

EVANGELISM.

BY THE REV. W. J. LIMMER SHEPPARD, M.A., Vicar
of Holy Trinity, Ripon.

II

IN the previous article we have considered Public Evangelism ; we now turn to consider the much more neglected, and yet much more needed, work of Personal Evangelism.

It has been contended that what the Church needs is to concentrate on this great duty of Personal Evangelism, and that in so doing the old method of Public Evangelism can be practically abandoned. I venture to think that, on the contrary, it is Public Evangelism that should be one of the main avenues by which the duty of Personal Evangelism may be brought home to the Christian conscience. The Parochial Mission, for illustration, if it has been the means of winning a number of persons for Christ in some Parish, should surely be followed by, or even include, definite teaching on the cardinal doctrine that Salvation must be followed by Service, and that the greatest of all service for Christ is that of Personal Evangelism. The history of the Early Church abounds in illustrations of the way in which those who had themselves found the Saviour immediately proceeded to lead others to Him. The Public Evangelism of Pentecost and the succeeding weeks is followed, after a time, by the members of the Infant Church, scattered abroad by persecution, going "everywhere preaching the word." Cornelius gathers together his kinsmen and near friends, that they may share his blessing ; the households of Lydia and of the Philippian jailor enter the kingdom with them ; the Thessalonian Church sounds forth "the Word of the Lord" far and near. The whole of the story of the Church of the first days is impregnated with this great fact, that those who have themselves been won for Christ at once become winners of others. Personal Evangelism was the universal practice. The great need, therefore, of our time for the extension of Personal Evangelism in the Church, calls also for the increase of the work of Public Evangelism, since it is through this method that multitudes may be won for Christ so as to become themselves Evangelists.

There is no question of the greatness of this need. Among the congregations of our Parish Churches throughout the land how many

of the laity are to be found who are really winners of others for Christ? Is it not the all but universal idea among our Communicants that soul winning is solely the work of the Clergy, and that there is no duty in this matter resting upon the ordinary Christian in any way? His or her work is to ensure their own salvation, to support their Church, to take part in the Parochial organisations—but never to endeavour, personally and privately, to lead others to the feet of the Saviour. Even those engaged in such definitely spiritual work as, say, Sunday School teaching scarcely ever make any real effort to lead any of the children in their classes to Christ. Yet that one work alone holds great possibilities. Some years ago, in a Mission in an Irish Parish, I had three petitions put into my Prayer Box, in the same handwriting, and at three different times; the first ran thus:—“A Christian worker asks prayer to be made ‘wise to win souls.’ Too long satisfied with sowing the seed and gathering but few sheaves, there has been stirred up a great desire.” The next petition was worded: “Please pray for my class of nine girls in our Sunday School, that while they are young their hearts may be given to the Lord Jesus”; thus the general desire to win souls was now focussed on the definite object of the Sunday School class. The final petition was for thanksgiving; “A Christian worker desires hearty thanks for being spiritually stirred up during this Mission; also for answered prayer in the conversion of two girls in her Sunday Class”; these girls were, I believe, won by the Teacher’s own efforts before the Mission ended. I recall a similar instance in Sheffield, where a Teacher of a class of senior girls was herself first brought to Christ; she at once asked for some Decision booklets that she might, for the first time, attempt definite Personal Evangelism in her class, with the result that five of its members immediately accepted the Saviour. In almost every department of Church work there is opportunity for such Personal Evangelism, but, of course, it is not confined to Church work, nor does it always begin there. The first disciple to lead another to Christ brought his own brother, and nowhere is this personal work needed more than in the family and the household. At the same time nowhere is it more difficult; there the timidity which seals the lips is felt the most, and so it is often found that the work of Personal Evangelism is confined to those outside the home, instead of beginning there.

I well remember a Church Army Sister, one of my keenest helpers at a Parochial Mission, who suddenly herself became convicted by the fact that, while she had been working hard for the conversion of the outsider, she had never attempted to reach her own sister, nor could she rest until the same night she had sent off to her a long letter pleading with her to accept the Saviour. It is the birth of this spirit among the Communicants of our Church which is so sorely needed, the deep conviction that Personal Evangelism cannot and must not be left to the Clergy alone, but that it is both the duty and the privilege of every true member of the Church of Christ.

