

WHERE SHALL WE BEGIN?

By "Self Denial."

Almost every week brings to my desk some appeal for more funds for the great work of our Church. In most cases these appeals are attractive, in all they are urgent, and perhaps, they are all worthy. But, the hard stubborn fact that always bobs up, is, How are we to do it, and where shall we begin? I sometimes wonder if our executive secretaries have ever considered, that it is one thing to theorize, and write out appeals from a position, in some instances, at least, of comfort and ease, and that it is quite another matter to come into living contact with the sources from which this help must come.

In the great war which is now engulfing the world, we read: "That the big guns demolish churches and other buildings, that the exploding shells change the face of the earth as was never seen before; but it is when the infantry advances that the toll of death is heavy; when the little machine guns get busy and when the conflict is hand to hand.

There are hundreds of faithful pastors and Sunday-school workers in our Southern Church, who are the advancing infantry. They have stood and fought and charged and charged again. They have been equal to every emergency, and yet our ecclesiastical superiors send us forward again. They demand more self-denial, more sacrifice. There is bad planning somewhere.

Not long since I had occasion to write one of my beloved teachers, and I said to him: "I have been away from the Seminary nearly 17 years, and yet I have done nothing." True, as compared with what others have done; yet for all of this time we have stood on "The Firing Line" answering every call, never saying, no. This word is not in our vocabulary. Through every hour of night, as well as day, at some time answering the call of humanity. Yet we have done nothing; nothing that shines, nothing that counts, as men count things. There is one thing that our leaders should not lose sight of, viz: That is that some times it is possible to overdo a thing. That it is possible to work a free pulling horse to death.

I am one of a great number of the rank and file of the forward squad, who believes that in some instances the work of our Church is suffering from top-heaviness, or being over-organized.

Let me illustrate: I am chairman of Sunday-school work in my Presbytery. To me there cannot possibly be a more important work. Yet what are we doing with it? Practically nothing. I have visited institutes, conferences, &c. I have perused and studied every plan that has come into my hands. I have been so full of enthusiasm, that I felt seriously the need of a safety valve; and yet, I have always, somehow gotten back to this point, which I believe is the bed-rock principle: that if the work is ever to be done it must be done largely, very largely, by consecrated men and women, in individual congregations, upon whose hearts this great work lies, as the work under God, which is theirs, in a peculiar sense. Such workers do not need elaborate plans of organization, nor complex problems, but they need consecration and consistency. Thus they stand from Sabbath to Sabbath and teach the word of God.

Again. We have in our Presbytery a "Church Building Society."

What could more encourage weak congregations, some struggling with debt; some

others beholding their house falling down; neither financially able to do more than stand by and wait, practically for dissolution than to have this society a real potent force, where the strong help the weak, and weak hands are lifted up, and courage comes again to the faint heart? Where shall we begin?

The secular dailies and magazines, as well as our Church papers, are calling attention to the fact that our pastors are the poorest paid men in any line of work today. Most of them are overworked and underpaid: yet these are the first to get these numerous appeals for self-denial. The only people to whom these same self-sacrificing pastors can appeal, are the faithful members of their churches, whom they know, in most cases are already doing all that they can.

It is true there are some of our members, and some elders and deacons, who seem to forget that God and the Church have a first claim upon them, but these are comparatively few. The great majority are faithful. I know poor men in my churches, who are liberal beyond their means, yet to them we must go. The noblest photograph that has appeared in The Presbyterian of the South for a long, long time, appeared just a week or two weeks ago. A picture of that godly elder, who not only is, doubtless, giving freely of his money to God's work, but is giving absolutely free of charge, very much of his business time. This is the kind of giving that inspires.

