

Links Between

Home Churches ::

- and -

The Foreign Field.



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FOREWORD.

IN his care of the churches the Apostle Paul constantly sought to foster a spirit of fellowship in the work of the Gospel for the sake, not merely of fellowship, but of obedience to the will of the Lord. Nor was he slow to recognise any response to his exhortations. How greatly he valued, for instance, the whole-hearted and regular co-operation of the saints at Philippi. With what manifest joy he begins his Epistle to them, with a testimony to their fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until then.

In the following pages the Author's aim is in keeping with that of the Apostle. The reading is calculated to strengthen links of existing fellowship and to create new ones. "Links" must be forged, and where the forging-heat is that of Divine love, the links will be strong and durable.

May the Lord own the messages of this booklet for the fulfilment of His will, first in the hearts of His servants, and then through them in the spread of the knowledge of His Name and His salvation unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

W. E. VINE.

Links Between Home Churches and the Foreign Field.*

A LINK is often small, but none the less important. The copula, for instance, is a link, but in many sentences makes all the difference between sense and no sense. The buckling of an engine is a link, but without it the carriages are immobilized. Fellowship is a link, but on its presence or absence may depend barrenness or blessing. All Christians are links in the body of Christ. From Him nourishment is distributed throughout the body, "by that which every joint supplieth." The Word of God makes much of fellowship. Though, in one sense, we are not dependent on one another, we are not independent. No member can say to another, "I have no need of thee!" The feeblest in appearance are necessary.

When John wrote that he had no greater joy than to see his children walking in the truth, he meant more than soundness in Church truth, but rather practical fellowship—treating servants of Christ in a way "worthy of God" and sending them on their journey liberally supplied (3 John). From the Epistle to the Philippians we learn the manner of the fellowship; the motive the Lord supplies, "He that receiveth you, receiveth Me." In shewing hospitality to that servant of the Lord, you really opened your house to the Master. When you made a sacrifice for that Mission, it was a gift to the Lord of the Mission. Those garments, worked by busy fingers, which brought relief to some mother's heart for her bairns, were so many gifts to Him, Whose garments were divided and over Whose vesture they did cast lots. The Head is in heaven, "crowned with glory and honour"; the feet are on earth and need to be shod. "God is not unrighteous

to forget your work and labour of love, in that ye have ministered to the saints and yet do minister": only go on with this blessed ministry (Hebrews vi.).

How then can we create and foster links of fellowship? There are links which become chains. These are not from heaven, but of men. Rather than create them, we would break them. Aught that comes between a servant and his Master, or makes men little lords over His heritage, is a carnal link.

Counsel asked or offered is one thing; the orders of a Committee or Director are another. Even the Apostles were not autocrats. Paul did not order his brethren about. In sending Timothy to Philippi he writes, "I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you"; "him I hope to send presently"; "I supposed it necessary to send you Epaphroditus, my brother . . . for he longed after you all"; "I desired Titus"; "I greatly desired Apollos to come unto you . . . but his will was not at all to come at this time."

On the other hand, this principle is double-edged. The younger are called to be subject to the elder, yea, all to be subject one to another. If the servant of the Lord desires, and rightly so, the fellowship of his brethren, he must shew it to them in taking them as far as he can into his counsels and plans, and keeping them posted in the encouragements, difficulties, and needs of the Work. A man may sometimes feel free to speak of the needs of the Work, where he would not speak of his personal needs.

Then there are links which cannot be created; they exist.

(1).—The link of the *Common Command of Christ* to evangelise the whole world. None can stand aside, as if the command had no voice for them.

(2).—The link of a *Common Interest in the Lord's work*.

The interests of all are bound up in it, whether they know it or not, just as the interests of every man, woman or child in Great Britain are bound up in the present war. The heathen poet Terence boasted in

a much lauded line that "everything which touched the interests of mankind touched him." This is natural. Even the lower animals—bees, dogs, ants—are interested in their kind. This needs no grace. But it does require grace to recognise that, "all that touches the interests of Christ touches me." A religious man may propagate his views. A zealous denominationalist may proselytize, but evangelizing is quite different. An ecclesiastic may engage in missionary work for the extension of his Church, and Christ may not be in it. A Christian man may be active in the Gospel, and the true motive may be very feeble. It was exceptional in Apostolic days to find a man with a true motive. "All seek their own," wrote Paul, "not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Are things likely to be better now?

