

Church Increase

(No. 2692)

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 18, 1881.

"The children which you shall have, after you have lost the other, shall say again in your ears, The place is too small for me: give me a place that I may dwell. Then you will say in your heart, Who has begotten these for me, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?" [Isaiah 49:20,21](#).

MEN who have no Grace in their hearts despise the Church of God. Those who have only a little Grace have but slight sympathy with her condition. Men who have great Grace and are conscious of having received much mercy from God have great sympathy with the Church of God, and a deep regard for her. You remember how David, in that memorable penitential Psalm, the 51st, after he had poured out his whole soul in pleading for mercy and forgiveness for himself, concluded his prayer by saying, "Do good in Your good pleasure unto Zion: build You the walls of Jerusalem." In like manner, those who have needed mercy, have pleaded for mercy and have received much mercy, are usually those who are most anxious that the people of God should be happy, that the cause of God should prosper, that the Truth of God should speedily overthrow error and that the Christ of God should be exalted and glorified in the earth.

I do not expect to say anything upon this subject which will interest those who have no love for the Church of God, but those who belong to her and who are spending their lives to promote her welfare because she is the bride of Christ, will, I trust, find something in what I say which will interest and perhaps encourage them. I shall come at once to the text and notice that, first, we must expect a measure of decrease in the Church But then, secondly, we may expect a great increase in the Church And, thirdly, from what this text has to say upon that subject and also for other reasons, we ought to be encouraged to seek the increase of the Church of God.

I. First, then, dear Friends, THERE IS A DECREASE GOING ON IN THE CHURCH OF GOD ON EARTH.

Zion is represented here as mourning for the children that she had lost. The Jewish Church in the olden times saw her sons and daughters slain with the sword, or carried away captive. Afterwards, she saw the great majority of the nation refusing Christ and turning away from Him—and thus the Jewish Church was diminished and brought very low. The same thing has happened in many other cases and I am going to apply the text to ourselves

and our own churches. We must naturally expect to see, in each separate church of Jesus Christ, a certain process and measure of decrease.

For, first, some are being drafted from us to supply the choirs of Heaven with fresh musicians. That is a happy source of loss which we would not stop if we could! Perhaps, in the case of each sheaf that is gathered into the heavenly garner, there are some who would gladly detain it, to the loss of that particular sheaf, and also to the loss of the great Husbandman. When we speak as we ought concerning those who are thus taken Home, we thank God that when the shocks of corn are fully ripe, they are no longer left in the field to suffer through the falling showers or the blighting mildew, but they are carried away to their proper place in the garner of God!

Therefore, Beloved, bury not the saints with dolorous music, but sing Psalms of praise as you bear them to the grave. I like the old Puritan style of funeral. The body of the Believer was borne to the tomb upon men's shoulders and the surviving friends sang Psalms and hymns as they marched along. Their faith taught them that they had no need to sorrow as those that are without hope, so they took care to always mingle the music of a joyful faith with the tears that they shed

over the departure of those who had fallen asleep in Christ. So let it always be with us. As star by star descends below the horizon of earth, it shines far more brightly in the skies above! Should not Jesus have His own? Is it not still His prayer, "Father, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My Glory"? Should we wish to detain them from their Lord's embrace, or rob the Master of the satisfaction of receiving Home His loved ones? No, certainly not! That source of decrease has lately taken away some of the godliest and most gracious of ministers. Some of the officers of the Church who seemed to be its pillars, have been removed, and others, less known, but equally gracious, have also been missed from our midst. So must it continue to be—therefore, let us not rebel against the blessed necessity. Who among us would wish to alter the Lord's arrangement? No, let this form of decrease still go on and let the Church on earth be the nursery for the Church above! Let it be the school, the place of education, the training-ground, until the children shall come of age and enter upon their inheritance fully prepared to enjoy it to the praise and glory of their Lord!