But if this desirable consummation is even to be partially attained, there must be a definite and clear call to the work given by the Clergy to their people. The Free Churches in this respect have moved ahead of the Church of England. More than a year ago it was decided to initiate a campaign throughout their membership, by which Personal Evangelism should be recognized as an essential feature of the ordinary Christian life. The President of the Free Church Council recently issued a letter to all Free Church ministers, in which he says :—

“ The happy results that have already attended this particular method wherever it has been put into practice embolden me to urge it upon those who have not hitherto adopted it, and I venture to prophesy that they will be astonished by the harvest that will ensue. . . . The Church itself needs to return to its first principles. It must get back before it can bring back. The need can only be met by personal return, personal concern, and personal testimony. . . . Too often the specific work of Evangelism is left to the minister, whereas it is the business of every member.”

A series of pamphlets has also been issued broadcast by the Free Churches on this great subject, the following being some of the titles and writers : “ Personal Evangelism : The Supreme Need of Our Time ” (Dr. Clifford) ; “ Ministers and Personal Evangelism ” (by the same writer) ; “ Personal Evangelism : How to Begin ” (Dr. F. B. Meyer) ; “ Disciple Makers : Hints to Beginners ” (Rev. R. C. Gillie) ; “ Personal Evangelism : Disciple Making To-day ” (Rev. G. E. Darlaston) ; “ The Guidance of the Holy Spirit in Disciple Making ” (Hon. Emily Kinnaird). In the first of these pamphlets the writer states that, at a meeting of Free Church Ministers, the estimate of those members of the Churches who practised

Personal Evangelism did not reach 20 per cent., 10 per cent. being considered the more probable proportion ; at the same time it was believed that in the Salvation Army the proportion would be over 70 per cent., and among Christian Scientists higher still. One wonders what is the proportion within the borders of the Church of England ! At any rate what is really needed is a definite and clear call to this work from the leaders of our own Church, followed by the patient and persistent pressing home of this duty upon our Communicants from the pulpit. How often—or rather, how seldom—has one ever heard a sermon upon this great subject ! Yet in it lies the secret of the vitality and vigour of a Church's life.

At the same time the mere call to the work is not enough. The pamphlets to which I have just referred are excellent in their way, and all breathe a spirit of intense earnestness, but they are, it seems to me, singularly lacking in instruction. They consist almost entirely of *exhortation* to the work of Personal Evangelism ; they practically give no directions as to how it is to be done. Possibly that is left for some later publication, or for the various ministers to carry out among their own people. But in any case, so far as our own Church is concerned, the keenest and most earnest workers almost always require some kind of training in Evangelism, and very few of them ever obtain it. A good many years ago, in the town in which I then lived, a United Church Army was being planned, the Bishop presiding over a gathering of all the Clergy of the Parishes concerned. At the end of the meeting the Church Army Officer, who had come down to assist in the arrangements, told the Bishop that one of their needs at the Mission would be that of workers who could help in the inquiry rooms, and who knew something of leading souls to Christ. The Bishop turned to the Clergy and asked how many of the nineteen Parishes present could help to supply this need ; only two Parishes had any one with any experience of this work ! That is to say, that only in one-tenth of the Parishes of that particular town was there any teaching on Personal Evangelism, or, probably, any work of the kind being done.

One very great advantage of the Parochial Mission is the opportunity it gives for new workers to essay the untried task of Personal Evangelism. Again and again has some Vicar, at my request, called together on the first Saturday evening of the Mission a little

band of his keenest and most earnest workers, whom he has previously approached on the subject, and who are willing—often with real fear and trembling—to attempt to deal personally with anxious souls. These are gathered together, not for exhortation but for instruction, brief and inadequate as this may have to be—instruction as to the best method of leading an inquirer to the Saviour. My own firm conviction, based upon a long experience, is that it is of the greatest possible use in this work to be provided with a Decision booklet, which sets forth very simply and clearly the way of salvation. The use of such a booklet is referred to below; here I only mention it in order to explain that, at the meeting of Mission workers just mentioned, a copy of this is placed in each person's hands, the booklet is carefully gone through, and the workers are instructed during this process in the way to deal with the many points that constantly arise in this most delicate and difficult work. But, given the very best instruction, there is really no teacher like experience itself, and the Mission usually provides this for the workers as it progresses. Over and over again has one of the best results of a Mission been the formation of a little band of men and women who have had their first beginning in the work of Personal Evangelism.

