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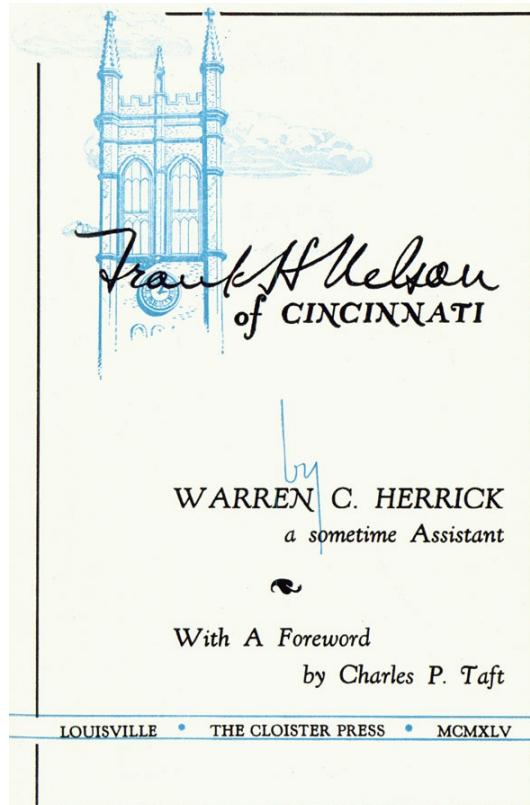
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK H. NELSON OF CINCINNATI ***



FRANK NELSON *of* CINCINNATI

*Writing is the offspring of thought, the lamp
of remembrance, the tongue of him that is
far-off, and the life of him whose age has
been blotted out.*

—Anon



Frank H Nelson
of CINCINNATI

by

WARREN C. HERRICK
a sometime Assistant

With A Foreword
by Charles P. Taft

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To My Wife

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is made possible only through the interest and contributions of the many friends of Frank H. Nelson. Space does not permit my mentioning by name all who have furnished me with material, but I do wish to record my gratitude to them. In addition to the years 1925-1928 as Mr. Nelson's assistant I spent two weeks in the autumn of 1943 interviewing a cross-section of Cincinnati and Christ Church. Many business men gladly gave of their time because they enjoyed recounting memories of one whom they loved, and often detained me when I felt I had imposed myself long enough. I noticed also that Mr. Nelson's photograph occupied a place of honor in more than one office as well as in many homes.

There are others far better qualified than I to write this story, and I accepted the task, though with a keen sense of my inadequacy, first, because Mrs. Nelson honored me with the request, and second because I have the strong conviction that it should be done for the sake of those who knew Mr. Nelson, and also for those of a succeeding generation who ought to know how one minister more than met the requirements of an exacting profession. Furthermore, I have written as one who owes an incalculable debt, and, therefore, cannot be wholly objective. While I have endeavored not to make this biography a eulogy, it is frankly his life as I saw it, and depicts one whom I loved, admired, and have tried to follow.

For innumerable suggestions and for valuable material I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Frank H. Nelson, to Mr. Nelson's sisters, Miss Margaret^[1] and Miss Dorothea Nelson, and to Mr. Howard N. Bacon, who have helped me more than perhaps they know. Then there is the pleasant duty of expressing my thanks to Mr. Charles P. Taft, the Junior Warden of Christ Church, Cincinnati, for writing the foreword; to the Vestry of Trinity Church, Melrose, Massachusetts for gladly granting me a leave of absence in 1943, and to Mrs. E. Howard Favor, my secretary, for the typing cheerfully undertaken. In the labor of preparing the final draft for the publishers I shall ever remember with gratitude the careful thought and skillful phrasing of Miss Mary Putnam of the English Department of the Melrose High School whose corrections and amendments were nothing less than creative. Finally, I wish to let stand my heartfelt thanks to the Right Reverend Henry Knox Sherrill, Bishop of Massachusetts, without whose encouragement and advice this little book could not have been written.

WARREN C. HERRICK

*Trinity Church,
Melrose, Massachusetts;
1945.*

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Deceased, July 6, 1945.

A FOREWORD

How does one life affect another?

I have tried to remember what Frank Nelson directly asked me to do. He asked me to teach in the Sunday School, and I did it. Gradually I found myself studying out an intellectual foundation for faith in God. He never said anything to me about that, except from the pulpit. He wrote me asking that I act as captain in the Nation-wide Campaign, and I answered that I could not. But the next thing I remember was being a visitor in the Nation-wide Campaign, and I was always in

it after that. He asked me to serve on the Vestry, and somehow made me feel that nothing except being really sick was an excuse for not being there.

Certainly he never exhorted people to be civic patriots or reformers, and save the city. He just gave you such a human picture of the teeming life of a great city that it made a tear come to your eye to think of what the city could be at its best, and it made you love it and the people in it. Your own actions in civic affairs just naturally followed.

He wasn't an exhorter of virtue, but he made of clean living and noble service such a fascinating objective that people went to work on their own problems with fresh faith.

The only time I recall he was really annoyed with me was when I had an emergency operation for appendicitis in the middle of the night, and didn't let him know until the next day. He was my minister, and that meant *minister*. After that, when I had a major choice to make, I felt I was risking his disappointment unless I went down to talk to him about it.

He didn't want me to go to a great school as headmaster. "The city is the place that needs service and talents," said he. To that he had given his life, in the personal contact with his parish. His life stands as a symbol of the way a true love of home and community is tied to a love of all God's children everywhere.

CHARLES P. TAFT

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Arise, And Go Into The City

*"Arise, And Go Into The
City"*

—Acts 9:6

1

"Tell the rector of Christ Church that if he doesn't call off the Woman's Club, I'll bring the women of the streets to the polls." And he added, "He knows I can do it." The boss of old Ward Eight, in which Christ Episcopal Church in downtown Cincinnati is located, had become alarmed by a serious threat to his power. Although this incident took place long before the coming of universal suffrage, Reverend Frank H. Nelson, the young rector, had discovered that women had a legal right to vote in public school matters. Following his leadership, the Woman's Club of Christ Church was actively supporting as a candidate for the Board of Education John R. Schindel, a fearless young lawyer in the Ward. This independent action was an open challenge to the dominance of the boss of Ward Eight, Mike Mullen. Though the courageous lawyer was defeated, and without the aid of the women of the streets, the affair was one of many which presaged the uprising that eventually wrenched the control of Cincinnati from the hands of one of the most notorious political gangs in American democracy.

