

THE CHRISTIAN SETTLEMENT

BY THOMAS S. EVANS,

Head Resident, University Christian Settlement, Philadelphia.

The social instinct or desire for companionship is strong in human nature—people of similar characteristics gather together whenever opportunity offers. Therefore, in every large city we find sections known as “The Bowery,” “The Tenderloin,” “The Devil’s Pocket,” “The East Side,” “The Neck,” etc. These districts are inhabited almost invariably by people who are little known and thoroughly misunderstood. In many cases they are foreigners with whom their neighbors have no relations except in business, and very often they are found even trading only among those of their own nationality. The most casual observer knows that in such neighborhoods the living conditions are unsanitary, the ignorance is appalling, the moral standards are low, the social customs are degrading and the religious life is little more than superstition. These are the districts from which the political boss reaps his harvest with least labor and expense. From such sections a large proportion of the criminals come, and here are found the dens and dives of iniquity in greatest numbers. These few general facts discovered in the routine of city life led to the necessity for doing something to bring about a better state of affairs.

Good impulse under rational control led those who longed to help these people, to a realization that actual life among them must be the means of discovering and meeting their needs. The settlements thus established immediately became the centers of investigation and the sources from which sprang other organizations and efforts for social betterment. A settlement is, therefore, the actual residence of men and women in a neglected district for the purpose of joining hand in hand with those living there to understand and improve their condition in a friendly and natural way. No man can help his brother until he understands him and has his confidence—neither can a group of people help a neighborhood until they know and have the sympathy of those among whom they live.

A settlement is not necessarily an institution, although in some

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cases a well-equipped building is essential. A settlement building should, however, be so constructed as to provide a home for the residents and a house where the people of the district may join with their new neighbors in all sorts of good and useful occupations and recreations. The scope of settlement work is absolutely unlimited—it should touch every phase of human life in every department of its being.

Naturally, it is largely a social institution, since we are considering a group of residents who have a social life of their own and at the same time a desire to affiliate with their neighbors and thus develop with them a healthy community spirit of hearty co-operation for better conditions. But while “social” seems to be the word, and is largely the method, it is only a part of the whole fabric of settlement work.

Much of the effort should be individual, and in fact, the most effective service is rendered when a single resident deals quite personally with one of his neighbors. The worker must study every phase of life in his district—physical conditions, moral standards, social customs, intellectual activities and religious spirit. There are the questions of health, sanitation, housing conditions, political methods, labor problems, education, church life, moral habits and various others.

Everything that concerns the people should interest acutely the settlement residents. Some settlements have greatly narrowed their sphere by refusing to tackle the religious question—these workers claim that to introduce religion engenders controversy and destroys the social harmony which is essential in such a center. Superficially and temporarily this is probably true, but in the long run exactly the opposite will result, for social ties without a moral basis will ultimately break down, and there can be no abiding morality apart from religion. On the other hand, religion forms social ties that grow stronger and stronger, although these ties, at first, bind only the few, the masses of people will gradually respond to that which meets their deepest need. This can be found only in religion.

The desire to avoid the religious seems to spring from several imaginary difficulties; in the first place, it is feared by some that to let the people know that a settlement and its residents stand for something positive in religion will, to use a slang phrase, “queer” things and create a chasm between resident workers and the neigh-

borhood people. Genuine religion creates no chasms—but promotes sympathy and love. The chasm is created by lack of religion, no matter how much the worker may profess. Jesus of Nazareth has more devoted friends to-day than any other person, and He stands as the only perfect settlement worker—the originator of the settlement idea and the constant ideal and inspiration for all settlement workers. His spirit and His methods have not been improved upon. It is, therefore, most fitting that settlements should bear the name Christian—an honest acknowledgment of the origin, and a definite expression of the ideal.

Again, religion is left out because it is claimed that the average settlement worker does not know how to handle religious questions properly and tactfully. Granting that this is true, we believe that the headworker should train his associates in religious work as well as in other forms of service, and should choose only those for this department who are qualified to do it. Let me say, however, that simple testimony is sometimes the most valuable religious method.

