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Towards Extending The Influence Of The Church

BY STEPHEN SCHOFIELD

While a certain minister was preparing a sermon he was prompted to do an astonishing thing. "Grace" was the title and he had been collecting notes about it for some time. As he sat in his study arranging his notes on this particular evening, he became so rapt in them and his thoughts so excited, that he couldn't sit down any longer. Seizing his hat, he strode out of the house and into the street—and accosted the first person he met, enquiring: "Do you know what 'grace' is?"

Is it any wonder that that man was one of the most influential churchmen of his generation; that he enraptured almost every audience; and that when he delivered in the Yale university chapel, students jammed every pew?

"I have no secret," said Dwight Moody, "when I choose a subject, I write the name of it on an envelope. I have many such envelopes. If I read or hear anything that will throw light on that subject, I write it down and slip it into the envelope. Perhaps I let it lie for a year or more. When I want a new sermon, I take everything that has been accumulating. Between what I find and the result of my own study, I have material enough. Then, all the time I am going over my sermons, deleting and adding."

Is that a good system? Ah, yes, Rev. Minister may say, but I'm vice-president of one society and chairman of another. I have meetings—boring, some of them—but I'm obliged to attend. I have sick calls to make, two sermons a week to prepare, births, weddings, funerals to officiate. And besides, my wife likes to see me occasionally.

Quite so. But let's consider a moment. What did you do with those five minutes spent while shaving this morning? When you had to trudge through Moneta were you considering how to best illustrate Christ's love for children, or that pesky landlord? And when, on a Schumacher bus, with a sleepish smile you politely relieved that pretty girl's legs and stood on your own for nearly half an hour—was your notebook in your left hand or in your left hand desk drawer. When compelled to wait fully 15 minutes to have a molar drilled, did you spend them skimming The Advance or did you play how to explain "Blessed are the meek" to the man on the street?

Time? Clearly I recall Canon Allan Shatford saying: "When a man says he hasn't time enough, what he means is that he hasn't inclination enough." Personally, I find it convenient to carry a few pages torn from a cheap edition in my wallet. Thus I read a large dictionary page for page, while waiting for street cars and in street cars and elevators and at lunch counters, in three weeks. When a man says he hasn't time, he means he doesn't really want to do it. On the other hand, a daughter's wedding one afternoon, and a mother-in-law's funeral on another, is more than likely to mean two afternoons off.

"I have known him to spend hours," says Herndon, "deciding the best way of three to express an idea." To consider the means alone—hours! How did he find them? He was a President. Insufficient time to prepare a sermon? Time? My dear Sir, you have all the time there is. You have 24 hours a day. It is a question of using it, not of finding it.

A lady of the vanishing race, told me of the most impressive sermon she had ever heard. It was in Hamilton and she said he was so in earnest that without realizing what he was doing, he left the pulpit and delivered from the aisle for a while, and later hurried up the steps to continue. "He was so in earnest." The power of it is astonishing.

Are there many who speak in earnest? Very many? There are indeed. Very many. I remember one very well. He was stressing the influence of the church. "Boys fathers often approached me," he said, "pleading that I might appeal in court on behalf of their sons. . . . now I conduct a Bible class in my church. Have any of their fathers had to appeal to me? Never once," he vowed, his eyes moist and his voice thick with feeling. "Not once," he repeated, his forefinger aloft and rigid. Is it amazing that not one of us dared doze or a moment, that there was only room for five or six more in the whole church? Was he bombastic, flouting oratory or drama? Not in the least. He was in real earnest and that is enough.

A sermon must be prepared well, affirms Rev. R. Matthieu, of St. Anthony's Cathedral. "One must study hard." Suppose you consider a theme while walking home. The

next day you forget it entirely. But, one night, just as you are brushing your teeth, a thought occurs to you—oh, a really choice one—and into an envelope it goes. A week later you read something in The Advance. "No," you say, "he's wrong about that, but—" and down goes another note. An unshaven mucker intrudes one evening and a good example strikes you. In the morning the same thing seems silly. "Of course it is, how absurd. A friend says something to you. You are shaving again and just as the blade rounds your chin, "By Jove, that's a good one—apt," you say, and into the envelope it goes. You become pervaded with the topic. It grips you. You take it by the scruff of the neck. And thus derive thoughts that sing and lift the hearts of men.

