

How to Increase and Maintain
the Membership
OF OUR
Young Men's Christian Associations.

AN ADDRESS

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How to Increase and Maintain the Membership of our Young Men's Christian Associations.

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Our subject divides itself into two parts. First, how to increase the membership; second, how to maintain the membership. Both of these subjects are exceedingly practical, and well deserve the earnest attention and prayerful consideration of all the members of our various Young Men's Christian Associations throughout the world. Indeed, Christian Associations will fail to accomplish the great and good work which they have undertaken unless each member fully comprehends the greatness and importance of the work, and is conscious of the daily weight of personal responsibility devolving upon himself in connection with the increase of the membership, spiritual life, and general usefulness of his own particular association.

HOW TO INCREASE THE MEMBERSHIP.

Let us in the first place consider how we can increase our membership. To my mind there are two ways in which an increase of membership can be attained, viz., by the personal character and influence of the members, and by their individual and combined efforts.

I.—The Personal Character and Influence of the Members.

By becoming a member of a Young Men's Christian Association, we profess to have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour, and we also identify ourselves with aggressive Christian work. As members of a Y.M.C.A. and followers of Jesus Christ, it is absolutely necessary that our Christian character should harmonize with our declaration of faith in God. Otherwise we cannot become instrumental in the work of increasing our membership, or in demonstrating to the world an adequate representation of the infinite power and glory of God as revealed in the salvation of mankind from the power and consequences of sin. We may tell men that they are lost and ruined by the Fall, and if they die in that lost and ruined condition everlasting misery will be their portion. We may also tell them that by accepting Jesus Christ to be their personal Saviour and Substitute with God the Father

they shall escape condemnation, and become the recipients of power from on High which will enable them to crucify the flesh and the lusts thereof, but unless *we* demonstrate by our consistent Christian character and work what Divine grace has done for us, and what it is daily doing for us, we need not expect ever to become successful in our endeavours to increase our membership, and to enlist the sympathies of the careless and irreligious on the side of vital godliness. By consistent Christian lives we substantiate our declarations of faith in God as the Author of our salvation, and we produce undeniable evidences of the power and influence of Divine grace in our hearts and lives. Thus we not only prove conclusively that we are *true* followers of Jesus Christ, but we also daily develop our likeness in spiritual character to that of our Heavenly Father. Hence we commend religion to our fellow-creatures, and by so doing we become powerful agents in influencing other young men to attend the meetings of our association and in leading them to the Cross of Christ. As children of God we ought always to retain a conscious sense of our Divine origin, and to feel, and to make others feel too, that we are walking in a path that leads to greatness, and supporting a character which is forming for heaven, so that our Christian lives may be epistles written in our hearts, known and read of all men. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance : But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, be ye holy ; for I am holy." (1 Peter i., 14-16.)

"Is Christ in us? Be ours the glorious dower
 To show the Saviour shining in our face,
 And through our eyes forth-putting His sweet power
 To help the weak and wayward with His grace :
 O! Let not sin in us those windows dim,
 Through which the world might catch some glimpse of Him."

Regarding personal influence, some one has said:—"Little do we know of the power of the unconscious influence which we exercise on those around us. Like the unseen but ever-active power of gravitation, so the influence of our examples and of our lives, though unknown to us, may be uninterrupted and powerful. The words we drop are remembered by others long after we have forgotten them. Our actions, our tones of voice, our looks and motions, and our every peculiarity of thought, and feeling, and action, may be producing an impression upon the minds of others which we may never know, and which we can never remove. Actions have a louder voice than words, and example is more potent than precept. And thus things which we say or do without thought, or consciousness, or recollection, may exercise an influence upon those around us, not only while we live, but long after we may be silent in the grave. Only the day of judgment, which reveals the secrets of all hearts, can disclose the mighty effects which our conduct may produce. Seclude ourselves as we may from the world, or even hide ourselves from our nearest friends, yet still the power of our example, the things we do, the things we leave undone, our likes and dislikes, our habits, our customs, our manners, our

indulgences, our pleasures—all these may be fixing the course of some one around us for time and for eternity. How important, then, that all our influence be positive, and all for God. How important that we walk uprightly before the Lord, devoting our lives to Him, keeping a single eye to His glory, and praying to Him continually that our efforts may be such as shall be safe for others to follow, and that in the great day of God it may appear that we have not lived in vain, nor been occasions of injury or mischief to those around us." We thus see that consistency in the life and work of each member of our Christian Associations is an absolute necessity if an increase of membership is to be attained. We ought always to realise that we are being watched by those who are not in sympathy with Christian life and service, and in the event of our character and service not being in harmony with our professions of faith in a risen and exalted Saviour, the result will invariably be a three-fold loss.