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A second "passage of arms" between the rector and Boss Mullen had its origin in the work of Christ Church among boys, and ultimately involved the boss of the entire city and his powerful machine. The privilege of running gambling games throughout Cincinnati had been allotted to one of the higher-ups in the organization. Within a block of the Parish House of Christ Church was a flourishing candy store, so-called, but the chief "confection" was a crap game run for the boys of the neighborhood under the direction of a member of the City Council, and with the knowledge and acquiescence of the police department. It was inevitable that some members of Christ Church Boys' Clubs should lose their earnings, and whatever of character the church was building up was thus broken down. To meet this danger, Mr. Nelson organized a good citizenship club among his parishioners. The members made a survey of the gambling places which were catering especially to boys, and found nearly one hundred throughout the city. The publication of their findings was one of many "shots heard 'round the ward."^[2] When in later years Frank Nelson spoke for the City Charter or Reform Party, he knew from first-hand experience the moral and spiritual influence of good government in the lives of boys and young men. Behind the youthful clergyman's deep concern for decent government was a vital religious faith, without

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which he was convinced social service and reform work can never attain the best results.

Frank H. Nelson was Rector of Christ Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1900 to 1939, having been the assistant minister in the year 1899. These forty years in the one parish constitute a career seldom paralleled for breadth of vision and devoted service. He became one of the first citizens of a great city, a crusader for honest municipal government, and the foremost Protestant clergyman. For the understanding of his ministry and of his religious convictions, one must know something of his early life and family, and the preparatory years.

Frank Howard Nelson was born in Hartford, Connecticut on September 6, 1869. His father, Henry Wells Nelson, the nephew of the Reverend E. M. P. Wells, a pioneer in early Christian social service in Boston, was the Rector of the Church of The Good Shepherd in Hartford. Before Frank was ten years old, his father accepted a call to Trinity Church, Geneva, New York, and there exercised a distinguished ministry for twenty-five years. Geneva, an attractive college town situated on lovely Seneca Lake, was an ideal place in which to bring up a family. There were five children: Margaret, George, Frank, Mary, and Dorothea. George now lives in Brookline, Massachusetts, and Mary, who married Edward L. Pierce, lives in Princeton, New Jersey. After the father's retirement, Margaret and Dorothea lived with their parents in the family home at North Marshfield, Massachusetts where they still reside. Frank was not a strong child, but in the freedom and simplicity of the life which a small town affords, he gained strength rapidly. A sister relates that he was unusually venturesome, and sometimes horrified timid ladies in the parish by walking on stilts on open rafters, and by frequenting the canal, where once he fell in and was pulled out by a bargee. As all boys do, he roamed the environs of his home with his chums, occasionally pilfering fruit and getting into all kinds of mischief; but though other boys might go unpunished because of doting parents, he was always firmly chastised for his pranks.

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The influence of both father and mother upon these strong-minded children was vital and enduring. The father possessed that happy combination of gaiety and goodness that commends religion. As he was deeply and naturally spiritual himself, the expression of religion in his home and parish was unusually beautiful and appealing. The last twenty-five years of his life were spent in blindness, but his courage and his deepened understanding of the ways of God because of this affliction led him to a thankful acceptance of his limitation; and his continuing interest in people "made the latter years of his ministry," to quote Bishop Lawrence, "as fruitful as the more active ones." His devoted wife, who was Hortense Chew Lewis of New London, Connecticut, guided the children through their formative years with skill and understanding. She was an intelligent mother, discriminating in taste and judgment. Because of her abounding love of good literature, the family passed many delightful evenings in listening to her readings from Scott, Milton, Shakespeare and many other great writers. Her fine gifts of interpretation made the masterpieces of English prose and poetry come alive. In later years, Christ Church people were to love Frank Nelson's readings at Christmas parties in the parish house and in his own home. The older he grew the deeper became his appreciation of the character of his parents. An intimate friend once said to him, "You are a fortunate and a blessed man to have had such a father and mother."

The family was privileged in possessing means beyond a minister's salary, and Frank, at the age of thirteen, was sent to aristocratic St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire. The headmaster, Dr. Henry A. Coit, an austere and exacting teacher of the old New England type, stimulated the natural student, and under his influence Nelson achieved a scholastic standing among the first five in his class. He was not particularly skillful in athletics, and had even then a cough which persisted throughout his life. The lad was not noticeably popular, and had more than the average measure of shyness peculiar to adolescence. He was extremely sensitive, somewhat unhappy, and in many accomplishments and activities was overshadowed by his older brother who was in the same school.

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In the fall of 1886, upon graduation from St. Paul's School, Frank returned to Geneva and entered Hobart College, a small church college of considerable standing. There he began to find himself, and became one of the popular men in his class and in the Sigma Phi Fraternity. Although in college he took more active interest in athletics and participated in rowing, tennis, and track, he never excelled in sports. At his graduation in 1890 he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts, *Magna Cum Laude*, being valedictorian and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Throughout his life he maintained relationships with his Alma Mater, coming to know the successive presidents, and in 1907 was instrumental in securing a large gift for a new gymnasium. Still later he refused the presidency of the college. In 1906 Hobart bestowed upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology.

In the course of his undergraduate days at Hobart, Frank Nelson had seriously considered the profession of the ministry, but graduation found him still undecided. As it turned out, the summer following the close of his college years was one of critical importance to his entire life. He accompanied a surveying expedition to the state of Washington. The party put up for a while in Merrysville, a rough-mannered, tough-living town of the old West. Into this place there came one day a circuit rider who fearlessly preached the Gospel in the face of opposition and outright hostility. This Methodist minister was utterly sincere, and Nelson saw what could be done by the sheer power of the spirit against the forces of evil. It surged over him that a man can hold the mastery over wrong, an inner conviction which at the same time was set aflame by a Communion Service held for the surveyors in the out-of-doors. The circumstances and surroundings were strikingly different from those associated in his mind with such a service. Possibly for the first time in his life he was intensely conscious of the presence of God. As in all such experiences the vision illumined and deepened his thinking and living. It has been said that in all great Christian

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leaders and reformers are found two elements: "The imperious commission from above, and the tumultuous experience within." Both these elements were present in the experiences of that eventful summer, and all Frank Nelson's doubts and waverings concerning the ministry were resolved. He returned East aware of being called to preach the Gospel. In the light of this happening one is not surprised that later when a professor dogmatically stated that there could be no true Sacrament without the Apostolic Succession, Nelson walked out of the classroom saying to himself, "It is a lie." To those who knew him through his forty years' ministry in Christ Church, this experience in the far West sheds light upon his burning sense of mission, for in those hours of inward tumult he had come close to God in the breaking of bread and in the society of his fellows, conditions which he preached throughout his life as being always the essence of fellowship with God.