Of course, if occasional After-Services are held in a Parish as a part of the ordinary Parochial work, then the same opportunities will occur without a Mission, but it will still be necessary to gather the selected workers together, only that in this case the instruction given can be much more adequate and extend over a longer period.

Nor does there seem to be any reason why in any Parish, if willing workers can be found, a kind of Study Class on Personal Evangelism should not be held, say for the six weeks of Lent, in which the methods of the work can be carefully discussed, difficulties met, and prayer offered unitedly for practical results to follow the Study Class. It is probable that those willing thus to be trained will only be very few in number, but leaven will always spread, and even one or two keen workers who practise Personal Evangelism will, in time, make a very great difference in the work and life of a Church.

In such a Class it will be found that what is needed most is instruction in the actual practice of Evangelism. One important branch of the subject is that known as "The Approach." How is the worker to get into touch with any particular person on such a matter

as their spiritual condition and needs? It is needless to say that this requires the greatest care. There must be, of course, most definite prayer, together with the worker's entire committal of himself to the Holy Spirit for guidance. On the one hand, a brusque and tactless approach may only offend and repel. On the other it is quite possible to let splendid opportunities slip. Frances Ridley Havergal used to say that she never tried to make opportunities; she left it to God to *make* them, her one care being not to fail to *take* them. At the same time, prayer and thought will often lead up to the provision of the opportunity desired. Dr. Trumbull, the well-known American worker, once came across a young man of agnostic tendencies, whom he desired to win, but with whom he had no common ground at all. Presently he discovered that this man was deeply interested in a certain branch of science, of which Dr. Trumbull was entirely ignorant. But he set himself to master the subject; he gathered every book on the matter that he could find, and spent some weeks in the study of them. Then one day he mentioned these books to the young man in question, and invited him to use them at any time. Interested at once, the young man found that here was some one who knew far more about the subject than most people, and discussions naturally followed, until from that common ground sprang the longed-for opportunity for Personal Evangelism—an opportunity only won at much sacrifice of time and study—through which the student was won for Christ. Sir George Williams was accustomed to say, when asked the best way of reaching a young man, "Don't argue; ask him to supper!" When himself in business as a young man, he found that one man who held a good position in the concern was bitterly opposed to those who, like George Williams, were earnest Christians. Quite undaunted, Williams determined to win him. Discussing with some of his friends the opponent's special tastes, he elicited the information—given half in fun—that he was a lover of oysters! Straightway Williams arranged with his friends to hold an oyster supper, to which the opponent was cordially invited. Partly from amusement at such an invitation from such a source, and partly out of bravado, he accepted. The supper was a great success, the evening a most lively one, while, at Williams' strict directions, not a word was said about religion. A great deal of the opponent's prejudice against the Christian men was thus broken down, and

later on he accepted another invitation, this time to a definitely religious gathering. So came the desired opportunity for Personal Evangelism. When George Williams afterwards founded the Young Men's Christian Association this former opponent was one of the first twelve members!

I have already alluded to the value of a Decision booklet. This can be used in many cases as the avenue of approach. It is quite easy for the worker to say to some friend, in whose spiritual welfare he is interested, "Have you ever seen this pamphlet?" and on receiving a negative reply, to hand one over, saying, "Have a look at it, and tell me afterwards what you think of it." Of course the friend *may* plainly indicate, on returning the booklet, that he does not wish to discuss it, in which case the wise worker will not make the mistake of trying to force a conversation; but in many cases the friend will willingly enter into discussion, and so give the opportunity for a straight personal talk. But the chief value of such a booklet is in the actual work of showing the way of salvation to a person who is really anxious to find it. In the first place it dispels a considerable amount of awkwardness and timidity; it is so much easier to talk when both are holding and looking at a booklet than without it. Then it holds the worker to the actually necessary points of instruction, and to a great extent prevents that wandering off to side issues, which is so unprofitable and yet so extremely easy. Again, the person who is being instructed can remember the teaching which is given far better when it is focussed around certain points in such a booklet, especially as he actually has the booklet in his possession afterwards, and can go over it again and again. Nor does its least value lie in the fact that, in most cases, it has a space in which the owner can record the date of his own decision, thus making it to him a perpetual reminder of the crisis in his spiritual life. The six great points in the booklet which I myself use, are Renunciation of Sin, Prayer for Pardon, and Faith in the Saviour's Word; then the consideration of Him as the Forgiver, the Keeper, and the Ruler. These are introduced by some plain statements about Sin, designed to awaken, if necessary, a sense of need, and concluded by a list of results that should follow if the decision for Christ is right and true. For the work of Personal Evangelism the worker should, of course, know the booklet practically by heart, and, as time goes on, he will be able to reinforce its