1. Loss of faithful service and of glory to God our Father.

2. Loss to ourselves, because the nearer we live to Christ the more Christ-like we become, and we are made partakers of greater spiritual blessings and anticipate somewhat of the joy of heaven.

3. Loss to our fellow-creatures, because by our teaching and consistent Christian lives God is pleased to use us in leading souls into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Moreover, we ought also to bear in mind that if our lives do not harmonize with our endeavours to increase the prosperity of our Associations, either numerically or spiritually, the inevitable result will be that instead of being a means of usefulness in Christian service, we shall on the contrary become hindrances in the work and stumbling-blocks in the way of sinners coming to the Saviour. O that each one of us may henceforth be enabled by the indwelling power and influence of God's Holy Spirit to live "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. i., 6.)

II.—*The Individual and Combined Efforts of the Members.*

Individual effort in Y.M.C.A. work is absolutely necessary on the part of each member if an increase of membership is to be attained. Do we not too often see the whole work inside as well as outside of our Association meetings left almost entirely in the hands of the office-bearers. This shameful state of matters ought not to exist in any Christian Association. If we are desirous of increasing our membership we must realise that dreaming about an ultimate numerical blessing will utterly fail to hasten the consummation of our dreamy and somewhat vague anticipation of the good time coming. Each member should feel that he has a particular work to do in connection with the welfare and prosperity of his own particular Association, and that his piece of work cannot be done by any other member:—

“ In God’s great field of labour
 All work is not the same,
 He hath a service for each one
 Who loves His holy name.”

Moreover, each member ought to search diligently to find out what his particular work is :—

“ There’s only one thing should concern us,
 To find out the task that is ours ;
 And then, having found it, to do it
 With all our God-given powers.”

A sense of personal responsibility should accompany our every endeavour to extend the cause and kingdom of our Lord and Master,

“ Our Master is coming, most surely,
To reckon with every one ;
 Shall we then count our toil or our sorrow
 If we hear Him say ‘ Well done.’
 There’s a work for me, and a work for you,
Something for each of us now to do.”

Individual effort will prove conclusively that we are not ashamed of the Cross of Christ ; that we are all deeply interested in the spiritual welfare of our fellow-creatures, and that we contemplate and anticipate ultimate success and blessing in the propagation of the Gospel message through the instrumentality of our Young Men’s Christian Associations. Combination and concentration of individual effort with the view of consolidating and strengthening our endeavours for the ultimate good of our membership and for the glory of God is an absolute necessity if we wish our labours to be crowned with success. “ That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans xv., 6.) “ For we are members one of another.” We ought, therefore, in all our efforts to increase our membership, to do our utmost and thus “ To keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace :—

“ The Holy Spirit’s bond of peace
 Is what we daily need,
 That from all discord we may cease,
 In thought, and word, and deed,
 As Christian men in heart and mind,
 As one in Christ our Head,
 The Spirit’s peace our soul will bind
 To Him our Living Bread.”

When we say that “ we are members one of another,” the words imply connection with Christ, communion and sympathy with one another, and co-operation for a common object. The members of the natural body act harmoniously. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee ; nor the head to the feet. The sympathy is secured, for if one member suffer all the members suffer with it ; and co-operation is complete. So is it in our case. As members of a Christian Association we first give ourselves to the Lord, and then to the work unitedly to which the Lord calls us :—

“ By feeblest efforts and small means
 The greatest tasks fulfilled may be ;
 Take this to heart, thou man of dreams,
 And learn the strength of unity.”

The following are to my mind some of the essential requisites required on the part of those who wish to enjoy a glad anticipation of success in their endeavours to increase our membership and propagate the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

1. *Personal experience of a Saviour's love and of the Holy Spirit's power.* He who expects to become successful in Christian work must have Christ in his heart, and must feel the constraining power of His love. Such an one will delight to feed upon the Word, and will be fitted for service by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

2. *Devotion to the Master and an earnest desire for the spiritual welfare of others.* Love to the Lord Jesus and to souls ought to be the principal incentives in our work. Love delights to serve, but love is better than service. There is often service without love, but it bears no fruit and brings no glory to God. If we follow in the Lord's footsteps He will make it our highest joy to give ourselves for others, even as "He gave Himself for us."

