, frequency of divorce, political corruption, commercial dishonesty, Sabbath profanation, lawlessness, social impurity, and other evils, is to be found in the fact that the church has lost its power. It has become formal and ineffective. To be sure, it is not fair to unload on the church the blame for all that is bad. Original sin is still an orthodox explanation. But if the church is entitled to the high place it claims as the divine instrument for the establishment of the Kingdom, it must shoulder the blame when the machine breaks down and fails to do the work.

Some frosty morning the water fails to run from your faucet. You will probably find the trouble in a sick water-pipe. It is not that the springs in the hills have run dry. It is not that the river has ceased to flow, nor that the reservoir is empty.

It is merely that the line whose business it is to carry the water into your house has ceased to perform its functions.

A great war flames in Europe, and cheap thinkers say Christianity has failed. It would be more accurate to say that Christianity's instrument for conveying the will and life of God to men has failed to perform its function in such a way as to prevent war. The church is sick. It has not possessed sufficient vigor to control the situation. It has been overrun by the militarists. It has been ridden down by the war spirit. It has been sent to the rear, where all the sick and infirm belong. It is not in control, and the reason it is not in control is that it has lost its power. It has lost its power because it is a sick church, or it is a sick church because it has lost its power. In either case, it has become a public calamity. Instead of conquering the world and saving society, it needs a nurse.

Is not this the condition of many a church, not only in Europe, but in other countries as well? There are churches that are not saving the town; they are on the town. Instead of being a municipal asset, they are a municipal liability. They must be taken care of. Instead of living, they are barely existing. Their horizon is bounded by their own needs, and their sympathies are exhausted with their own distresses. They regard themselves as the end of Christianity, and not as means to the end. They are churches all of whose aspirations and activities end in themselves, and whose plight is sufficiently described by Isaiah when he said: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

The Symptoms of Sickness

The symptoms of a sick church are easily recognizable.

1. Loss of appetite is one of the first disorders to appear. There is no eagerness to hear God's word expounded. Bible preaching fails to draw. Church attendance falls off. The preacher faces great spaces of empty pews, which yawn discouragingly and depressingly at him when he rises to deliver his message. He wonders what is wrong with himself, and he may well wonder, for he may be in a measure responsible for the situation. The disgrace of a church dying on his hands torments him. In his despair he resorts to anything to draw a crowd. He preaches on freak topics. He advertises extensively. He competes with the newspapers in the discussion of current events, and with the picture-shows and concert halls in his efforts to attract a crowd. For a while he succeeds, but soon his novelties grow stale, and he must invent something more highly flavored or lose his crowd. For they are still suffering from a loss of appetite for divine truth. It is still a sick church.

2. Loss of appetite is followed by anemia. The blood is thin, and the circulation is poor. People call it a cold church. The charge is made that it is unsociable and exclusive. An impression gets abroad that it does not care for poor people, for working men, or for anybody who is unable to add to either the social or the financial assets of the organization. People who attend the services of such a church are not disposed to repeat the experience. They find nothing there to attract them. The church lacks magnetism, and its services are without inspiration. The

ungodly speak of it as an ecclesiastical refrigerator. The trouble, however, is not that the church wishes to be frosty and exclusive. The trouble is that the church is sick, and its heart action is bad.

3. It is not long until various functions of the body ecclesiastic get out of order. The extremities grow cold, the limbs suffer from a numbness, digestion is poor, respiration is bad. The minister appeals for workers, but there is no response. He goes to his pulpit white hot, but no sooner is he there than he begins to feel cold currents blowing from somewhere, and when he finishes, he feels as if he had been in an ice-pack. His people have lost their responsiveness, for the church is seriously ill.

4. Aches and pains are felt. Tumors and eruptions appear. Complaints and petty jealousies arise. Some of the brethren feel that they have not been duly consulted. The pastor's aid becomes the pastor's anxiety. The good women have a serious difference as to how the work of the Lord should be done. There are dissensions and divisions. Schism impends, and a split is imminent. And this is the church to which the Lord says: "Let brotherly love continue." But the church has grown peevish and fretful and discontented. It is not so much a church with a Gospel as a church with a grievance. Instead of blessing, it pesters the community. It insists on being noticed, and so far from "laying down its life for the brethren," is quick to take offense at the slightest indication of a failure to treat it with reverence.