Each separate church will also have a measure of decrease through the removal of God's servants from one place to another. This is a circumstance which is sometimes much regretted, but I think it should not be so. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Often, the removal of a Christian out of a particular place is in order that he may be more helpful to another community than he is in his present position. I have frequently seen Brothers and Sisters who were just ordinary members of this Church—good, useful people—but they did not attain to any very great prominence. Yet, in another place they have been exceedingly useful. I go into the country to preach and the deacon shakes hands

with me. And as I look at him, I say, "Ah, I remember you." "Well, Sir," he replies, "I moved away from London some years ago and the Lord has been pleased to put me here, so that I may help this little cause. It has been strengthened, I hope, by my coming." And I find the Brother greatly developed by being transplanted. He is where the trees do not stand so thickly together as they do here, and he grows all the better for the change.

Sometimes, under the shadow of some great tree, there is a large number of saplings, and they grow pretty well. But, by-and-by, the big tree is cut down and it is not altogether a loss—for then the minor trees, that were beneath it, begin to develop and to become strong forest trees themselves. So is it, sometimes, that men are overshadowed in one position, and their removal is for their own development. On the whole, it is a gain to the Church of God for certain churches to lose some of their members. Do not, therefore, always regret this source of decrease. For my part, I thank God for the many whom we lose by emigration. I am glad that some friends have gone to America. What would the United States have been, at this moment, if it had not been for "the men of the Mayflowef in the olden times, and the many pilgrim fathers and pilgrim sons and daughters who have since gone across the Atlantic to be as salt in that part of the earth?"

Look still further away to Australia, so largely peopled by those who are of our race. What a mercy that it is so! Would you have those lands given up to Romanism, or to Mohammedanism, or to Paganism? God forbid! Salt ought not to be kept in a box—it is meant to be rubbed into the meat—and Christians are intended to be scattered all over the carcass of this world, to salt it all, and act with purifying and preserving power in every place! Let not the members of any one church, therefore, sit down and sigh, and cry, because their fellow members are removed. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, so try to catch some more! If your Brothers and Sisters are gone where they can be more useful, God speed them! Freely and cheerfully let them go! A heart that should try to keep all the blood within itself would be no source of life to the body—no, it could not itself live—but the heart that continually pumps in the blood and then pumps it out again is the one that is serving its proper purpose.

That is what churches should do—let them not be stingy, but rather lavish in the cause of God. Depend upon it, if we decrease in numbers because our friends depart to other spheres of service for the Savior, it is not a thing to weep over! We must try to get in some new members to take their places and may God prosper the endeavor!

But there is another source of decrease over which we must greatly grieve, and that is the backsliding of many professors. Over this decrease I mourn even more than over another, grievous as that is, namely, the sifting process by which the chaff is removed from the wheat. For when the saints backslide, they are still God's people, although their power for good, their influence, their help to the Church of God is gone until they are brought back—and that is very lamentable. Churches lose much, if not in number, yet certainly in strength, in

fever, in power of prayer, by the declining in Grace of some who once ran well, but who have been hindered. Pray much, dear Friends, that God would keep all who are members with us from growing cold. May they have their first love restored, if it is at all declining, and may they have much

more than that, for it is not much to stay just as we were when we were spiritually made alive—we ought to "grow in Grace." Our first love should be like the kindling of the fire when, perhaps, there are shavings or straw set alight, and it burns apparently more fiercely than it does afterwards. Yet, later on in the Christian life, there ought to be a steady flame like the glow of the coals when they are turned in the grate to one solid ruby. That steady glow of permanent love to the Lord Jesus Christ is what we should seek after—but we do not see it in some of our members. Then, by-and-by, they cease their attendance at the Communion Table and they are missing from various forms of Christian work and service—and so the church has ineffective members and thus it has to regret a real decrease.

As for that other decrease over which we mourn—the sifting by which the chaff is separated from the wheat—how sadly true it still is, as the beloved Apostle wrote, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." There is a separating process always going on in the professing church and the most effectual fan of all is a faithful ministry. After a while, some of our hearers do not like what we say—it is too personal, too cutting, too searching. They want to listen to that kind of preaching which will allow them to go on comfortably in their sins and to keep up a name to live even while they are dead.