On September 18, 1890, he matriculated at the General Theological Seminary in New York City. The General Seminary is directly under the government of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, and while it has always been characterized by a conservative type of churchmanship, all shades of opinion were and are to be found within its faculty and student body. At this time the respectability of the Episcopal Church was considered an asset and not a liability, and the Seminary community was in the social forefront. When an upstanding man like Frank Nelson, whose background was well-known and whose intellectual gifts and social graces were obvious, entered this environment, it was inevitable that he should immediately take a leading place in the undergraduate body. His tall, commanding figure naturally attracted notice, and within a few days he was elected president of his class. There was magnetism in his personality, and he was soon welcomed among the socially distinguished in both seminary and city. His fellow-students at General, when speculating about the future, as students do, always considered him destined for the highest office of the church; throughout those now remote years he clearly revealed the qualities of the born leader. His class was a notable one, and through the passing years gave a good account of itself, listing four bishops and ten honorary degrees, Frank Nelson himself receiving the degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology from the General Seminary in 1934.

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As a student he excelled in Pastoral Theology, Biblical Learning and Evidences, subjects which in their nature give some indication of his intensely human interest in all aspects of life. Like many theological students, he was groping and feeling his way through the multiple problems that center upon man in the light of God. One of his classmates says that the curriculum and the methods of instruction in that day bear poor comparison to modern standards, but Nelson, unlike many students, was never in a state of open or even tacit rebellion. He did his work faithfully and well. He was graduated in 1894, but for some reason was not present at Commencement to receive the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology, which is the mark of scholastic distinction at General. On May 19, 1894, he was made a deacon in his father's church in Geneva, New York by the Right Reverend Arthur Cleveland Coxe, the Bishop of Western New York. During his senior year he had assumed work on the staff of St. George's Church, New York City, and after his ordination was quickly absorbed into the work of that great parish. Because he did not feel ready, Frank Nelson, at his own request, was not advanced to the priesthood until November 14, 1897, when he was so ordered in St. George's Church by Bishop Henry Codman Potter of the Diocese of New York.

Another important element in Mr. Nelson's preparation for his unique ministry in Cincinnati was this experience on the staff of St. George's Church from 1894 to 1899 under the prophetic leadership of the Reverend William S. Rainsford. This notable rector possessed unusual gifts and exerted an incalculable influence upon the Episcopal Church. He gathered about him a group of young men the like of whom has never been found elsewhere. St. George's stands as the pioneer of what was known as the "institutional church," and in the midst of the teeming activities of the parish house and a heterogeneous congregation, Dr. Rainsford set loose his young and enthusiastic assistants. They experienced a training comparable to the clinical instruction gained by an intern in a modern hospital. Under his tutelage these men received a course in applied religion, and their rector set a standard of preaching, parish administration, and pastoral care that not one of his "boys," as he called them, failed to practice in an unusual manner. Dr. Rainsford's impassioned preaching of the essentials of Christianity as opposed to those aspects which are merely traditional, and his forceful efforts, radical for those times, to democratize a conventional Episcopal parish were significant contributions to church life throughout America.

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Although Dr. Rainsford exerted a lasting influence upon all his young assistants, he set his stamp to a marked degree upon Frank Nelson. For the first time in his life this young man, the choicest flowering of a cultured home, lived among the underprivileged, spending his afternoons climbing interminable tenement stairs, and his evenings in the parish house. He came to know poverty and squalor and the honest worth of struggling humanity. If "The Rector," as Dr. Rainsford's "boys" called him, bade them preach on the street corners, he himself had done the same. His example and his personal religious faith were those of a living St. George touched with the heart-stirring Gospel of Love. Under him young Nelson found the services and work of the church taking on a meaning that was like a cool, refreshing breeze. Things concerning the Church, doctrine, and ritual, which had formerly perplexed his youthful mind, now seemed subordinate.

Dr. Rainsford evoked a loyalty which held his young men long after they had "graduated," and when he died in 1933 at the age of eighty-three, many of his former assistants were in the chancel of old St. George's for the burial service. One who was present said, "We shall not see a service like that again, for we shall never see and know another Rainsford." Eulogies are not

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customary at funerals in Episcopal Churches, but on this occasion the tradition was fittingly broken, and Mr. Nelson delivered a brief address from the pulpit in a breaking voice, barely audible at times. In this very moving tribute, the speaker reveals much of himself:

I am not here to presume to speak of the man we loved in any formal way; to try to weigh the imponderable, to measure the immeasurable—but only to say a word out of our hearts of thanksgiving to God that the rector was our rector in the days that are passed, was The Rector always and will be always, for those who knew him, who loved him, to whom he gave that tremendous love of his.

A book was written by a friend of his some years ago, and the dedication of that book was this: "To William Stephen Rainsford, who has seen the Christ and has shown Him to men."

I know of no more perfect description of the rector than that. For twenty years and more of his rectorship in this great parish he showed Christ to men; showed Him in the incomparable words that he poured forth Sunday after Sunday and year after year from this pulpit—in his great concern for the men and women and little children; for the strong and for the weak; for the wise and the foolish; for the saints and the sinners; for those who labor and were hungry and perplexed, and were strained by the tasks of life. They came here week by week; they heard from him the words that refreshed them and sent them back with courage and with faith in God and in man, to the tasks that were breaking them, to the problems that were perplexing them.

I suppose that to every one of us who knew him in his great days here and have known him in the years since, the one supreme thing that poured out of his life was his love of God. Not the love of God that theologians speak of, that men reason about, but that pure love that a man gives to his friend, to his loved ones—personal, intense, vital, real.