3. *Sympathy.* We must be full of compassion for the unsaved, and avoid all harshness in our dealings with them. Wondrous is the power and influence of a loving, Christ-like heart. A timely word kindly spoken or a frank invitation to come to Christ will be blessed of God. Our power in drawing others to the Lord will depend largely on our joy and communion with Him and our desire for His glory.

4. *Avoidance of party questions.* Men often fight more eagerly for a sect or a doctrine than for the honour of the Lord and the good of their fellows. Christian workers destroy their influence and hurt their own spiritual life by taking part in controversies which do not concern them. "Avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith." (1 Tim. vi., 20-21.) "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes . . . be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient." (2 Tim. ii., 23-24.)

5. *Fervour of spirit.* By fervour of spirit, in general, is meant an ardent application of mind in the performance of anything, a warmth bordering upon transport, that moves every spring of the heart, and carries all before it, to gain its end. So that by fervency of spirit in serving the Lord, must be understood a zealous and active desire of loving the Lord, of worshipping Him in sincerity, and obeying His commands with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Fervour of spirit consists not in a few transient fits and starts of natural devotion when we are perhaps in the midst of a series of special evangelistic services, neither is it a wild blaze of religious passion that flashes for a while and afterwards vanishes away. True fervour of spirit is a ray from the Sun of Righteousness, bright even at the beginning, and which shineth more and more unto the

perfect day. This fervour of mind in its full extent, is one of the brightest ornaments of the Christian. It enters into the heart, and engages the whole man on the side of devotion, it gives a double measure of force and alacrity to that religion which before was sincere. In a word, it is to the spiritual life what health is to the natural; it makes that spirited and cheerful which otherwise would only breathe and move. May this fervour of spirit henceforth permeate our whole life and service, so that we shall be constrained to set about the work of increasing our membership with suitable ardour and intenseness of mind. "Fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." (Rom. xii., 11.)

6. *Perseverance in prayer and effort.* Our personal character and influence cannot be good and attractive without the Divine influence, neither can our individual and combined efforts be crowned with success unless we are working in full sympathy with the Giver of all grace and blessing. If we are to influence others for good we must often frequent the Throne of Grace. It is there we obtain strength and courage to persevere amid the difficulties that beset us. Let us aim at accomplishing great things for God. Intercourse with ignorant or sceptical men will tax our patience and test our Christian character, but a soft answer will often disarm our opponent and turn him into a friend. Though we see no immediate results we should never dream of giving up, for success will assuredly come, and that, perhaps, in larger measure than we expect, for the Lord is not unmindful of His promise that in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

Lastly. *Naturalness and unobtrusiveness should characterise all Christian workers, and especially the members of Young Men's Christian Associations.* Young men hate affectation and sanctimonious expressions and will not be coerced. Prudence, therefore, ought to permeate our every endeavour to enlist the sympathies of the careless and irreligious on the side of vital godliness. In fact, we should manifest the wisdom of the serpent combined with the harmlessness of the dove. A wise and considerate study of the variety of character to be operated upon, and a careful and judicious adaptation of workers will invariably result in the augmentation of our membership. The difficulties and discouragements which attend our undertaking are truly very numerous and trying, but let us continually bear in mind that the work is the Lord's, and that He is ever nigh to those who call upon Him in sincerity of heart. God never says, seek ye My face in vain; He never neglects the prayer that comes from the heart; He will never forsake the man that puts his trust in Him; His grace is more than sufficient for us; His strength is made perfect in our weakness; God is on our side; He works with us; His wisdom is our Guide; His arm is our support; His Spirit is our strength, and He has promised us a glorious victory. The conscious sense of Divine co-operation and ultimate success in Christian enterprise should constrain us to fight the good fight of faith with a glad and confident anticipation of a substantial increase of membership and spiritual prosperity. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. (1 Cor. xvi., 13.)

HOW TO MAINTAIN OUR MEMBERSHIP.

In treating this part of our subject it is necessary for us at the outset to define the object of our Young Men's Christian Associations. The object may be said to be the promotion of the mental, moral, and spiritual welfare of the members; the improvement of their scriptural knowledge, and the union of their efforts for the extension of Christ's Kingdom, especially amongst young men. Keeping this object before our minds, and in view of ultimate success and blessing in all our efforts to maintain the membership, spiritual life, and usefulness of our respective associations, the following are, to my mind, some of the essential requisites required in the consummation of such a benevolent and praiseworthy undertaking.

