

HELPERS AND HINDERERS.

"I wrote unto the church; but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not*****

"Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself; yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true."

III John 9***12.

We like the Demertius's, but we whould like to get rid of the Diotrephes's. John said that Diotrephes cast some of the good people out of the church. If the good people were in the majority, why didn't they kick Diotrephes out? How hard it is to keep the good things of life; how hard to get rid of the bad and worthless.

I remember a few years ago my wife's father was down for a long last illness. While my wife was away from home trying to help with him my son was stricken with a severe case of appendicitis, my chickens were dying with worms and the bugs were eating up my garden. I was sitting out on the porch looking at an old sugar berry tree. It was green and flourishing; not a withered leaf on it. I said to my daughter, "I wish everything on our place was as healthy as the old hackberry." I know I could have given up the old hackberry a lot easier than I could my boy or my wife's father. I think it was worth less than the chickens or garden. But there it was, and I was about to lose the others.

We knew we couldnot save her father, though loved ones would have given anything to keep him with us. We had a hard fight to save the boy. But when the fight was over we knew it was worth all it cost. The good things of life are always costly

and hard to keep. The worthless accumulate without any effort on our part.

John says nothing about getting rid of Diotrephes, though it should have been an easy thing to do. Why doesn't the church get rid of the troublesome members? They are always in the minority; they could easily be put out. When the servants saw the tares in the wheat they wanted to go out and pull them up. But the Lord said, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them."

Do the troublesome members really hurt the church? How much real harm do the Diotrephes's do? The real harm such people do the church is always far less than appears at the time. Many a preacher who is always harping on the harm objecters do the church is just a lame preacher. The ineffectiveness of his preaching is due to its own weakness. He lays it on the ^{hinderers.} ~~hinders~~ to cover up his own short comings. There is always a chance that the church will help the wayward member more than he hurts the church.

Do objecters in the church really hinder it? Why has the church been so intolerant of objecters? Early in the history of England under the Magna Charter it was found that any one party or group without opposition is dangerous. If an opposition party is necessary in civic affairs, why is it not in the church? In America we have learned that the safety of the country lies in two strong parties.

The Roman church has damned all objecters. Many of the protestant churches have been almost as intolerant. A church does run "smoother" when it is run by one man or a small group. But a smooth running church does not save sinners.

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Only a tumultuous church can save men and women. A smooth running church is a dead church; it never makes progress.

I remember when Tom Watson criticized the missionaries for living in luxury in China and India. They could do it then on fifty dollars per month. Some of the preachers were very angry at Tom Watson. I remember reading one blast that called Tom Watson some bad names, questioned his motives and exposed some weak points in his own church life. But the same preacher failed to answer the charge that Tom Watson brought against the missionaries. Was the cause of missions hurt by Tom Watson's criticism? Most of the people who took his criticism as an excuse not to give, would not have given anyway. I think the record will show that the sum contributed to missions increased after that.

Sinclair Lewis and H.L. Mencken have criticized the church severely. It made little difference what the motive of these men was, it made many people very angry. But the Christian church is still with us. It is purer and stronger today than when Tom Watson attacked its lame practices. It has dropped a lot of cant and hypocrisy because of the opposition of Lewis and Mencken. It is a better church because these men found its faults and pointed them out. And it is far more tolerant of objectors. Even if they did not do it for good, it did good anyway.

A church that is running too smoothly is a dying church. A preacher who has every one agreeing with him is preaching a dead gospel. A man who does not like us may find faults that a friend would be too kind to mention. A church that cannot bear criticism or to have its faults exposed has a lot of faults that should be exposed. A church that cannot hear opposition needs opposition.

The real test of a church member's moral armor is the ability to laugh when the joke is on his own church. It is said the Communists never laugh. The only time that Hitler was known to laugh was the rather fiendish laughing at the French when they had to surrender to his army. Can one imagine Hitler laughing at a joke that was on him? A church member that cannot laugh when the joke is on his church should never tell one on another church. It is good to be able to see our own faults and laugh at our own mistakes. There is something fundamentally wrong with the person who cannot see anything wrong with himself or his own group.

If I had a Tom Watson, a Sinclair Lewis or an H.L. Mencken in my church, I would not turn him out. When he blasted the church, I would ask him what else he found wrong with it. If he blasted my sermons, I would tell him I think they are pretty rotten myself, but it is the best I can do. If agreeable with the congregation I might ask him to preach one. The quickest way to silence troublesome objecters is to ask him to propose some way that is better.

This is usually the weakness of objecters. They can find plenty wrong with other men; they can see faults in the most devout. But when you ask them to point out a better way, they are dumb.

One ^{weakness} weakness of objecters is they can only object. They are always poor constucters. They like to tear down, but do not ask them to build again what they have destroyed. The world would be in a sorry plight if it had only objecters. When he is asked to build his fingers are all thumbs, the mortar is always too wet or too dry, the bricks are the wrong color or the wrong size or the wrong shape.