Soon a condition of general debility ensues. The church has ceased

to think of its mission. *It thinks now not of saving the world, but of saving itself.* Its annual reports are regarded as eminently satisfactory if it can say that it is "holding its own." It has long since given up the idea that it is an army in the field for conquest, and has fallen back on the claim that it is a veteran deserving a place on the pension list. It would like to be endowed, to have an income derived from the graveyard rather than from the benefactions of living saints. It groans over changed conditions, and has grown discouraged and pessimistic. It seems powerless to plan and impotent to execute any forward movement. It lacks faith and hope and love. It is disenchanted of its task, and nervous about the Almighty.

It is a sick church, and it needs a nurse.

What is such a church good for? It is good for nothing unless it can be cured. There is no particular merit in an aggregation of folks calling themselves a church and going through the forms of religion, but sterile and useless when the mission of the church is presented.

A church that has ceased to be of value to society has no claim to either the sympathy or support of society. A sick church is without market value.

A Diagnosis

With these symptoms, which are all too common, and which every pastor will recognize as having come under his observation from time to time, how shall we diagnose the disease? What, precisely, is the real trouble with a sick church?

It has lost its power, the one thing the Lord promised it should

have. Christ's supreme gift to His Church is the Holy Spirit. He bade them tarry at Jerusalem until Pentecost, when the endowment came.

Christ has not promised His church influence, but *power*. The two are very different. A church may have great influence, and be without spiritual power. It may be rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, but be utterly powerless to achieve spiritual results. It may possess numbers and wealth and social prominence, and still be a very sick church.

Health is the best foe of sickness in the human body. Physicians are finding that physical vigor beats drugs in the battle with disease. When the vigor of the body gets below par, and the activities become sluggish, disease finds it easy to make inroads on the system. The best way for a man to avoid sickness is to "keep fit."

The same thing is true of a church, and a church is fit only when it is in possession of spiritual power. What vigor is to the human body, power is to the body of Christ. A church without power is a disqualified church. A church that is not in constant and unbroken fellowship with the Spirit of God is susceptible to all kinds of spiritual contagions and diseases.

The fundamental trouble with a sick church is, therefore, not to be sought in the character of the neighborhood in which it is located, nor in the station of the people who compose its pewholders, nor in the shabbiness of the structure in which it worships, nor in the dryness of the sermons to which it must listen, nor in the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the hearts of the worldlings who

decline to be charmed by its holy dirge. The trouble with a sick church is discovered in the fact that it is a church without spiritual assets. A street-car line without a power-plant will never carry passengers; and a church without living connection with the divine dynamic will never save a soul.

A church without power may seem to grow, but its growth is merely fatty degeneration. It may have a kind of generosity, but its generosity is only a back-handed way of feeding itself. If you ask it for money to fresco the church or purchase a new organ, the response will be lavish; but if you ask it for money to clean up a slum or send out a missionary, the response will be a "frost."

The trouble is, the sick church is not interested in spiritual things, and its malady is that it is without a Pentecost.

If this be a correct diagnosis based on the symptoms which show themselves in a sick church, what is the cure?

What Is the Remedy?

If the church is really living, and not dead, the remedy for its stagnation and coldness and lack of vitality will be found in missions. The way to cure a sick, selfish church is to get it interested in the business for which it was created. The way to take the church's eyes off itself is to get it absorbed in a world campaign. The way to make it forget its own aches and pains is to stimulate its sympathies with a vision of world need. The way to quicken the pulse and thicken the blood of a sick church is to engage it in activities which call into play all the normal functions of the church. The

way to warm up a cold church is to fire it with a world passion. The way to heal the divisions of a sour and schismatic church is to unite it in a service where it has unbroken fellowship with the world Redeemer.

It is a significant fact that our Lord's promise of spiritual power and the command to world service are linked together. With one breath the risen Christ said to His disciples: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," and with the next breath He said: "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Is not the inference unavoidable? The secret of the acquisition of spiritual power is in the carrying out of the great commission. The church which declines to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature can not claim the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The church forfeits its spiritual assets when it turns its back on its world task. Forfeiting its spiritual assets, it heads straight to the hospital and becomes a candidate for the dispensary. Refusing to be a missionary church, it divorces itself from all the conditions of vigor and health. That the relation of spiritual power and missionary activity as set forth in Christ's ascension promise is not an arbitrary one is proven by the actual experience of the Church. Many a church has been not only toned up and rejuvenated, but literally raised from the dead, by a baptism of missionary fervor. There is nothing better for the Church at home than to get it profoundly enlisted in the work abroad. A church is bound to drop its provincialism when it be-

comes really cosmopolitan. It is likely to forget its own petty aches when it becomes a tender nurse, ministering to the wounds and woes of a sin-sick world.