Let the human head or heads of the Church, scale some of the high salaried positions. Cut down the force. Send the preachers back to the pulpits to tell the story, and put good hard business men in their place, at a greatly reduced salary, and then when the appeals come, we will look around carefully and see if we can do just a little bit more to help along. Until something happens in our Church, I do not believe there can be much going forward. Until the whole Church is convinced that the very best and most economical policy is being pursued, these appeals must fall largely on deaf ears. For how can a pastor with five churches (some have more) and who is scarcely able to make ends meet; and who is giving conscientiously the first tenth to God, and who knows that his most loyal and faithful people, in poverty and straitened circumstances, are doing the same, ask them to do more? I for one have not the heart.

NIGHT.

By Rosa H. Gray.

Thou quiet night, mother of sleep and dreams,
When man should leave ambition and its schemes,
And like a child upon its mother's breast
Lie down with God, to bring him healing rest.

Come to us now. The garish light of day
Has tired our souls. And we would hide away
From vexing question, and from idle thought,
And all the bitterness the world has wrought.

Lift up our souls on thy dark pinioned wing
To that far land where gladsome angels sing,
Where no confusion and no strife is found,
And all the blessings of the blest abound.

From out the stillness of thy wide abode
Bring us fresh hope to guide us on to God.
Renew our courage, and allay our fears,
Strengthen our strength, and dry our useless tears.

Round beds of pain and sickness wrap thy veil
Of rest and quiet. Mourners sad and pale
Comfort. And help them to forget their grief
Or point them where to look to find relief.

Be guard against all evil while we sleep.
Blest messenger of God, dark vigil keep.
Then when the morning breaks we shall arise
Refreshed, uplifted, nearer Paradise.
Ashland, Va.

TAKE THE SUN OUT OF THE SKY.

By Margaret H. Barnett.

The sun is the center of the system of which our earth is a part. Held by his powerful attraction, planets and their satellites have pursued their ordered course, in their mysterious journey through space, age after age, for untold aeons. The sun is the source of light and heat for the earth, and so is necessary to all life, animal and vegetable. We are all familiar with the miracle of spring, when the returning sun awakens to renewed life an apparently dead world.

Sunlight has valuable curative properties, and is used in the treatment of different diseases. Some kinds of deadly disease germs are killed by exposure to light and air. Dark places are breeding places of disease.

Imagine, if you can, the chaos, and darkness, and death that would result if the sun were suddenly taken out of the sky.

Christ is called, in language divinely chosen, the "Sun of Righteousness," which shall "arise with healing in his wings." What the sun is, in the physical sky, in a much fuller sense Christ is in our spiritual sky. Men estranged from God by sin, he draws back into a right relation with God, and holds them there. He is the "Light of the world," and so is necessary to all spiritual life. Without his quickening power mankind is dead in trespasses and in sins. He is the light not only of this world; he lights up also the gloom of the grave, and he gives the only light on the life beyond the tomb. He has said, "I am the resurrection and the life," and he points to a home eternal in the Father's house of many mansions after this brief earth-life is ended.

He, and he only, has "brought life and immortality to light." Without him philosophy has never been able to give the longed-for assurance of a life beyond the grave. Prof. Huxley, in writing to a friend, made this melancholy confession: "It is a curious thing that I find my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get older, and nearer the goal. It flashes across me, at all sorts of times, with a kind of horror; that in 1900 I shall probably know no more of what is going on, than I did in 1800." Contrast this dreary looking forward to extinction, with Paul's view of death, "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."

Christ gives healing to the deadly disease of sin, a disease incurable by human means, a disease from which every member of the human race suffers.

Imagine, if you can, the chaos, and darkness and death that would result, if this Sun were taken out of our spiritual sky.

WHY GO TO CHURCH?

Pastors and church workers often express surprise that people do not come to church. They mourn and wonder and ask one another, "Why do they not come?" It might help them solve their riddle to put the question the other way about, "Why should they come?" What is there in the church that will draw a crowd of people away from the comforts of their homes or the pleasures and freedom of the open air? There has got to be a positive power, a definite attraction, something real and fascinating and magnetic, to pull the people into the church.—The Christian Herald.

"Yesterday is dead—forget it.
Tomorrow does not exist—don't worry.
Today is here—use it."