How constantly our Lord's teaching kept on sifting His disciples! After one of His utterances concerning human inability apart from Divine Grace, we read, "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." As He continually brought out some of the deeper Truths of God as His disciples were able to bear them, there were certain of the mixed multitude that had joined with His followers who went off this way and that way. So is it always—and so must it be under the faithful preaching of the Word—and you must not be astonished or grieved when it is so. It is a gain to any church to lose such members as these, for the mixed multitude usually falls a-lusting as it did in the olden times. Half the sin in the camp in the wilderness came not from the children of Israel, but from the riff-raff and rabble that went up out of Egypt with them—and that were mingled among them to their hurt.

Do not, dear Friends, ever believe that the true saints of God can finally turn away from Him and be lost. There was a notable sermon preached, last Sunday, in St. Paul's Cathedral, against the perseverance of the saints. Did you notice why it was preached and the whole tone and tenor of it? It was this—if the saints shall finally persevere, why, then, we do not need "the sacraments." Ah, that is the great secret! Calvinism is the death of priest-craft!

Calvinism is the end of "sacraments" and, hence, "sacraments" must be cried up and God's everlasting love must be proved to be mutable, and the Covenant to be founded on an "if and an "an," and the Christ of God is, after all, to be just a toy for "priests" to play with! The preacher, perhaps unintentionally, let the cat out of the bag—"the sacraments" must be cried up, "the priests" must be kept up and everything else must go!

But we do not believe any such teaching as that! We still hold to it that when Christ gives to His sheep, eternal life, they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hands. Yet there are some that come in among His sheep that are only goats or wolves in sheep's clothing and, after a time, these depart and the church thus apparently decreases. But so it must be to the end, even as Judas went to his own place, yet the Apostles did not really lose by his departure. They were rather the gainers thereby and, as those who are not true converts go out from her, the church need not lament except for their sakes—certainly, not for her own!

I have brought this subject forward because I may be addressing some Brothers and Sisters who see the tide running out in their churches, and they are very sad as they watch the ebb. I have not seen much of that sort of thing, myself, but the least ebb troubles me and I go before God in prayer about it. I cannot bear to lose one of the members of my church, or to see one of them turn aside from the company of the faithful. Yet there is another side to this picture and we must not shut our eyes to it.

II. So I ask you now to consider with me the second part of our subject. That is, THERE IS AN INCREASE TO BE EXPECTED IN THE CHURCH OF GOD. There are new converts yet to come in, as says my text—these children which Zion is to have, after she has lost the others.

And, Brothers and Sisters, these new converts are necessary. No church can be healthy without the constant infusion of fresh blood. Unless there are new converts, you cannot see the church built up. They often help to keep the old members warm and zealous. How I like, at a Prayer Meeting, to hear a Brother pray for the first time! I am not greatly grieved even if he breaks down, for it is the best kind of praying in the world when a man breaks down. Such an incident

puts a sense of reality into the whole meeting. Our good old friends, who cannot break down, but must inevitably run on till the winding was all worked out, are not always the most edifying to us. But those who, from very passion of earnestness, cannot find words in which to express their feelings, and so come to a pause with a sigh or groan, or a flood of tears, often do us the most good. The young converts are also quick in inventing new ways of usefulness and they venture to do things which some consider "imprudent." Oh, how I love that word, "imprudent," in such a connection! I like "imprudent" young people. The more "imprudent" they are, in the cause of God in the judgment of stolid, cold-hearted professors, the more I rejoice in them! Imprudence which believes in God and dares to do

exploits in His strength is far preferable to that prudence which has no faith and is, therefore, a poor, dead, useless thing.