We came here church people, professing the Christian faith, thinking we believed in God and in His son, Jesus Christ, and as we sat under the rector here Sunday after Sunday, we came to know that our profession was a form of sound words, that in him was the form of unsound words, but that he poured forth *reality* for the thing that we *professed* to believe in, and he helped us to see the real work of God, the real passionate love of God for men—not for the chosen few, but the weak, the broken, the struggling—those in sorrow and the hungry—the love of God that drove him to lay down his life as few men had laid down their lives before. He gave of himself without stint, rejoicing in the chance to serve his God and his fellowmen with his whole heart and soul, with such passionate devotion that at last broke through his own conventional beliefs and tore them to shreds, and made him the voice of the living God, to us in St. George's, to New York and to America.

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In the great days of his preaching, he took us who were his clergy—young, inexperienced and conceited—and made us over. He took us, to whom religion was a profession, and made of it a passion. He was ever patient with us, giving us his best; day after day walking with us around Stuyvesant Square in the morning, sometimes for hours, and then pouring out to us as we walked the best religious thought of his time, his judgment on the questions of the day, his interpretations of religion and the tremendous work of the church as a gift that God had put into the souls of men for service to their fellowmen.

He told us of his thought for men and women, of the problems of the time, of the problems of the church—not conventional, but vital, not formal, but distinctly real—and then he would take us into his study and we would kneel there. And never have I heard a man pray as the rector prayed—without any of the ecclesiastical technique and form of prayer, without any formal discussions of the value of prayer, but pouring out the things that we had been talking of; as real to God as they were real to us, bringing into them God; God's companionship, God's sympathy, God's understanding and patience; God's ruthless will that we should love our fellowmen and serve our fellowmen—without name, without a distinction.

That is the vivid life, a little of it, that we lived with, which made God real to New York and to us here at St. George's, and to his clergy. God has taken him home, and we meet here, every one of us, because the rector—broken though he was in these later years—because the rector, whose great and lovely smile we had loved to see, as we had loved just to touch his hand to gain strength, courage, faith and joy—because we cannot do that any more. His work is done and God gives him a safe lodging and he shall rest in peace to the last. Thank God who gave him to us, to know and to love, that we might be lifted by him to find God and Jesus through him.

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He wrote a little prayer, and in closing I am going to read it and ask you to join with me in making it our own. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, I am trying to do right and be right and help others to be right. Give me my daily bread. I am Thy child; Thy little, weak child. Give me Thy strength; Thy patience; Thy wisdom; Thy love—that with confidence and with joy I may do the work Thou hast given me to do in my home and among men. Amen.^[3]

The charter of Frank Nelson's future is set forth in the impression he made at the General Theological Seminary, and in the zest and enlargement of vision which characterized his five

years under Dr. Rainsford at St. George's. When the opportunity presented itself to create in Christ Church, Cincinnati, Ohio a work similar to that of St. George's, he displayed a characteristically wise judgment in making his decision. Henceforth he was to live "in the upper story" of that decision, conceiving of his work as a mission to the city, and pursuing it with a fidelity and a diligence that ranked him as an unusual servant of God.

FOOTNOTES:

- [2] For these stories I am indebted to the Rev. J. Howard Melish, D.D. whose forthright denunciations of political corruption in Cincinnati were further "shots heard 'round" the city.
- [3] *The Churchman*, January 1st, 1934.

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Reclaiming A Church To Meet A New Age

"By the grace of God, and the loyalty of the members of Christ Church I was enabled to carry on the work when Alexis Stein had to give it up."

—*Frank H. Nelson*

2

The surging currents of city life had left old Christ Church in a back eddy, and certain leaders including the senior warden advocated selling the property or turning it over to the Diocese for a mission. The population, as in many another American city, was shifting from the downtown district, and many believed that the parish had seen its best days. In those late nineties, parishioners of wealth and prominence were moving to the suburbs; the older, conservative members still attended the morning service, but the young people either attached themselves to churches nearer their residences or were drifting away from church affiliations altogether.

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Christ Church was established in 1817 when Cincinnati was a small river town of nine thousand inhabitants; looking at the present church building which seats over one thousand people and is flanked by an enormous and ever busy parish house, one finds it difficult to picture Bishop Philander Chase meeting in that year with a group of men in the home of Dr. Daniel Drake to lay the foundations of what was to become one of the largest parishes in the Middle West. The first services were held in a cotton factory, and the church slowly developed into a strong parish, small in numbers but served by several very able rectors, one of whom later became the Bishop of Virginia. As the first Episcopal Church to be founded in Cincinnati, it was the parent of a number of other parishes; but at the close of the nineteenth century it appeared that the "mother-church" was about finished. Churches of other communions located in the downtown district were going through the same transition. The slump in finances by reason of removals created something akin to panic in the fearful and timid vestrymen, but because of some loyal and far-sighted women Christ Church was not disbanded. They wanted it to mean to their children what it meant to them, and they gave assurance of support in substantial ways.

These ardent supporters had a definite vision and plan. In 1897 Dr. William S. Rainsford had come on from New York City and had packed old Pike's Opera House for a week in Lent, and thrilled his hearers with the recital of his efforts to anchor St. George's Church in the heart of that great metropolis, and make it free to serve the community. When Bishop Vincent of Southern Ohio wrote him about the difficulties of Christ Church, he replied with this momentous letter:

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I am going to give you the greatest proof I can of my love and deep interest in Cincinnati. I have a plan for Christ Church. Here it is. Take two of my men—let them work and live together; they could take a mighty strong hold, and do a really good work. I feel sure that in the future many a position of great difficulty can be much better occupied by two men, pulling together, than by one alone. There are two magnificent fellows—dear, dear boys after my own heart—who have been here with me for years; and I shall be lost without them, if you call them. Stein (Alexis) is the ablest

preacher of his age (28) in our Church in these United States today. Nelson (Frank) is a strong, capable man, full of energy and charm and a first-class organizer. This is a big idea, my friend; but I believe God may be in it. It is like offering to cut off both my hands for you.

Thus the Reverend Alexis Stein became Rector of Christ Church in December, 1898, and within a few weeks of his arrival the people of Cincinnati awoke to the mighty fact that a prophet was in their midst; the doors of all churches were flung open to him, and everywhere he spoke, new interest and hope in the Church were born. Stein has been called a modern Savonarola, but, unlike the great reformer, he was burned within by the fire of his own consuming message. "He was a preacher of most unusual power with a message he burned to give; and a vision of truth that made him a leader of men. He loved God and showed Him to men; he loved men and led them to God."^[4] Before Stein left New York, he had asked his friend, Frank Nelson, to join him in the new venture, but it was not until May 21, 1899 that he was free to come.