Though the above reasons are usually given for omitting the religious, the deepest and most likely reason is that many leading settlement workers do not feel it to be necessary—they claim that morality is sufficient—or they think one religion as good as another. Or if they do believe in “religion,” it is ethical religion, so-called, with the supernatural left out—the hollow shell without the substance—the result without the cause.

Our position is that morality is the basis of settlement work and all social work, that religion is the basis of morality, that Christianity is the final religion, and that constant conscious fellowship with the living Lord Jesus is the sum total of Christianity and of life. There is no genuine life apart from Him—it is mere existence.

Therefore, the only complete settlement is the Christian settlement. In order to be genuinely Christian the known policy of the settlement must be to apply Christianity to the individual and social life of the neighborhood. The headworkers must not only be so-called passive Christians, but active and aggressive Christian workers, not enthusiasts or fanatics or fools in their methods, but as much like Jesus Christ as possible. Many may work in the various departments of the settlement whose religious life is unknown or undeveloped, but those who have charge of things must agree on

all important matters of policy and, above all, on the religious problems. It is most important to make plain the fact that to be Christian does not tie the settlement to any existing sect, creed or method of work. One of the greatest problems of the Christian settlement is to find out how genuine Christianity can be effectively introduced into the individual and social life of a community blindly prejudiced against anything that bears the name of Christian. The difficult and unsolved condition of this problem involves no reason for avoiding it; it is rather an additional stimulus to those who have learned the process of discovery through the solution of other problems.

Another advantage of the Christian basis is in keeping up the spirit and moral tone of resident workers. The report comes to our ears that in one large settlement beer was served on the table to the workers. It is hardly thinkable that in a Christian settlement the approval of the residents could be placed upon a habit which has such a demoralizing effect upon their neighbors who have not the power of self-control. The Christian basis also prevents the settlement from becoming a place where people get only what they want instead of what they need and should have.

Any distinction between social and Christian work is most unfortunate, since the latter certainly includes the former, but, on the other hand, so long as social work is considered sufficient or one religion thought to be as good as another in this world, Christianity must protest by planting and conducting its own centers. Jesus Christ divided sharply between His followers and others, not because He desired to create social strife, but because He had infinite foresight and penetration and knew that only by this means could He secure thorough and abiding moral results.

A prominent social worker told me recently that he could agree with probably nine-tenths of the things which a certain Christian settlement would stand for, but did not feel at liberty to take an active interest, because he felt that the problem of tackling the religious openly, in view of the difficulties involved and the scant results to be obtained, was too great. He stated a fair proposition, and, apart from the supernatural element in Christianity as an asset, his conclusion was probably correct. The essential difference between a social settlement and a Christian settlement is doubtless to be found in the attitude of the settlement towards supernatural

Christianity. If Christianity is the only true religion and is essential to final completion of character, then the settlement must be Christian, but if other religions or no religion produce as good character results, then any emphasis put on the religious is unwise and the social settlement is both easier and better. Let it be distinctly understood that it is not my wish to say that the lines are clearly drawn in most settlements. I am fully aware that Christian and Hebrew and moralist work together and often as individuals do religious work, but I am discussing the policy of the average settlement and speaking of that for which it stands in its neighborhood. My contention is that there can be no complete neighborhood center without a religious basis, and that this center cannot be in the long run effectively religious without being aggressively Christian.

Most foreign missionaries are really Christian settlement workers, for they take up residence in a city or village and by example and effort set about to make a change in their new environment. And, too, their activities include every variety of service and involve organization in every sphere of human life. They lead the people by example and teaching to be sanitary, to "keep house" properly, to observe good manners, to be honest, to correct political abuses, and, in short, to have for the first time high ideals and a social consciousness. Our settlements in this country could learn much from the practices of those devoted settlement workers in China, Japan, India, and Africa. The Christian settlement and the average church hold each a different place, but the settlement is quite unnecessary in a neighborhood where the Church has adapted itself to modern social conditions and needs. When we realize that hundreds of thousands of dollars are invested in church buildings so poorly constructed that they can be used only a few times each week instead of every day in the year, does it not seem necessary that the settlement should supply what is lacking? A church plant providing gymnasium, baths, playground, athletic field, concert hall, quarters for resident workers, summer camps, etc., would make any nearby settlement unnecessary, since it would do the work quite as effectively, provided only the denominational lines were practically forgotten. Is it not probable that settlements exist only because the Church has failed to do the service which was intended by its Founder, and may it not be the highest mission of the settlement