So you see that the church needs new converts and, therefore, she ought to have every preparation for their reception. There should always be an arrangement in every church to afford a welcome to the coming ones. Everything should be in readiness for the reception of the newborn converts. They should scarcely have to ask for admission and, certainly, as soon as they come, they should see that it is the church's joy to welcome them. Hence we should always be on the lookout for them. We ought to look for new converts every Sunday. I do not think any sermon ought to be preached without each one of you Christian people saying, "I wonder whether God has blessed the message to this stranger who has been sitting next to me? I will put a gentle question to him and see if I can find out." I have known some hearers to be annoyed at such a question being put to them by an earnest Brother. Do not be annoyed, dear Friend, if you can help it, because you are very likely to be treated in that way again! It is our custom to do it here, so you will have to put up with it. And the only way to get over the annoyance is to give your heart to Christ and settle the matter once and for all! Then, the next time you come here, you will not be asked the question because they will know who you are, for they will recognize your happy face—or if anyone else should ask you the question, you will give such a glad answer to it that you two will rejoice together!

We expect people to be converted when they come here. So much is this the case that I know a friend, who came to take a sitting—I will not point it out, but I know just where he is now occupying it—and he said that he must see me before he took the sitting. He said, "I understand that if I take a sitting here, you will expect me to be converted." I said, "Oh, yes, I do expect that." "Well," he replied, "I cannot guarantee that." "No, my good man," I answered, "I know you cannot, but you use the word 'expect' in a different sense from what I do. I hope you will be converted through coming here—that is what I mean." "Oh," he said, "I hope so, too." And that is just what happened! When people come to the House of God and they expect to be saved, and we expect it, too, it is tolerably certain that they will be converted before long! We may rejoice and bless God if you live in an atmosphere of holy expectancy! Where the great door stands wide open for the prodigal son to come back—where all in the house are on the watch for his return, where they keep on sending letters to him to ask him to come home—is there not a good hope that such a wanderer will, indeed, return, and that the great Father will be made glad?

Churches need converts and they should be on the lookout for them, and all who love the Lord should labor earnestly on their behalf. All of us who believe in Jesus should seek, as God helps us according to our individual talent, to bring others to the dear Savior's feet. If we do this, we shall often be made to remember that all true conversion comes from God alone. There is no possibility of converting anybody by persuasion, by logic, by rhetoric, or anything of the sort. It is the work of God, and the work of God, alone! And though He uses

instrumentality in almost every case, yet He will not use that instrumentality which thinks itself sufficient for the work. He will make us know that we are nothing— and then He will make everything of us. He does not mind how much He makes of His servants when all that He does for them brings the more glory to His own name, and they do not, even with their little finger, touch the honor of it, or wish to do so.

When we come to that point, and we are all pleading and laboring for an increase to the church, it will come. And when it comes, it is probable that we shall be astonished at the number of those who come. "The children which you shall have, after you have lost the other, shall say again in your ears, The place is too small for me: give me a place that I may dwell." Or, to quote another text, the church shall say, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" I wish I could put it into the heads of some Christian people that when there are large additions to a church, the new members are not necessarily at all inferior to those who come in by slow degrees and in small numbers. My own solemn impression is that it is more probably a work of God in conversion when there are many than when there are but

few. For, look, when there are few converts, the tendency of human nature is to encourage as many as possible to come forward and, in the process, to bring some who, if more caution had been used, and more true judgment exercised, might have been bidden to stand back for a while. The tendency of the minister and of everybody else is to try to bring in some when but few are being converted—and the probability is that they will not, all of them, prove to be true Christians. But when there are a great many candidates coming forward, I can vouch for it that we become even more earnest than usual not to receive any but those who are, as far as we can judge, truly converted! Every elder is doubly watchful at such a time and everybody tries, if possible, to prevent an enthusiasm which might deceive people into the notion of their being Christians when they are not. We feel that we can afford, as it were, to use many sieves and strainers, many tests by which to try whether they really are the children of God or not—whether they are resolved and determined that they will follow Christ at all hazards.