We came out to Cincinnati because Dr. Rainsford sent us; he told us that we ought to come—not that we wanted to come. Stein and I both had always lived in the East. It was the America that we knew, and it seemed a desirable place to live, just as those of you who have been born here think that Cincinnati is the most desirable place to live, because it is your home. But he, with a larger vision of America, and a larger vision of the calling of God to a man in the ministry, sent us here to do what we could.^[5]

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In February, 1900, the doctor ordered Alexis Stein out West, a victim of tuberculosis. He lived a short twelve years, but was never well enough to do more than a little incidental work. This tragedy was a deep, personal loss to his young associate, for all through their St. George's days they had been the closest of friends. They complemented one another and made an ideal team.

Invariably on Good Friday in the course of his address on the Sixth Word from The Cross, Frank Nelson spoke of Stein's influence upon him and upon Christ Church: "The work he began is witnessed to by you who are here. You wouldn't have been here forty years ago or the likes of you would not have been here, but he opened the door of life and the spirit to the people of this city, as to the members of this church. His work goes on. The thing that God wanted him to do he did, and it was finished." He expressed himself in more intimate fashion to his friend Bishop Touret: "The heart of all its worth (Nelson's own forty years' ministry) has been that I was carrying on for Alexis. I've first been his assistant in my own mind always, and that has made it possible for me to dare to undertake it." If Stein's work was finished, and a prophet needs no great length of time, then it was brought to fruition through the resolute efforts of this devoted servant who with great humility and genuine searchings of heart took up the reins so tragically relinquished.

Frank H. Nelson was elected Rector of Christ Church on May 5, 1900. In the light of subsequent events his letter of acceptance is of interest:

May 16, 1900

Gentlemen:

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In a letter from your Secretary, I have been informed of your action of last Saturday, in electing me to succeed the Rev. Alexis Stein, as Rector of Christ Church. That I appreciate very deeply the honor that you have conferred upon me, I do not need to say. I have considered the subject very carefully, and painful to us all though the circumstances are that have led to this, I feel strangely that it is God's work we have undertaken, and that He has led us in it all. I therefore accept the call you have given me, and I believe that working together we can, with God's help, do a real work for Him in this city. For the success of the work I regard two things as essential: the first that the Church shall remain absolutely free, and the second that the lines of work represented by the Parish House shall be continued. I ask your cooperation and support in them both. I am writing the Rev. J. H. Melish to ask him to be my associate. I hope to have him begin his work with us in June. I feel deeply the burden of responsibility, and the great opportunity that your call involves. I can but say that I shall do all in my power to be faithful to both.

Frank Nelson distrusted his own ability. Stein's preaching had packed the church, and the numbers drastically declined when his eloquent voice was stilled. The Bishop, conscious of the difficult problem confronting a downtown church, advised Rev. Mr. Melish not to become associated, saying "Stein could have solved it, but Frank Nelson never will." The Bishop, however, had not sufficient evidence to gauge the young rector's talents, nor could he foresee the capacity of the parish to respond to the man's magnetic appeal.

There was at this time not only a break in the center of population in the city, but also a shifting of the center of gravity in religion. There was dawning a unity of the spirit which led men to break away from the orthodox emphasis on creeds, and which strove to express itself in many forms; such as parish houses, Christian associations, reforms, and educational and missionary movements. Mr. Nelson's mind, being busy with the stars, was concerned with the moral and spiritual movement which outlasts the stars. He said, "To some of us it seems that Jesus was not so much interested in establishing an institution as in revealing a new quality of life." Likewise, Frank Nelson was not so much interested in being the rector of a large, prosperous parish as in making the church an agency for leavening the city's life with the spirit of Jesus Christ. He caught the imagination of his people when he pointed to the possibility of a church becoming the community center for multitudes in the downtown district. In the near neighborhood of Christ Church were new offices, factories, and boarding houses, and at the distance of one block began

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the tenement houses where lived the poor and underprivileged. He said:

We owe to them the gift of Christian friendship, of spiritual influence irrespective of religious affiliations. The church should provide not only a place to pray, but to play; a place not only for worship, but for friendship. There are no places for leisure except the streets, saloons, burlesque houses, pool-rooms, public dance halls, or other commercial places of entertainment. The Church is not here for its own sake. It is here to bear witness, and to spread a spirit. It should be the center from which radiate the forces of righteousness and the spirit of brotherhood and every human activity and interest in the community. Therefore, it must speak not to the individual only, but to the business, social, and political problems, dealing with them not from the viewpoint of the economist or political theorist, but from that of the preacher of righteousness. If Christ Church can be a force for righteousness in the city, it matters but little whether it gain in numbers.[6]

"Distinction," it has been said, "is the emphasis put upon qualities by circumstances." There were two circumstances which enabled this young rector to create in Christ Church, Cincinnati a far-famed chapter in the history of American churches and cities. One was his conception of the place and function of the modern church in the new age, as just outlined. It has been the reproach of the Protestant Churches that they have too largely attracted only the well-to-do and middle classes. Frank Nelson made Christ Church a place where rich and poor met on equal footing. Drawn by his personality, both responded to his vision. There was something about working in his parish that gave people a peculiar zest and joy in living. There was, for instance, a Jewish lad in the Sunday School, (Mr. Nelson never liked the term Church School) who after his marriage came every Christmas to Christ Church with his wife and two children. He proudly introduced them to Mr. Nelson, saying, "Though I am a Jew, this is my church!"