I.—*The Members should cultivate a spirit of fraternal love and friendship with each other.*

The men of the world could say of the early Christians, "Behold these Christians how they love one another." But we fear that the men of the world have now good reason to say, "Behold these members of Young Men's Christian Associations how they *shun* one another." A large proportion of the members of our Christian Associations only meet once a week on the Sabbath morning at the Fellowship Meeting, and after the meeting is closed each one goes to his particular church, and, perhaps, he may have spoken only to a very select few of his fellow-members. Now, is that Christian conduct, and will such behaviour tend to maintain the membership and promote the spiritual life and usefulness of our Associations? Nay, verily, we cannot hope to maintain our membership if the members continue to cherish and cultivate a spirit of indifference and selfish isolation. We should love one another and cultivate friendship with each other. Thus would we be able to testify that love and unity, bind together the members of a Y.M.C.A., and we would also prove a mutual stimulus and help in all that pertains to Christian life and work. Many of our members instead of making friends and companions of Christian men, form friendships with those who are not in sympathy with Christian life and service, and by so doing they hurt themselves and damage the cause of Christ. If we are desirous of maintaining the numerical strength and general efficiency of our membership we must guard against the baneful influence of worldly companionships. Such friendships tend to cool our love for Christ and are very great hindrances in our endeavours to promote the prosperity and usefulness of our Christian organisation. For example, we know several young men who were at one time active members of a Christian Association, but through the influence of worldly friends and companions they became first irregular in their attendance at the meetings of their Association, and ultimately they were persuaded to sever their connection with us altogether:—

"Sad is the thought that friends in name
Who love not Christ, indeed,
Will prove, to all who trust in them,
Worse than a bruised reed."

Daniel and his companions in Shushan are fine examples of how godly young men may band themselves together to pray and work for God in the midst of surrounding ungodliness :—

“ With those who have the mind of Christ,
The Christian loves to dwell ;
He finds in them his chief delight,
Beyond what words can tell.

When we are associated with Christian brethren, we feel that the company is congenial. It is both an enjoyment and an anticipation. It is the gratification of inward and deep-felt emotion, and the anticipation of higher rapture in the heaven of heavens. Christian love is the most excellent of all graces, and it secures sympathy with the brethren in all their sorrows. Brotherly love leads us to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” We are fellow travellers to the same heavenly home ; and we must not only avoid falling out by the way, but we must be mutually helpful in our journey. We should not need to be exhorted to cherish and manifest brotherly love toward one another ; for it springs up in the heart wherever a true connection is formed with the body of Christ. Being in Christ we imbibe His Spirit, and learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. We hear the voice of Jesus saying “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.” If we love Christ, we necessarily love one another, and thus we become conscious of common sentiments, common affections, and common hopes :—

“ Head of Thy Church beneath,
The Catholic, the true,
On all her members breathe,
Her broken frame renew ;
Then shall Thy perfect will be done,
When Christians love and live as one.”

As followers of Jesus Christ we should band ourselves together so that we shall become a source of mutual sympathy and strength amid the temptations and afflictions of life. Thus we shall be able to counteract the evils of worldly friendships, by strengthening the bond of love and unity that binds us together in Christian faith and fellowship.

II.—*The cultivation of a humble, self-denying, and charitable disposition.*

There is no duty commanded in Scripture, on which so much stress is laid as on the duty of Charity. It is assigned as the test and criterion by which we are to distinguish the disciples of Jesus. “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love to one another.”

Charity in its most comprehensive sense, signifies that disposition of mind, which from a regard and gratitude to God, leads us to do all the good in our power to our fellow creatures. Thus it takes in a large circle, extending to all the virtues of the social, and many graces of the Divine life. But, as this would lead us into a wide field, we will only at present consider the necessity for the cultivation of Charity and

humility amongst the members of our Christian Associations in order to maintain the membership; by promoting the spiritual life and quickening the diligence and zeal of the members in provoking one another to love and to good works. We are associated with a Christian institution, the members of which, irrespective of doctrinal opinions, acknowledge as brethren all who hold and love the Truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Hence, we profess to have no sympathy with those professing to be followers of Christ who unchristianise all men who do not belong to their party. Indeed, their lack of Charity justifies a doubt as to whether their claim to be regarded as Christians should receive any acknowledgment, for the Word of God says—"If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of His." At the same time, though we feel justified in condemning such uncharitableness on the part of some of the professed followers of the Redeemer as being entirely inconsistent with the object of the Gospel, and the spirit of Christianity, we should be careful to avoid paying those men back in their own coin. To pass a judgment upon characters is a difficult task, and requires an unbiased mind. We ought to distinguish what flows from a narrowness of mind, from what flows from a badness of heart, and allowances ought to be made for the prejudices of education. If a man be educated in the belief that none are to be saved but those who believe every article of that system which he embraces; if his judgment concerning the character of men rest not upon the goodness of their lives, but upon the soundness of their belief, such a man's Charity must be narrow and constrained. And this may sometimes be owing, not to the badness of his nature, but to the baneful influence of his religious principles. Let us, therefore, always form a favourable judgment concerning the character of those who profess faith in Christ, whether they agree or differ from us in opinion, and, if we do err, let us err on the side of Charity. "Have fervent Charity among yourselves; for Charity shall cover the multitude of sins." (1 Peter iv., 8.)