I say not this as though I would depreciate the work of God in the conversion of ones, twos and threes. No, no! I bless God for them, but I want to make it clear that when great numbers of converts come, it is wrong of people, for that reason, to think that it is not the work of God. I would, on the contrary, conclude that it is the work of God when many are saved at one time. If Peter, when he preached on the day of Pentecost, had been the means of the conversion of half-a-dozen of his hearers, it would have been a thing for which to praise God, and no one ought to have suspected the genuineness of the half dozen. But, as Peter's ministry was blessed of God to three thousand, there was not any more reason to say that there was one too many! Remember, also, dear Friends, that they were all baptized before night and the whole of the three thousand were received into the church that same

day. Many critics might have said, "Oh, dear, there is far too much excitement!" Are you afraid of excitement, Brother? You have excitement in political affairs, you have excitement in business matters, you have excitement in your family.

What excitement there was in your house when but one little stranger came there and shall there be no excitement in the Church of God when souls are born there? Why, surely we may be permitted to share in a Divine excitement, for there is an excitement in Heaven! Our Lord Jesus has told us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." There was considerable excitement when the prodigal son came home—it was so great that they killed the fatted calf and had a festival of joy. There was holy merriment in the house—it was the scene of intense excitement and I think, within reasonable bounds—within such bounds as true reason would dictate from the great events that are happening! The conversion of a soul is the grandest event in human history next to the Redemption—there must be a blessed excitement among the people of God!

Dear Friends, expect great numbers of sinners to be converted by the proclamation of the Gospel! I remember praying, when I went to preach in the great shed at Bedford, belonging to Mr. Howard, the plow maker, that God would be pleased to bring at least some few souls to Himself by that service. Dear old Mr. Howard, a Wesleyan friend who has since gone Home to Heaven, kept on saying, "Amen, Amen, Amen" while I was praying. but he did not say, "Amen," to that particular petition. When I went home to the house, he said to me, "I joined with you in all your prayer except when you asked that God would at least convert a few people. Why, my dear Friend," he said, "did you not pray that God would convert every soul there?" I said, "I will, tonight, Mr. Howard. I am rebuked by what you have said." We do not ask enough of God! Open your mouth wide and He will fill it. Oh, that we would open our mouths wide in large requests to God that He would bring in the converts by hundreds of thousands to the glory of His holy name!

The next thing that was a subject for astonishment to Zion was, how those converts came to be born at all She inquired, in the language of the text, "Who has begotten these for me?" The reason was that she did not feel as if she had any power to bring forth all these. "Why," she said, "I have been in a truly sad state. 'I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro.' How did it ever happen that all these should be my children?" Ah, Brothers, sometimes we ask the same question!

Yesterday, [Wednesday, August 17, 1881] I had a joyous day—all the bells of my heart rang! While many of you have been away at the seaside, I thought there was a little difference in the numbers coming to hear. And when I sat to see inquirers, there did not seem to be quite as many as usual coming forward and I was troubled about it. But yesterday I had so many sheaves that the cart was loaded with them, and my helpers came to me, every now and then, and said, "What a joyful day!" I do not know whether all the friends whom I saw yesterday are here, but they delighted my soul

with the stories they told me of what the Grace of God had done for them. I bless God and take courage as I see another great slice cut out of the kingdom of Satan and transferred to the Kingdom of Christ!

Quite a number of people who had never known the Lord, or anything about Him—outsiders altogether—had dropped in here and heard the Word—and found Christ! And they kept on coming, hour after hour, till I was weary with the blessed task of speaking to them, one by one, about their souls. And as I went home I kept saying to myself, "How has all this come about?"—because I have often felt so dull and heavy when I have been preaching. "Who has begotten these for me?"

And, dear Friends, if God blesses you in your Sunday school classes, you also will say, "However has this come about? What could I have said that could have brought my scholars to Christ?" If the Lord shall bless you much, my dear Brother, in your preaching, you will more and more marvel that He should ever use such a poor tool as you are. I do not mean that you are a worse tool than I am, for I feel that I am a still poorer instrument than you are, but I often wonder that God uses me as He does, and I think you will also marvel that He uses you. When the church has grown feeble, when she has seemed to have no hope that God should bless her, but He then comes and visits her, and a multitude of converts is suddenly brought forth, she may well say, "Who has begotten these for me, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro?" Take comfort then, Beloved, from the fact that whatever the decreases in the church may be, we may also expect increase—and in their number, the converts will surprise us—and in their being converted at all, we shall greatly marvel!