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On the other hand, Mr. Nelson's special gifts as a rector were developed and brought into full flower in Christ Church because of the many remarkable people who formed the backbone of his parish. In point of numbers and in ability, they were an unusual group, a group characterized by breadth of vision, and by a faith sufficient for them to carry through the bold projects outlined by their leader. Many were blessed with abundant means, and, above all, were filled with a consummate loyalty and affection for their church. In this happy partnership of pastor and parish, each inspired the other to great accomplishment. The older members who were in the parish at the beginning of Mr. Nelson's rectorship were vigorous, strong-minded people accustomed to having their own way. They hewed to the old lines, suspicious of change. With his deep sense of loyalty, Mr. Nelson felt bound to maintain the sort of practices and low-church ceremony which prevailed when he took over, but such was his adroitness, skill and tact in leading them that he won their complete confidence and trust, and they gave him an unreserved support as well as a free hand in many things. This unbounded support of his early work he never forgot; nor did he let his appreciation diminish with the success of later years. In the course of the observances that marked his forty years as rector, he said of them:

We found here, as the days went on, a group of people that I think have never been equaled. Not a very large group of people, but a group of people who gave us freedom—freedom to speak the thing that was in our minds: to do the things that we believed the Church ought to do and to stand for in the heart of a great city.

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A new parish house had been erected as Alexis Stein's rectorship closed, and Mr. Nelson's organizing abilities made it hum. With the assistance of the Rev. J. Howard Melish, the most competent of all his clerical assistants, a Men's Club was organized, and became a mecca for the young men of the city. For those of small means, it was the only sort of club available, and was thrown open to every race and creed. In 1901 the yearly attendance was 7,000, and by 1903 it had grown to 16,973. In line with the policy of a community center, the Club included members of all faiths, Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic. The Roman priest was always notified of Catholics joining the club and informed that no proselyting was intended, but rather that it was hoped these young men would become better members of their own church. Athletic grounds were secured together with a field-house, and Christ Church teams won an enviable reputation for high standards of sportsmanship. Their spirit may be judged by the story of a football player who waxed into colorful profanity in the heat of a game and was bawled out by a Roman Catholic teammate in terse words: "Don't you know who you represent?" During an interim when another parish house was being built, Christ Church basketball teams used the Holy Cross Monastery Hall for an entire year, with the full approval of the Roman authorities and the gratitude of Mr. Nelson. At that time, the captain of the Christ Church team, John M. Cronin, was a prefect of the St. Xavier Sodality and also the secretary of the Christ Church Men's Club. By 1911 it was necessary to limit the Club's membership to six hundred, and there was always a long waiting list. The social atmosphere, the entertainments, the athletic record, the camp established by the church on the Miami River made this club one of the most popular in the city. Mr. Nelson and Mr. Melish spent untold hours in the work and gained an intimate knowledge of the individual members and their views, particularly on labor questions. The men expressed themselves freely, and at the close of an evening's discussion Mr. Nelson would gather up the points of argument into a clear and effective summary easily understood and remembered. It was in this club that a small group once earnestly discussed how they might best help a member when he should be released from a prison term which he was serving. Nothing gratified the rector more than this sort of human comradeship because it is the very essence of the Christian fellowship which he was striving to implant.

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As time went on, an increasing number of girls and young women entering the business world

created a social problem which weighed heavily on the rector's mind and heart. Knowing the special conditions which these young women must meet in a large city, he applied grave thought and much energy to the study of their needs and to the opportunity which Christ Church had in meeting them. Finding nothing for them socially in the city except the Y.W.C.A., some distance away, he sent invitations to department stores for a meeting at the parish house. At this meeting he proposed to establish a branch of the Girls' Friendly Society which is found throughout the Episcopal Church and which exists for social and educational purposes. Mr. Nelson gave himself particularly to this organization. He gathered a set of workers in the parish, women of character and cultural background, who became the leaders and friends of the various groups. He was a frequent visitor at meetings and often conducted a question box. He encouraged the members to make it one of their prime objectives to work for the city's interest. The rapid growth of the Society enabled it to support a bed in the Children's Hospital, to finance the Vacation House on the Ohio River, and to promote other civic projects. The Christ Church organization became one of the largest and most active branches in the national society, and had a succession of remarkable directors, such as Deaconess Lloyd and Miss Alice Simrall. Mr. Nelson's faith and incomparable friendship as well as his careful planning made the Girls' Friendly a strong and useful force in Cincinnati and an influence in the national body.

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In those days the public schools provided nothing in the way of training in the practical arts, and a large work along these lines was carried on among the boys and girls who lived in the districts adjacent to Christ Church. The Sewing School, for instance, grew in membership in three years from twenty-four to over two hundred under unfavorable conditions in the already cramped parish house. When the College Settlement on Third Street closed, the church took over its kindergarten equipment and its list of members, and every morning gathered in the children of pre-school age.

When some people said it was a mistake to make a parish house a community center, because in their minds it was being used only for social purposes, Mr. Nelson's scorn was beautiful to hear. He asserted, "The Church claims to be the Body of Christ, doesn't it? How did our Lord regard His body? He used it freely with no thought of preserving it, even to the final extent of hanging it upon a Cross. This is the only way, His Way, that the Church will have eternal life."

Not many years passed before it became apparent that the parish house, though not an old building, was literally worn out and was entirely inadequate for such an extensive work. In 1907 Mr. Nelson announced the gift of a new parish house from Mrs. Thomas J. Emery, a devoted member of the church. So munificent a gift had rarely been equaled anywhere. The six-story building, complete in every detail, was not finished until 1909. In it are club rooms, a large auditorium, a gymnasium, locker rooms, and bowling alleys. At the corner next to the church rises a beautiful clock tower which before the day of skyscrapers could be seen from distant parts of the city, and which has been sketched by many artists. Under the impetus of this gift the parish took on increased vigor and extended the work into new fields. A Baby Clinic set up by the Visiting Nurses' Association provided one more opportunity for service; in 1910 the problem of crowded conditions in the nearby Guilford School was solved by the use of Christ Church parish house for Kindergarten and Domestic Science classes. It was a long list of services which gave Christ Church and Mr. Nelson a far reaching reputation for efficient and intelligent social service.

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In the Parish House we meet each other, not as having the same point of view, the same opportunities, but as having a common humanity infinitely various in thought, in faith, in desire. Each may learn from each, and grow in breadth and depth, and the knowledge of God through his brother. It is in recognition of this that we have a free church and free parish house. No distinction of wealth may mar the worship in the one; no distinction of faith may hinder the service in the other.^[7]

The passing years brought fresh opportunities which were seized upon with tireless energy by this far-seeing rector. In August, 1917 came the opportunity to establish a Red Cross unit which through day and evening groups enlisted the woman power of the parish. At the close of the war, Mr. Nelson envisioned the continuance of this work on a scale far exceeding the conventional idea of church missionary work. Tactfully overcoming certain prejudices and narrow points of view, he again secured the enthusiastic support of the same group of women. This unit became one of the largest and most diligent organizations in the parish, continuing the indispensable Red Cross work, and enlisting larger numbers in the special program of the Woman's Auxiliary as it is conducted in Episcopal parishes throughout the country.