Moreover, we, who are to-day met in conference, belong to various denominations, but since we came together, we have been singing with one mouth, and I trust also, to some extent with one heart, the same hymns of praise to our common Father in heaven. We are met in the same spirit which led the holy Apostle Paul to say to the believers at Ephesus, "We are members one of another." Paul thus associated himself with all the faithful everywhere. Let us follow the Apostle's example, and by the exercise of sanctified patience and forbearance with one another, we shall be able to prevent denominational and sectarian feeling from counteracting our endeavours to promote the prosperity and efficiency of our membership. "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting. (1 Tim. i., 16.) Read 1 Cor. xiii. chapter.

With respect to our general behaviour, we must strive through the influence of divine grace to steadfastly follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. When upon the earth He was meek, lowly, and condescending. He went about doing good, and received testimony from His enemies, that "He did all things well,"

To the errors of his friends, He was mild and gentle. The disciples on one occasion when moved by false zeal (in which, alas, they are still to some extent followed by some who have the assurance to call themselves followers of the meek and lowly Jesus), besought Christ to cause fire to descend from heaven, and consume a city, which believed not in His doctrines; all the rebuke he administered was, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; the Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." When he suffered His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the hour and in the power of darkness, when He besought His disciples to watch with Him in that dreadful scene, and when, instead of giving Him comfort, they sunk unconcerned into sleep; instead of reproving them with severity, as their conduct deserved, He Himself sought for an excuse for them. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Though He was the Friend of all mankind, yet He had enemies who sought His life. "I have done," said He, "many good deeds among you, for which of these do you stone me?" And when, after persecuting Him in His life, they brought Him to the accursed death of the Cross, His last words were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." (Philip. ii., 1-5, 14-15.) "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." (1 Tim. iv., 15.)

III.—*Each Member should do his utmost to make the Meetings of his own particular Association interesting, instructive, and profitable.*

The following are, to my mind, some of the methods by which this end might be attained:—

1. Regular and punctual attendance at the meetings of the Association. The irregular attender exercises a baneful influence over all the other members of the Association. His frequent absence from the meeting demonstrates a want of real interest and sympathy in the welfare of the Association, and beside, it has a tendency to discourage the members, and weaken their efforts for promoting the prosperity and efficiency of their organisation. On the other hand, when all the members are regular and punctual in their attendance at the meetings of the Association, they manifest a spirit of earnestness, interest, unity and activity, and become a source of mutual encouragement and help in Christian life and work.

2. Each member should carefully and prayerfully read and meditate on the subjects of study previous to his attendance at the meetings. This would enable the members to act fairly and conscientiously in all their criticisms of one another when a *knotty* point is under discussion. When the members come prepared to supplement the essayist's paper or address, the meeting is generally interesting, instructive, and stimulating to all concerned. But when the members come to the meeting without due preparation, the exercises are dull and monotonous, and altogether wearisome and unfruitful.

3. Every speaker, except the one that introduces the subject, should be restricted to five minutes each, and no member should be allowed to speak twice on the same subject until all the other members have had an opportunity of expressing their views on the subject under consideration. Those members who are inclined to be a little "windy," and who wander from the subject, should be called to order by the chairman. Someone has said that the "windy" speaker "aims at nothing and hits it." The remarks should always be concise and pointed. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (Col. iv., 6.) "Sound speech, that, cannot be condemned. (Tit. ii., 8.)

4. In compiling the syllabus, the committee should make a careful and judicious selection of subjects for study which are adapted to the varied capacities and requirements of the members. Such an arrangement would invariably insure a variety of thought and expression of opinion upon the subjects under discussion, and tend to foster a spirit of interest and animation in all the meetings of our Associations.