An old Puritan divine tells how his sympathies were taxed and his time and energies exhausted in efforts to comfort his flock. Wherever he went, it was a tale of woe. Everybody seemed to be afflicted with trials and tribulations. Finally, he heard of something called foreign missions, and he determined to try it on his congregation. He declares that it worked like magic. Lamentations ceased, trials and tribulations were forgotten, until at last, instead of his having to comfort his people, they began to comfort him.

Any pastor who really tries the missionary cure on a sick church will find that it works. It takes the church's mind off itself. It substitutes hope and expectation for introspection. It sets the machinery of the church to its legitimate work in producing spiritual results, and so saves it from grinding in on itself. It employs the energies of the church in a sane and Scriptural way, and so prevents fatty degeneration of the ecclesiastical tissues.

The Church of Christ was built for a world task. It has a world message and world resources. It confronts world need. It is summoned both from heaven and earth by a world call. It preaches a world Savior. For it to retire into anything less than a world career is, therefore, its supreme peril.

The Treatment Administered

How is the remedy which is to effect the cure to be administered?

How is a sick church to be enlisted in the missionary enterprise?

Some remedies must be taken internally. It is so with missions. *The people must be informed.* Many a church is unmissionary because the members of that church do not know any better. Their congregational information stops with first aid to the injured. Their leadership lacks missionary statesmanship. The church is out of touch with great world movements, and their piety is a backwoods product. The facts of missions must somehow be gotten into the minds and hearts and prayers of the people if the remedy is to have a chance to effect a cure. Mission-study classes must be organized. A circulating missionary library must be gotten under way. Missionary literature must be gotten into the homes of the people. There are many ways of doing it, but it must be done. There must be a definite and persistent missionary propagandum. The pastor and church-officers must promote this. In doing so, they will find that they are improving their own equipment, for they will become themselves the beneficiaries of their campaign.

It is not enough to exhort a sick man to be sound, neither will it go far to exhort a sick church to missionary enthusiasm. A fire must have fuel, and "facts are the fuel that feed the fires of missionary zeal."

The brain of the church must be packed with missionary ideas, if the blood is to be enriched with missionary corpuscles. The heart must be charged with missionary convictions, if the energies are to be occupied in missionary activities. It is

well-nigh a waste of time to take a collection for missions in a church where the people are ignorant of the progress of Christ's Kingdom in mission fields; or to preach a sermon on missions to a church whose keenest interest is pew-rents.

The start of this educational work may be a little hard, but as the people begin to learn, their interest will develop rapidly. There is no more fascinating story than this of modern missions. God's greatest miracles are these. He is working under our very eyes, but there are still eyes that are holden so that they do not see.

Dr. Egbert Watson Smith, one of the Foreign Mission secretaries of the Southern Presbyterian Church, has culled from his recent mail statements of missionaries, showing the progress of the work in their respective fields. Each statement is from a different source, and represents a distinct phase of the work.

It is not possible for a Christian to come face to face with such facts as these statements reveal, and remain indifferent.

Sanitary conditions are also needed. Sunshine and good air fight disease. A sick church must be given the right atmosphere. A Christian church should live and move and have its being in a missionary atmosphere. The preacher must create this. He can do something in this direction by occasional sermons on foreign missions, but he can do far more by giving to all his sermons and prayers the missionary outlook. It is not always necessary to say the words. The attitude is the main thing. Let the preacher feel that he

is a citizen of the world at large, and he can not keep internationalism out of his message. Let him be convinced that the Bible is a missionary book, the church a missionary society, Christianity a missionary religion, and himself a missionary messenger, and it will be impossible for him to preach without his people feeling the tug of the ends of the earth.

One thing more remains, if a thorough and permanent cure is to be effected. First, a prescription—the facts of missions; second, sanitary conditions—a missionary atmosphere; and third, exercise—missionary activities.

The gifts and energies of the church must be enlisted in the maintenance of missionary work. This should be done in a systematic way. Churches, or groups of individuals or individuals, should be encouraged to assume definite missionary obligations. The support of missionaries, or shares in a mission station, or the care of an entire station, may be undertaken. Anything is good that gets the church into action, and keeps it in action doing the right thing.

Information without activities may be as disastrous to a church as feeding without exercise to an individual. The missionary treatment for a sick church has a gymnasium as well as a breakfast-room. It has a program of work as well as a schedule of study. If both are followed, we may count on a complete recovery.

Therefore, foreign missions is as essential to the Christian as it is to the non-Christian world. It is as much the salvation of the church at home as it is the hope of lands whose torch is still unlit.