In 1913 and again in 1937, floods devastated the Ohio River valley. Mr. Nelson quickly organized his parish to do its share in caring for the refugees. Committees fed, clothed, and entertained one hundred and fifty people on the first occasion, and two hundred on the second. Experienced dieticians planned and supervised the meals, a trained nurse was kept on constant duty, and doctors gave medical service and examinations. But Christ Church did more than provide physical care; it knew the moral and spiritual needs of the homeless, and each day, through the cooperation of the government agencies (especially in 1937), city organizations, and individuals, it provided two hours of entertainment for them. Every night Mr. Nelson conducted family prayers, and won the undying gratitude of the refugees by his friendliness and personal interest in their present comfort and future needs. His reputation travelled from New England to California, and checks poured in from all over the country for this work. The atmosphere of helpfulness in Christ Church was his creation, and many volunteers in this emergency were not of the parish at all. One mother and daughter engaged in this relief work found the associations so delightful that the mother remarked to Howard Bacon, the superintendent of the parish house,

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"My daughter wants to join this place; it is the swellest club in the city!" Another instance revealing the sort of spirit which pervaded the parish house and filled the people of Christ Church was the serving of dinners to the American Legion during their convention because colored Legionnaires at that time were not allowed in Cincinnati hotels.

The fact that the people in the immediate vicinity were coming to Christ Church and using its privileges in such great measure, calling upon the clergy for their services, and joining in the work was immensely satisfying to Mr. Nelson, for this kind of thing was the fruitage of many years of earnest labor, and amply justified his conception of the function of the church and parish house as a community center. The rector always held that the work of the parish organizations should be a result of inspiration from worship and sermons, something first-hand and immediate, so that the impetus of the services would not be lost. In 1912, to mention only one year, there were more than two hundred volunteer workers. In addition, his people were serving in numerous organizations throughout the community, such as the Juvenile Protective Association, the Bureau of Municipal Research, the Hospital Services, the Consumers' League, the Anti-Tuberculosis Society, the Playgrounds, Fresh Air Society, and Tenement House Reform. Moreover, there was the inspiring fact that the parish house had become a civic center, and by channeling the idealism and energy of a group of young men, of whom Henry Bentley of City Charter Committee fame was one, the Church created comradeship and generated faith in Christian principles which led later to far-reaching usefulness throughout the city.

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No account of Mr. Nelson's work could possibly be complete without recording the place in it of his chief assistant, Howard N. Bacon, who has been superintendent of the parish house for thirty-eight years. Howard Bacon came to Cincinnati at the age of twenty-two with the purpose of pursuing a business career. Through Dr. McKinnon of Kansas City, Mr. Nelson learned of Bacon's marked abilities in church and social service lines. They had dinner together, and Mr. Nelson outlined the plans for the new parish house. Though a relative had advised Bacon "to cut-out the soul-saving business," the avenues of service under Frank Nelson's leadership impelled him to abandon his planned career. No agreement was made about salary until much later when Mr. Nelson said, "We cannot give you much. Will you come for a hundred dollars a month and live in the parish house?" At the annual meeting of the church on Easter Monday, 1908, the rector made the announcement: "I am very glad to be able to tell you that Mr. Howard N. Bacon has joined the staff, giving up a very promising business future to devote his life to work among boys and young men. He will have charge of the camp, and manage the parish house as well as working in the Sunday School." It is not the slightest exaggeration to say that no appointment to the staff of Christ Church was ever more momentous and fruitful. He served Mr. Nelson thirty-one years, though many other attractive positions were offered him. Upon him Mr. Nelson leaned as on no other. Through the years he has performed the larger part of a clergyman's office, and though not ordained is often called "Reverend." He took over the multitudinous details of a highly organized parish as did or could no other assistant or paid parish worker; consequently, Mr. Nelson was able to devote his time to many civic enterprises, and to play a vital role in the national life of the Episcopal Church. To have rendered such a service means that he is completely self-effacing and richly merited Mr. Nelson's tribute: "I would not know how to get on without him."

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The phenomenal development of the parish house as a community center kept pace with the striking growth of the church. During Mr. Nelson's rectorship the communicant list of the parish expanded from 599 in 1900 to 2089 in 1939; the number of contributors to the budget from 200 to 1002; the parish and missionary budgets from \$15,103.00 in 1900 to \$77,493.00 in 1927, to cite a high year; the Endowment Fund from \$11,770.00 in 1900 to \$531,384.00 in 1939. In a way it seemed as if Mr. Nelson had only to walk down Fourth Street and the money met him! In any case, in the prosperous years it flowed in steadily from a people given to generosity. One morning he met a parishioner who had been abroad during the past year, and the man asked Mr. Nelson to accompany him to his bank. Taking the rector to his safety deposit box, he handed over a thousand dollar bond saying, "I haven't done anything for Christ Church in a long time." One Sunday morning in the course of the notices (with him, announcements were really an art) Mr. Nelson spoke of his friend, Dr. Paul Wakefield, who had been left stranded in China during the Communist uprising of 1927, and from whom he had just received a letter. The special offering that morning, together with contributions sent in over the week, amounted to five hundred dollars.

In the course of the great forty years of Mr. Nelson's ministry, a long series of extraordinary gifts was made, including the parish house already mentioned, memorial windows, an altar, an organ, and numberless others, all indicative of the liberality of the people. These gifts were grandly climaxed by the erection of a chapel to commemorate the Centennial of Christ Church. It was designed to express the beauty, mystery, and nobility of the Christian faith, and to provide for the many services for which the large church was unsuited. The Chapel was largely a thank-offering on the part of parishioners and many others who had found in Christ Church a spiritual home for which they were profoundly grateful. Another remarkable aspect of this gift was its conception in the uncertain days of 1917.