to awaken the Church to its fuller responsibility as the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A. are doing in other fields? The great function of the settlement religiously is to win the people to Christianity and then to let the people themselves choose their own form of worship and church connection.

There are many dangers to be guarded against in a Christian settlement; for instance, that of calling it Christian if the spirit and power of the Master Himself is not felt through the resident workers. Any "holier-than-thou" attitude towards the neighborhood people is fatal. A spirit of aloofness from other workers will isolate and hinder the work. A critical spirit means paralysis. Only Jesus Himself is a safe example of what resident workers should strive to be to their neighbors. But while His spirit prevails the sphere of usefulness in a needy district is truly unlimited.

There may be a variety of definite lines of work in a settlement. The children need to be looked after because of their dirty, cramped and wretched homes. A kindergarten conducted if possible by the city Board of Education, with volunteer workers to help, is most desirable. A day nursery in the building is an important part of settlement work and a boon to the babies and their mothers.

The settlement may help to solve the problem of dealing with truants and to enforce the law of compulsory education. The probation officer and "cruelty" agent may be of great help. Child labor is a crying evil, and no agency is so well equipped as the settlement for its overcoming. Night school has its place for the boy and girl who leave school at an early age in order to help with the support of the family.

The mothers of the neighborhood who have grown up in slovenly homes and worked in the mills until the wedding day comes, need to learn the first principles of housekeeping, cooking, sewing, etc. The girls and young women may be induced to spend two or three evenings each week in learning the essential qualifications of a successful working man's wife.

The settlement should manage the athletic sports of the young people, in which recreation and healthy exercise are combined, for it has been proven that the athletic sphere when taken hold of properly may be one of the largest fields of usefulness in neighborhood work, since all classes of people will rally more enthusiastically about athletics than anything else.

Debating societies, political meetings and games like bowling, etc., may be used as a means of keeping the men of a neighborhood out of the saloons. The mothers' meeting may be made a bright spot in the monotonous lives of the homekeepers. All of the people can doubtless be interested in public lectures, concerts, entertainments and athletic match games gotten up by the club members.

A children's playground takes the little tots off the streets and the roof-garden is always a delight on hot summer evenings. Every settlement should have a large athletic field near enough to be reached easily by the people of the neighborhood—saloonkeepers are now providing these fields free of charge, and are even paying teams to play match games. But there is no department of settlement work more important than the summer camps—a week or two in the country during the hot season may mean more to the people whom the settlements are trying to help than months of effort along other lines during the winter, for there is no place where workers and people learn to know each other so well as in a camp where they actually live together day and night. No settlement is complete without those summer camps, and no settlement needs to be without them, for they are neither hard to manage nor expensive, inasmuch as the people will pay a large proportion of the costs.

The settlement should co-operate with the city and all other neighborhood agencies in every possible way, but the settlement itself should do for the people only those things of a personal nature which it can do most wisely and sympathetically. The city and other charitable agencies should be induced to look after *general* problems of environment.

It is plain that those who are to be competent leaders in such unrestrained and unlimited work as that which we have discussed need to be well balanced and well trained. It is, therefore, most desirable that all Christian settlement workers should have, in addition to the fundamental equipment of an earnest Christian spirit, a thorough training in the most up-to-date methods of social work. Mere enthusiasm to "save souls" is not sufficient, for all souls reside in bodies. Jesus healed diseased bodies, unbalanced minds and dealt with the social customs and conditions of His time. He has sent us forth as the Father sent Him, and it is ours to do as He did in His name.