But what Zion wondered at next was, how they had been nurtured, for she says, "Who has brought these up?" They were not merely born, but they had been brought up! And we also meet with persons who come forward to tell us that they are converted to Christ—and they are by no means fools. No, but when we begin to question them concerning the things of God, they answer us sensibly and intelligently. They do not need us to lead them like little children and to put the words into their mouth, for they know what to say—yet some of them have only been converted about a month and they have not been used to hearing the Gospel—but since they have heard it, they seem to have sucked it in like Gideon's fleece drank in the dew! Many doctors of divinity make a dreadful muddle of their theology, but these dear converts are as clear as possible upon what they believe. They have it all at their fingertips and they can tell what, "Covenant," means, and what, "Substitution," means, and what, "Regeneration," means.

We say, "Who has brought these up?" It seems so amazing to us! Has it not often been so to you, also, dear Friends? Yet, all the while we have been forgetting the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and we have said, "Why, my poor teaching could not have taught them all this." No, nor has it taught them all this. There is a higher Teacher than the best of ministers, there

is a better Teacher than the most earnest and the most advanced of Christians—and He still fulfils that gracious promise, "All your children shall be taught of the Lord."

A further cause of wonder was the sudden appearance of this great increase. Zion inquires, "These, where had they been?" Ah, that is just what I thought and said last night—and that is why I took this text, for it kept coming to my mind, "These, where had they been?" Some of them I had seen here forever so long, but others of them I had never seen at all, except on two or three Thursday nights lately I noticed them and, perhaps, at one or two Prayer Meetings. And I began to think that there was something good coming to pass with them, or else they would not have come. So I kept saying to myself, as I went home, "These, where had they been?" A month ago, I could not have found them. "These, where had they been?" They have sprung up and come forward all of a sudden through the blessed working of the Spirit of God! "These, where had they been?" Shall I tell you where they had been? Some of them had been in godly families, with fathers and mothers praying for them. No wonder that they came to close in with Christ! Some of them had been in the Sunday school, in classes where Brothers and Sisters love their children and never rest till they bring them to decision for Christ. It is not so very amazing that they should, by-and-by, come forward! "These, where had they been?" Well, they had been under the influence of Christian wives, Christian children, sometimes Christian brothers and sisters—and so, at last, the gracious influence took effect upon them, by the power of God's Spirit, and out they came! Thank God that there are great numbers still under those sacred influences, for they are sure to come in due time, and say, "We are on the Lord's side."

Then there were some others. "Where had they been?" Well, they had long been listening to the Gospel, regularly sitting in their pews—and we had heard of them as people who had been attracted by our ministry for 20 years, but who

did not know the Lord. What a blessing it was for them that even after the hardening influence of listening so long to the Gospel had operated upon them—for it has such an influence in some cases—yet, at last, God Himself touched the Rock, and the waters streamed forth! There are some such persons now coming forward to join us in church fellowship—let us pray for all the rest of our fellow worshippers who are unconverted, that they also may come after them.

But there were others whom I saw yesterday about whom I might well ask, "These, where had they been?" On the Lord's-Day, at home in their shirtsleeves. On weeknights, at the theater or the music hall, finding enjoyment in the lowest form of amusement. "Where had they been?" Never troubling church or chapel, some of them scarcely ever entering such an edifice at all! But God, in His Providence, brought them for once to hear the Word and, as one said to me, "I laid hold of something and something laid hold of me, and I shall never part with it, for it will never part with me." This is how it happened with many utterly irreligious people—those who had no fear or thought of God. And there were some still worse,

who had gone into sin, and transgression, and crime—but they had been induced by some kind friend to come and listen to the Gospel, so there they were to tell of "free Grace and dying love," and to testify what Infinite Mercy had done for them!