Suppose you are to appeal for the poor. Why not hire a room and spend one or two nights in the slums. If you saw a bit of squalor, wouldn't it help you to speak well? Would it? It did to me. I did it for a week. It won't cost you much (\$2.50 a week). Why not do anything that may lend light to your sermon—induce a soldier to talk to you for half an hour, take a salesgirl out to lunch, ask a street-cleaner what he thinks about church-ness. Would your congregation care to hear their impressions? Personal experience has a great deal to do with the effect of a sermon," avers The Rt. Rev. R. J. Reardon. "Good sermons proceed from acquaintance with the needs of the people," adds Rabbi Irving Margolies.

Last Saturday afternoon a minister told me that he could never apply himself with full reverence at funerals—until he lost his father. After hearing the late Canon Shatford on "Death," one of my close friends said to me: "You know, Steve, I felt like dying right then and there."

- A test—
- (1) My very first remark, is it interesting, preferably casual, but interesting?
 - (2) Am I going to begin with something directly from the Bible 2,000 years ago, or am I going to begin with something directly from the people yesterday afternoon?
 - (3) Are my examples apt and palpable?
 - (4) I know I make my remarks for His sake; but when I climb those steps am I going to give just "another sermon," or does this one really matter?
 - (5) "Personal work and preaching are twain," says Harry Emerson Fosdick. Does my sermon march along with the needs of the people?
 - (6) Is it a one-man aspect throughout, or do I interject views likely to be felt, from time to time, by the congregation?
 - (7) Should I try to avoid being either caustic or didactic?
 - (8) The finish—is it dangling or terse?

I dropped in to see a minister one Saturday afternoon last summer. He was finishing a sermon he had prepared during the week (what was Mr. Businessman probably doing at this moment on a Saturday afternoon?). Meanwhile I found this minister plugging at his sermon. Good work. I called on another one Saturday night (where is Mr. Businessman now?), and he was giving his sermon, as he put it, "another lick." I respect him too.

But can a vital sermon be given once or twice a week? I asked this question to the Rt. Rev. Sir Francis Heathcote of Vancouver. "Can't be done," he answered. Channing Pollock told me it couldn't be done. He spent four or six weeks preparing each sermon. Perhaps that is why he filled churches. Even a Burke or a Russell Conwell could hardly have delivered 50 or 100 different and vital addresses each year. Fosdick? Yes, but he has others working for him, and, even so, he says he spends an hour in preparation for every minute in the pulpit. One hour per pulpit-minute—fancy!

What is the answer? Rabbi Irving Margolies suggests that, when a man has struggled long to turn out a fine sermon, "Why not let him itinerate; let more people be exposed to it."

Perhaps that would help. Canon Knox Little, of Canterbury, once remarked that no one ever got the real message out of a sermon until he had delivered it at least half a dozen times.

A well-known school principal once had barely launched into a Sunday sermon when one of the younger masters approached the pulpit and interjected with a question. The principal stopped, considered the question, and answered aloud. The master stood firm and further advanced his view. The principal waited patiently and then responded.

In The Days When The Porcupine Was Young

By G. A. Macdonald

No. 138—A Minstrel Show In 1919

It was Tennyson who wrote: "In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

An old-timer in the Porcupine might say, with equal plausibility, that about this time of year the thoughts of young and old up here turn delightedly to thoughts of minstrel shows.

At the moment, no doubt, many are looking forward to the Kiwanis Minstrel Show to be held in the Palace theatre at Timmins on March 30 and 31st, while others recall with pleasure the Kiwanis Minstrel Show last year. There may be still others whose thoughts go back to the first Kiwanis Minstrel Show on February 13th and 14th, 1924.