The facts are these: The field is His; the servants are His; the harvest is His. Let me have a hand with share, seed or sickle as the Master of the harvest may direct. May each servant be on the alert to get their allotted task from Him.

There is yet a link which already exists: (3).—*A Common life with all true servants of God.*

"Is he in fellowship?" is often asked. The answer depends on circumstances. Of course, if he is a Christian, he is in fellowship, for a faithful God has called all His people to the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. i.). This is the fellowship of the one body—the link of life forged by the Spirit of God. This unites us to all true servants of Christ everywhere. If Paul could rejoice when Christ was preached "of contention not sincerely," with the base motive "of adding affliction to his bonds," it would be inexcusable for us not to do so over the many true servants of Christ who are preaching the Gospel in the C.M.S., C.I.M., London Missionary Society, American, Moravian and other Missions—Societies that have produced their Careys, Henry Martyns, Hudson Taylors, Moffatts and Judsons. It would be pitiful for us who are hardly worthy, most of us, to undo the latchet of their shoes, to try and ignore such men or

belittle their work. We have a deep fellowship with all who have the delightful habit of preaching Christ.

But the fellowship of life should lead to the fellowship of ways. 1 Cor. ix. points on to Acts ii. 42. "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here human responsibility comes in. It was their fellow-believers who recognised the 3,000 candidates, on their confession of faith, as fit subjects for baptism. All such were *ipso facto* in fellowship. We read of no further ceremony of reception. These two fellowships were intended to be co-extensive. But we may be in outward fellowship as to our ways and another inner fellowship may be lacking—the fellowship of the Spirit. We are never exhorted to keep the Unity of the Body, but of the Spirit. Alas! we may sit round the same table and be out of fellowship in this deep sense. This strikes home. Let us try our ways. God must have reality. Then there is a fourth fellowship, that of truth. This is described in 1 John i. The Apostle longed to impart to others the truth of the Person of Christ, that they might have fellowship with the Apostles. Attempts have been put forth, always with disastrous results, to make truth the ground of fellowship, instead of Christ; light instead of life. It will not do; God will always blow upon it. Where fundamental truth or holiness is sacrificed, excommunication is necessary, but the member excised is not *regarded* as a brother (though he may be one, and if so will be manifested later by repentance), but as a wicked person. Knowledge of truth varies with the individual; one day we shall all come to the Unity of the Faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. In the meantime "in the things wherein we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." (Phil. iii.)

Lastly, there is "fellowship in the Gospel," that is, the practical manifestation of interest and support. How can this be furthered? It depends on our own state. A cold heart has little fellowship with the spread of the Gospel; therefore, get warm. Then you must

have the means. You can't give money if you have none. You can't offer hospitality to a missionary and family if you have no spare room, but every one has means for some exercise of fellowship. Then you must have the opportunity. The Philippians had lacked this till Epaphroditus came along to take their gift. The opportunities abound. As we have opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. vi. 10). Perhaps more than all we must have confidence. How can we sustain people of whom we know little or nothing? Here is a professed servant of Christ. What are his principles? What gospel does he preach? Where does he lead his converts. Though I should rejoice over every man who is preaching Christ; when it comes to practical fellowship I must know more about him. Paul would not have *helped* the men who were preaching a defective gospel or with an unworthy motive, or who were leading their converts into Judaistic systems. John makes a special claim for certain brethren, because they had "gone forth for His Name's sake, taking nothing of the Gentilish ones," those, that is, who savoured of the great world outside. These brethren were most near the pattern of the Word and we are to throw in our lot with such. Don't dissipate your energies in trying to embrace too much. "*Qui trop embrasse, mal étreint.*" The first link then I would recommend to be cultivated is *the link of personal knowledge*. Timothy was indicated as a messenger to the Philippians, because he knew them from the start. It is good when those who go out are known from the start. I do not mean that brethren intending to go out should tour the provinces, telling the wonderful things they intend to do; but that as wide a circle as possible should be interested in their going forth. A passing notice in "Echoes" or "Links" may soon be forgotten by readers outside the parent assembly. It is comparatively easy to pray intelligently for those of whom we know something; but here are names dropped from the blue, known only to a limited circle. This link can be fostered by reading "Echoes" and