"These, where had they been?" Well, I cannot tell you where they had all been. Some had been at death's dark door, buried in sorrow and in sin, in poverty and in vice. Others, though they were not apparently so bad as these, were, notwithstanding, quite as much lost, for they were in the dark wood of self-righteousness, boasting that they were not as other men, and that they were as good as they ought to be, and so deceiving themselves. Now, it is just as much a marvel of mercy for God to save a self-righteous man as it is for Him to save a drunk or a harlot, and it takes as much of the almighty Grace of God to tear a man away from his own righteousness as to pull him away from his sin. Oh, the wonders of redeeming love that out of every place can fetch its thousands upon thousands to make the Church of God glad, and to cry in sweet surprise, "These, where had they been?"

III. I have no time to dwell on the third point, further than just to say that ALL THINGS SHOULD ENCOURAGE

THIS CHURCH—and the same rule applies to every church that God blesses—TO SEEK LARGER INCREASE.

For, first, dear Brothers and Sisters, there is the same power to convert ten thousand as there is to convert one. The Lord, who brought you in, can bring thousands in! And if He adds to our Church some hundreds now and then, why should He not be constantly doing it? His arm is not shortened and He is still ready to bless us.

Besides, we ought to be encouraged by the fact that the converts come in answer to prayer. Notice that these additions to our Church have come just when we have been praying more than ever. Every Thursday night, before the service, there is a Prayer Meeting at 6 o'clock, in which a few friends gather to pray especially that their Pastor may be helped to preach. And tonight I suppose there were three or four hundred gathered together with that objective, and it is real praying, let me tell you—short, deep, earnest cries to God for a blessing—and the preacher cannot help preaching when he is prayed for like that! As that Prayer Meeting has increased in intensity and power, a blessing has already begun to come! Some of us are conscious of it—we cannot help seeing it. Is it possible for me not to believe in prayer? Can I deny that there is such a thing as the electric fluid when I see a tower shivered by a lightning flash? If I were fool enough, I could deny that, but I never could be such a fool as to deny the power of prayer which I see everyday exhibited in all sorts of things, and all sorts of ways! Very largely, in proportion as we pray, God blesses the Word. It has been so for years and they who have been among us, and know, can bear witness that this is an unexaggerated statement of fact. Well, then, if that is so, let us pray! If prayer can be the means of bringing souls to Christ, let there be no stint in that matter!

And, further, since the converts come from all sorts of places, let us carry the Gospel into all sorts of places. There is not any part of London, however bad it may be, where God may not have an elect soul in it. Go after him, then! Down in the deepest kennel, in the worst court, in the filthiest houses, following the vilest occupation, there may be some whom God in mercy means to bless through you—so go after them, and go after them at once! You can never tell where God's chosen ones are. "These, where had they been?" is the question concerning those who have come to Him. And where they were, there are others—

"How many sheep are straying,
Lost from the Savior's fold?
Upon the lonely mountain,
They shiver with the cold
Within the tangled thickets,

Where poison vines do creep,

And over rocky ledges,

Wander the poor lost sheep.

Oh, come let us go and find them!

In the paths of death they roam—

At the close of the day

'Twill be sweet to say—

I have brought some lost ones home. What a little thing God often blesses to save a soul—a word from a sister—a little note from a Christian woman— half a word in these aisles! A man, who was never before spoken to about his soul, had not been pleaded with for five minutes before he came under conviction of sin—and he soon found the Savior. The very smallest thing has been made the means of bringing souls to Christ! Will you not, dear Friends, make use of those little things? Will you not use everything? Will you not be willing to spend and be spent for Christ in this blessed work of soul-saving? "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not what shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

Go on, dear Brothers and Sisters, to cry mightily to God, and to labor earnestly for Him, till we shall, in glad surprise, bless and magnify His Grace that multitudes are brought to Him, and that His name is made to be yet more renowned! Let us constantly have your prayers at home as well as here, and the Lord be with you all! Amen.