Beating Themselves
The first Timmins Kiwanis Minstrel Show was a notable success in every particular, but last year it was confidently stated that the 1949 show would be bigger and better and more enjoyable than the 1924 event. It proved all that, and now the claim is that the 1950 event will surpass any other that has gone before. As to that, time will tell. In the meantime, it would be well for all to get their tickets at once, so they may be in a position to judge.

First Local Minstrel Show
In the early days, travelling troupes put on minstrel shows here, but they need not be counted, as the local events by local talent were much superior in quality to those by the so-called professionals. It is a matter of record that there was at least one minstrel show presented in Timmins five years before the first Kiwanis Minstrel Show of 1925. This event was put on at the New Empire Theatre on March 12th, 1919. It was only part of the evening's programme at the theatre, but the big crowd plainly showed that it was more in the popular fancy than the motion picture that night. The feature was given by the Timmins Specialty Group whose musical talent was undoubted. Later, the Timmins Specialty Group had invitations to visit South Porcupine, Matheson, Iroquois Falls, Cobalt and other centres in this part of the North, and at each place visited they made a decided hit. In all their outside shows they presented a full programme lasting over two hours.

Five Coloured Gentlemen
The Timmins Specialty Group included a number of talented musicians and dancers, all accustomed to appearing before the public. All old-timers will agree with this when they recall the name: Mrs. C. J. Appel, Mrs. J. A. Theriault, Miss Irene Carswell, Miss Laura Brazeau, Miss Mary Downey, Clarence J. Appel, James Geils, M. Downey Sr., Gene Colombo and W. Waterson.

Their gifts entitled them to the name of minstrel, but only the five gentlemen were in black face. As might be expected from the names, these five gentlemen were respectively, American, Scottish, Irish, Italian and English. That fact seems to settle the race question in this part of the North in the early days. That question then was not: "What is your race, your colour or your creed?" but "Are you a good fellow?"

Every boy in that chapel listened as though the top scorer of the N.H.L. was talking. Never had they evinced such interest in Christ and his ways. As one said afterward, he was continually excited as to how the Head could squirm out of each question. It later transpired that the affair was pre-arranged.

What is the tremendous advantage here to the clergyman? He can do it alone. . . . No doubt there are some of you who would say to me, "Well, now, a member of the choir might ask. . . ." This can sound quite natural. It is natural. And it helps remove any trace of blateny or rancous self-assertiveness.

"A sermon should be a living thing, a light within you," avers Rev. J. H. Hunter of South Porcupine. "A common defect in sermons is not enough conviction," declares Rev. W. M. Mustard, of Timmins. "Concerted effort is the only way to put meaning into it," affirms Rev. Michael Brondos, Timmins Lutheran minister.

What would seem to matter most is this: Has the man something to say which he wants to say so badly that it stirs him until he feels urged to convey it, not merely impart with it, but to convey it to Mrs. Murphy in the second row and the snooty-tendring old gentleman in the balcony. A precise definition is ineffable. But it is one of my deepest convictions that this quality attracts and affects more than any other—language, appearance, voice, grace, manner, degrees, learning—all being subservient.

"I find that I must prepare well in advance," adds Mr. Hunter. If it might be mentioned, preparation is thorough, one will not need any notes, and thus avoid looking down or away from his listeners, breaking that precious contact, which helps so much, and is so difficult to maintain any-how. His theme has become so ingrained that he won't need to read, his all being rapt with conveying it. No notes? Suppose he forgets some things he had so painstakingly discovered and arranged. That doesn't matter. Everything he did find will

These minstrels were all good fellows, and put up a first-class good show.

The Scottish End-Man
Mention of race in connection with minstrel shows will at once recall to old-timers still another minstrel show held in the 1920's, when the end-man spoke with such a rolling Scottish burr that it actually added to the effectiveness of the comedy. This end-man was Andrew Downie, selected for the role because of his natural talent as an actor and minstrel. Ordinarily, his Scots tongue was barely noticeable, but at the first rehearsal, as Mickey Downey said, "that tongue stood out like a sore thumb." Some thought that Andy would not be able to take the part of end-man in this account, but he knew better. Instead of vainly attempting to cultivate the slurring voice of the stage Negro, Andy turned on the full force of his Scottish burr. The result was that every time he had a line or two, he stole the show.