“Links” and other similar publications, with our glasses on, and attending M.S. Classes, with all the opportunities for information and fellowship which they afford. As long as information of the intelligence does not outrun communion with God, nothing but good can result. “Mere knowledge puffeth up,” “Love buildeth up.” The study of a map, too, is highly to be recommended. Had I followed the geographical directions of some of my home friends, in my visits to Central Africa, I should have sometimes got considerably out of my reckoning. One brother, for whom I have a high esteem, when he heard I had been at Luanza, said, “Oh, then I suppose you saw something of the Kabompo work.” This would be like saying to a man whom you knew had visited John o’ Groats, “Then you must have seen something of the brethren at Land’s end.” A glance of a map shews that hundreds of miles separate Luanza from the Kabompo river.

The link of knowledge helps the important *link of prayer*, invisible but far-reaching. The link which holds the moon to the earth is invisible, but is equivalent, we are told, to a million million rods of steel, each 17ft. in diameter, stretched to breaking point. Prayer “nerves the arm that moves the world—to bring deliverance down.” Prayer is a tremendous force in missionary work. Pray that our brethren may be able to pray more. The atmosphere of the Foreign Field is specially inimical to prayer. Oh, that we might be Epiphraes in the Church of God!

Then there is *the link of giving*. The Philippians sent direct to Paul by Epaphroditus. This formed a special link between them. The personal touch is electric. A direct gift, with a covering letter of affection and interest, is a strong link. This is the ideal, in my judgment, though some may not agree. However, in practice, in the case of foreign workers, direct communication is in the majority of cases impracticable for various reasons. Then a covering letter may be sent to be forwarded with the gift by those who have addicted themselves to the important and valued ministry of acting as channels of communication with workers

abroad, such channels for instance, as those at Bath, Dublin, Glasgow, Kilmarnock, etc. These brethren seek to act according to the desires of contributors, and are themselves strong practical links between the Home and Foreign fields—as such they deserve to be sustained in their labour of love by the earnest prayers of the Lord's people. I was going to call this link the golden link, but that might seem to exclude the widow's two mites, "of fine copper, precious as gold." (Ezra viii.27). Giving is a habit which by cultivation becomes ever easier and more pleasurable. Try to be systematic. A private record of dates and amounts might show some of us we don't give as often or as much as we thought.

As I have referred to *the link of correspondence*, perhaps a hint might be permitted as to the character of letters which, I believe, are specially appreciated. A message from the Lord, fresh and to the point, is always helpful, but a letter to brethren need not be composed entirely of Scriptural exhortations and quotations. A letter is not unspiritual for being human, as the Epistles of Paul testify. When you have been more than six months at a stretch, as I was once in Central Africa, without a letter or postcard, you do long for news of home, kindred, friends, brethren, assembly and country. Some are hindered from writing by the thought of not having a cheque to enclose, but this thought ought not to stop our pen—a friendly letter of cheer and interest is a kindness anyhow. Our brethren do need money for themselves and perhaps even more for the work, but they do not live for money. That is not their object; else they would not be where they are; some having resigned fine worldly opportunities in order to be the Lord's free-men in the Gospel. In this connection grace is needed to give in a tactful way to servants of Christ. The recipient should be made to feel that he is bestowing a favour, rather than receiving a charity. To be asked what his expenses are before others, and to receive coin from palm to palm, savours rather too much of a dole. The facilities of His Majesty's post may not yet be

perfect, but they obviate, at the expense of a little trouble, any appearance of almsgiving. Living of the Gospel and living on charity must never be confused ; they are on the heavenly and earthly planes.

There is another link, *the link of personal visits* to missionaries abroad. Paul was a great believer in these. As we have seen, he pressed Apollos and Peter to visit the Corinthians, and Timothy the Philippians. If he could not go himself, he got others to go. Certain qualifications are needed. A good measure of bodily health and strength ; some grace and gift so as to have some help to contribute, and a good measure of sympathy. No " chiel taking notes " should apply. I remember, when first going out to Italy, being approached by someone who seemed greatly impressed by the need of reforms in the Churches there, urging me to addict myself to this ministry. I found, however, that I had a good deal to do with watching my own ways and had not as much time, as he would have desired, for the other work.