5. Care and discrimination ought to characterise the members in their selection of office-bearers. Much of the success of the Association largely depends on the character and qualifications of its office-bearers. Those who are in office should be men filled with the Spirit of Christ, in full sympathy with the object of our Y.M.C.A., and always ready and willing to extend a helping hand to any of the young men who come to the meetings. Youth ought not to be a disqualification for office, if the member be otherwise eligible. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim. iv., 12.)

6. Inter-visitation with neighbouring associations and interchange of essays would be an attractive and interesting feature in our meetings, and would no doubt tend to strengthen and maintain our membership. District and Sub-district Conferences held at intervals in connection with village Associations would also greatly help to consolidate our membership and increase our usefulness. "Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city . . . and see how they do." (Acts xv., 36.) "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." (Malachi iii., 16.)

IV.—*A conscious sense of personal accountability to God regarding the manner in which we employ our time and talents should permeate our whole life and service.*

Obligation to Christian service does not depend on the measure of our ability. God holds the possessor of one talent as responsible for its proper use as He holds the possessor of ten talents responsible for their use. We are prone to imagine that small powers are useless, and that they absolve us from effort. Such, however, is not the case. The servant who had but "one talent" neglected it, and he was punished for so doing. We are therefore bound to use the smallest of God's intruments as diligently and faithfully as the largest. He who says, "Not slothful in business," would never have given his sanction to a life of inactive, dreamy pietism:—

"Away with the faithless plea which cannot abide the light.
Be wholly for Christ, and He will teach thee to speak aright;
His love shall supply the power, the measure, the mode, the theme;
Thou hast but the present hour, oh! spend every breath for Him."

In God's service there are necessarily many grades and varieties of work, for which different degrees and forms of capacity are needed. It is, however, our qualification for our work, not its form or magnitude, which determines our usefulness. God's acceptance of limited service implies no toleration of what is imperfect or feeble. The Divine command is—use well the ability you have, and I will increase it, and bless your smallest efforts. It is encouraging to know that all grades of Christian workers may be equally qualified and consecrated; that God estimates service by its motive and spirit, and that small services may yield large results. We are told that John Angel James traced his serious impressions to the consistent life of a young lad who shared his bedroom. That young follower of Jesus Christ, leading his quiet, Christian life, did not dream that he was stirring thoughts and feelings that would inspire congregations both at home and abroad; for the spoken and written words of Angel James have indeed exerted no small amount of influence. The minister, whose only known convert was Robert Moffat, had no cause for discouragement. Thus God individualises Christian service, and marks His appreciation of efforts made with a single eye to His glory. The knowledge that we are individually responsible for the existence of every evil which we have the power to destroy ought to stimulate every one of us to manifest a more intense earnestness of spirit in the beneficent work of counteracting the powerful influences for evil which are in the world. Earnestness commands the respect of mankind, whereas a wavering, vacillating, dead-and-alive sort of Christian worker is a clog on the wheel of the Gospel chariot, retarding the progress of the consolidative influence of Divine grace in the ranks of those who are carrying on a warfare against the powers of indifference and sins of all kinds. In God's service, work can never be separated from character—what we are, from what we do. We preach—men employ their intellects in answering our arguments. We strive to reform—the vicious band themselves against us to defeat our plans and operations. But if we are true and holy, there is no argument against

that; there is no resisting the substantive, undeniable, and unconvertible power and influence of the evidence of a consistent Christian life; it tells on every intellect. May we continue to live and act on the side of Christ in whatever circumstances of life He may be pleased to put us.

In conclusion. We have gone over some of the ways and means by which our membership can be increased and maintained, but before closing, I wish to add, that *Watchfulness* is also a necessary requisite in the consummation of the glorious and beneficent work contemplated.

1. Things to be watched over—Thoughts, words, and actions.

“To think well is the way to act rightly.”

2. Things to be watched against—The flesh, the world, and the devil.

3. Things to be watched for—Opportunities for getting good, opportunities for doing good, and the coming of Christ.

“And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” (Mark xiii., 37.)

We trust that, by the Divine blessing, our conference will realise the highest success, by producing an increased interest and zeal in Christian work, higher aims and better methods in carrying it on, and that greater results will crown our future endeavours to increase our membership and promote a spirit of brotherly love and unity amongst our members with the desire to consolidate and strengthen our position in the battlefield of Christian service. “My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (Eph. vi., 10-18.)

“*Finally*, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” (2 Cor. xiii., 11.)

‘Let us speak for the Master wherever we go,
Displaying our colours to friend and to foe;
Exalting His person, His work, and His ways,
His cross, and His coming, and all to His praise.’”