The Irish Negro
In the events by the Timmins Specialty Group, however it was an Irishman who took the part of "Mr. Bones," the end-man. The Scotsman was interlocutor, and all the other races raced themselves to give pep and swing to the show. In this part of the programme, the costumes were of check suits that made quite a bit of noise to the dignity of faultless dress attire, with some of the group so ragged that they should have been meek, but actually were the most aggressive of all.

Describing the entertainment at the time, one local man said: "Why that group has everything. They give monologues, dialogues, extempores and decalogues, as if they were professionals.

Dancing A Specialty
The music for the entertainment did much to make the event a success. This was true of the instrumental, as well as the vocal music. C. J. Appel was the manager of the New Empire theatre at the time, and had organized an orchestra that was popular on its own merit. As several of the Specialty Group were members of the orchestra, it is needless to say that the minstrel show had the best music. Nevertheless, there were times in the show when the music was forgotten for the moment because of the interest in the dancing. Among the special dance numbers reference may well be made to the clog dance by Mrs. Appel. This number never failed to rouse the heartiest demand for an encore. The dancing of M. Downey and his daughter, Miss Downey, also had the tendency to bring down the house.

When the "Old Man" Danced
Few old-timers will forget the "Old Man's Dance" by Gene Colombo. It was a work of art and a sample of perfect timing. Though Gene was a young man then, he took the part of an old man to perfection. He was artist enough not to overdo the part. He did not look like a stage "coloured gentleman," but rather like a real old man from one of the southern plantations. A gentleman from Georgia who was on a visit to the camp at the time said: "I'd almost swear that he was a coloured man I knew at home."

Over more trying tasks the clergyman tries, generally speaking, as hard and harder than anyone. Encouragement? Precious little. On the contrary he is faced with flattery and criticism and endless discouragement. But he has an opportunity which can almost nullify these. Confronting him twice every seventh day are many minds. The number varies largely according to his skill and spirit. For 20 or 30 minutes he has them to deal with, to influence and nourish, as best he can. A business man rarely wears such shoes, nor does a lawyer, or an engineer.

When Rev. Robert Norwood was moved to Montreal from his obscure home in Nova Scotia, my grandfather happened to be on a committee seeking a new man for his church in London, Ontario. He induced Mr. Norwood to go to London. Ten years later he was moved to Boston; then to a larger church in Philadelphia; and finally to St. Bartholomew's on Park Avenue in New York. Colossal as it is, he repeatedly filled it. Why? And why was he moved from one place to another? Because he sanctified the vestry? Because his soul was less blemished than others? Because he toiled well, conducted meetings efficiently, and made the most of contacts? Partly perhaps. But I think the main reason was because he spoke with such livid earnestness.

Between Hearst and Moonbeam is there a mightier means of propagating His wishes? "The ability to speak effectively," said William Jennings Bryan, "is an acquirement rather than a gift." Worthwhile! Oh, ye men of the Church, under His stars in Hollinger Park I gaze in awe and wonder—is there anything under them that is more worthwhile? S. S.

200 Children Offer Bands

Orchestra, Dancing & PT

The public schools' annual Spring concert will be held in the Canadian Legion Hall on Monday, March 20. Choir, orchestra, folk dancing and rhythm bands. Also physical training will be comprised with over 200 children. The children are under the direction of George Jenkin, public school music instructor.

Violin, Piano & Voice

Combinations: Tuesday

Edouard Bartlett and two out-of-town artists will offer a concert in the Legion Hall on Tuesday at 8.00 p.m. The visitors are Reginald Geen, pianist, of Oshawa, and a boy soprano, from Hamilton.

They will not comprise a trio. They will sing and play in pairs, Mr. Geen accompanying each of the other two. Mr. Geen, a Toronto conservatory examiner and festival adjudicator, will also play piano solos.

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