teaching and illustrate its points by incidents drawn from his own experience, or sometimes from that of others. I have found that nothing helps an enquirer at a point of difficulty more than the brief account of a case somewhat like his own. At the same time the worker must refrain from the temptation to recount his own spiritual history at length, as it is rarely edifying or helpful to the anxious soul. I well remember once seeing a girl, really anxious about her spiritual condition and keenly desirous of being led to Christ, but absolutely "bored stiff" by the well-meaning but entirely mistaken lady worker who was dealing with her, and who was simply pouring into the poor girl's ears at interminable length the narrative of her own spiritual experiences. The worker who guides the conversation along the lines indicated by the booklet, and simply endeavours to explain its contents, will be able to avoid this snare.

In all Evangelism, whether Public or Personal, the result must never be deemed satisfactory unless the enquirer does really understand the way of salvation, its conditions and obligations, and, having done so, does definitely and personally accept Christ. In a good deal of modern Mission work nothing of this kind seems to be attempted. A number of persons in an audience or congregation signify their desire to become Christians, but often nothing is done to follow this up by personal dealing, or to make sure that they really understand the way in which to attain their desire. One of the maids in a friend's house, where I was staying, had attended some kind of undenominational mission service, and had there expressed her desire to accept Christ as her Saviour, but her mistress was doubtful as to her having really done so, and asked me if I would have a talk with her. On doing so, I found that the girl having signified at the mission a really genuine desire, had then immediately been hailed as a really converted person; people shook hands with her, and expressed their delight at her salvation, but no attempt of any kind was made to explain to her what salvation meant, nor did any one attempt to bring her into actual touch with Christ; all this was simply taken for granted, while in conversation with her I soon ascertained that she actually knew nothing of it! She was really in earnest, and it was an easy task to bring her to Christ, but no one had even attempted to do it, although she was reckoned as a convert by those at the mission. **There can be no doubt that a great deal of actual personal work is**

neglected in many evangelistic efforts, when as a matter of fact the very greatest care should be taken that an enquirer be given every possible instruction and help by some worker who is qualified to do so.

Nor must the personal evangelism stop there. A great deal depends on the thought taken for the "after care" of those who are genuinely converted. Would that we could see the day when a congregation were so keen on the winning of souls that every case of conversion was hailed with joy by the whole body, and welcoming hands held out on every side to help the convert in the new life just begun! How few congregations show the least interest in any addition of living members to the Church of Christ! Therefore all the more care is needed in the shepherding of the newly converted, and in bringing them into touch with Church life and work. When Confirmation follows, there is, of course, a great opportunity afforded of keeping in close touch with the young Christian for some time. In other cases much can be done through Classes, Guilds, etc., to strengthen and foster the new spiritual life, while, as soon as it is deemed wise, some definite Church work should be assigned to the new convert. Above all, he should be taught the urgent necessity of practising that Personal Evangelism through which he himself has been brought to a saving knowledge of the truth in Christ. The first chapter of St. John's Gospel is a striking study of the evangelized becoming the evangelist. St. Andrew is brought to Christ, and brings his brother Simon. The two then bring Philip, for, as Professor Godet points out, the apparently irrelevant insertion of the information that "Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter" (verse 44) really indicates that it was through the instrumentality of the two brothers that Philip was brought into touch with Jesus. Then Philip proceeds to bring Nathanael to the Saviour Whom he has just found. Thus does Personal Evangelism stand in the very forefront of the Gospel story, for the Church's instruction and example, as the great Divine method by which her every member should endeavour to extend the spiritual kingdom of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.