To be a mere critic of missions and missionaries demands neither heart nor brains. I do not believe a man sent of God will go in that spirit. There are two ways of arriving in the midst of a work, one in a spiritual aeroplane—and you land on the top ; the other, as a humble traveller by the little wicket gate at the foot of the hill. The latter is preferable, in the sight of God and of men.

There is another link which is very important, namely, *the link of personal intercourse* during the sojourn at home of the missionary. Those who have favoured and furthered his going forth, especially the Assembly where he was in fellowship, will not forget his need of rest and change at certain intervals and their responsibility therein. The representatives of certain Roman Catholic Societies go forth never to return, but this is not what we see in the Acts of the Apostles and, for various reasons, cannot be imposed. For one thing, evangelical missionaries mostly follow the example of the Apostle Peter, in being married, and have responsibilities as regards their families.

These, as well as considerations of health, demand a return to the homeland from time to time. This is being realised more and more and the needs of returning missionaries, as regards hospitality, etc., are better provided for than they were. But there is one side of the question which has been rather overlooked, and that is, the utilization of our brethren from abroad while in the homeland. I know they need rest, and naturally enjoy opportunities of taking in, instead of perpetually giving out. On the other hand, the accounts they can give of the work are useful in stirring up fresh interest and prayers. But beyond all this, the fact remains that they do know far more about the needs of the work and its varying circumstances than the most experienced brethren at home. They are, many of them, no longer young men, and had they stayed in the homeland they would, by this time, have been bishops in the home churches. They are bearing responsibilities in their stations, perhaps almost unknown in the homeland. They should be treated as elder brethren in many cases. I am reminded of an aged lawyer in B. who died recently at the age of 102—having found Christ only a year or so before his death. He had a daughter who had almost reached what is termed "the allotted span," whom he still treated as a girl almost to the last. He never could get into his mind she was no longer a child. Our brethren are no longer children. They are glad of counsel—but they can also give it.

In ordinary Conferences for hearing Missionary reports what is expected of brethren is an account of what they have seen of the Lord's blessing on his work, cases of encouragement, etc., This is certainly needful and stimulates praise, as well as increased effort and fellowship. But such are not the moments to confer on difficulties and thorny matters of discipline, or to discuss problems incidental to the development of the work, training of native evangelists, erection of schools, etc.; which press on the hearts of our brethren from abroad. A good beginning has been made for this end in the Missionary meetings at Wimbledon and else-

where. The Conferences, too, of brethren in various parts of the Mission field are a hopeful sign. May the need be increasingly realised and this link with our brethren from abroad utilised and strengthened.

There is one more link and it is, perhaps, the most important of all. *The link of Spiritual power.*

Are we in a fit state to be linked with our brethren abroad? There is a law of temperatures, which decrees that two objects in contact tend to reach the same temperature; the hotter of the two parts with its heat. If I am cold and shake hands with a man with warm hands, I have a sensation of warmth and he of chill. I believe we as home churches owe much to the brethren abroad; but what I would like to enquire is, do they find the spiritual temperature of the home assemblies and conferences warming or chilling? We have suffered a great loss in the home-call of our brother, Mr. Huntingdon Stone—a heavy loss indeed. In what does that loss chiefly consist? Oh, you say, he was a faithful steward and gave so largely of his substance to many branches of the Lord's work. Another would refer to his business qualities; his intimate knowledge of affairs; his mastery of detail; his wise counsels; his gifts as an organiser and teacher. This is all true. But there is one other thing which makes his loss more felt than any other, and it is the loss of his spiritual power and influence. I knew him long, but not intimately; I think few really did. His letters contained very little spiritual exhortation, but spiritual power accompanied them. You felt, this is the letter of a righteous man, which availeth much, the word of a Nazarite indeed, and God was glorified in him and His people's spiritual temperature raised. May it be our ambition to be increasingly godly, so that spiritual "caloric" may flow from us and cheer and warm our beloved fellow-workers in distant fields.

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