As the years brought the ever-changing conditions of city life, and as civic institutions, social agencies, and the public schools afforded gymnasiums, swimming pools, playgrounds, and social centers such as were scarcely known in the first decades of Mr. Nelson's ministry, he continued to believe in the religious motive which Christ Church gave to all these recreational and social activities. To the end of his days he held that religious faith gives to social work an enthusiasm, a personal fervor, and a genuineness without which the one thing needful is lacking. He led his

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people to see in the drinking fountain outside the parish house a symbol of the Church's undying service to the world of men. The fact that passers-by, whether on foot or in pleasure car or truck, stopped to quaff of its ice-cold water was to him an expression of man's eternal need for the water of life, a need which, please God, would always be met by a church whose gospel resides in the nether springs of God's loving purpose for the children of men.

FOOTNOTES:

- [4] Frank H. Nelson.
- [5] Frank H. Nelson, *Centennial Address*, May 17, 1917.
- [6] Frank H. Nelson, *Year Books*, 1902 and 1903.
- [7] Mr. Nelson's report, *Year Book*, 1908.

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The Shepherd Among His Flock

"And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall abide ... and this man shall be our peace."

—Micah 5:4

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A Cincinnati taxi-cab driver said to me, "Frank Nelson was sure a real man. If you had a million dollars, you got a fifteen minute funeral service; if you had twenty-five cents, you got a fifteen minute service. He was just as concerned over the family with two rooms as the one with twenty." This man had lived all his life in the Queen City, and had driven Mr. Nelson to innumerable services as far back as the days of horse-cabs, and though he was not aware of the restraint and brevity of the Prayer Book Service, he unwittingly put his finger on the very pulse of Mr. Nelson's ministry.

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In all relationships with people, Frank Nelson possessed the true instinct of the pastor because he was moved by the zest and pity of human life as well as by an eager willingness to spend himself. He invariably had the right word for the occasion, and responded with a finely balanced emotion to each individual situation. His discerning sense of the human element in life's experiences was matchless. He spoke humorously when lightness and gaiety were in order, and seriously when the word of faith was needed. There is much to be learned from his approach. Called one day to a humble dwelling on Mt. Adams where a mother was hysterical because her boy had just undergone an emergency operation, Mr. Nelson tore a button from his coat before entering the room, and said in an off-hand manner, "Oh! this has just come off! Will you sew it on?"

In a surpassingly unselfish fashion he thought of himself as the head of the Christ Church family, and it mattered not at all to him whether people who needed him were on the church register or were connected only through a parish house organization. When told of someone's illness, though the patient had membership in another church yet belonged to the Men's Club for instance, he would say, "Oh! I must go to see him." The agent for an Industrial Insurance Company tells of calling in a home where the policy was about to lapse. The woman said, "I will see Mr. Nelson. Will you come back at five o'clock?" When he returned, she had the money.

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In these tragic years of World War II we have learned that time is of the essence, and Frank Nelson exemplified this principle in an extraordinary manner. Through all his years of service he seemed to have a special sense of timeliness. He acted when one should act but does not always do so. He was what a minister should be yet is not always. He was there when needed, not when

it suited his convenience. Immediacy again and again opened an opportunity that otherwise would have been lost and with it the possibilities for widening his circle of usefulness. An out-of-town friend telegraphed requesting Mr. Nelson to call on a certain man in a hospital, a stranger to Mr. Nelson, and he went at once. On another occasion a new member of the choir who had been in Cincinnati only a few weeks was suddenly taken ill. The doctors at the hospital were some time in deciding to operate, and called the girl's roommate. Although not knowing Mr. Nelson, she phoned him of her friend's serious condition, and he went immediately to her bedside. Though the operation was not until midnight, he stayed with her through the hours of waiting, joked to keep up her courage, and saw her through the ordeal and was there when she came out of the anesthetic. It turned out that the young lady was the daughter of a Methodist Bishop, and one can imagine her parents' gratitude when they learned over the phone that Mr. Nelson was with her. It was the sort of thing he loved to do, and people could not say enough of his help during such times of stress. There was a peculiar radiance to his ministry which issued from this alacrity, the special glow that surrounds all lives that are nobly unselfish. He never spared himself, not even in his later years when illness had laid its relentless hand upon him who had always been robust and free of physical infirmities.

In a parish as diverse as that of Christ Church, there were unnumbered happenings of a tragicomic nature, and they all bespoke his special place in the hearts of his people. Howard Bacon was once closeted in the parish house office on a certain winter's night with a man who became definitely and increasingly insane. Greatly alarmed, he succeeded in locating Mr. Nelson, who arrived in evening clothes; together they got the man into a car and drove him out to the distant suburb of College Hill. On the way they were stalled by a flat tire, and Mr. Nelson insisted on Mr. Bacon's staying in the car while he himself put on the spare. In the midst of all this, the poor man's mind apparently cleared briefly for he asked, "Do all great men come way out here to do things like this?" In another instance a choir soloist developed melancholia and refused to eat, and Mr. Nelson often fed her because she would eat for him. Nothing was too trivial to be encompassed by his great heart. Everyone, and sometimes it appeared as if everything, that was clothed with any need was his responsibility and called out his limitless sympathy. A friend jested that even the dog fights required his presence and the remark seemed to carry a kernel of truth! Once he prayed with a poor, broken-hearted woman who had lost her dearest possession, a pet canary bird, and again he sat down and talked as one sportsman to another with a friend who had lost a polo game. To this clergyman these were the peculiar privileges of his position, and never duties. Parents, with a true instinct for loving a man who was really good, wanted him to baptize their children, for in laying his hand upon the infant he was also laying his hand upon their hearts, and this act was the genuine blessing of a father-in-God, the shepherd calling his own by name.

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There came to me the following letter from a parishioner whose first child lived only a few hours:

The one thing I wanted to do was to receive the Holy Communion. My husband called the Parish House and left word. We expected his assistant or possibly the deaconess, and you can imagine how honored and comforted we felt when Mr. Nelson came himself. It was indeed comforting to know that such a busy person could take time for one of the most humble of his church. We shall never forget the talk we had with him in the hospital before receiving the Holy Communion. He asked all about our little boy, and told us always to speak of him by name and think of him alive with the Father. Mr. Nelson told us of a baby sister of his who died, and how he felt about her. He said he always visited that tiny grave when he went home. He really stands in our hearts.

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The strength of the Lord dwelt in his heart else he never could have given himself so indefatigably to the demands of a great city parish. There were no barriers of access to him. Until 1919 he did not have a private secretary, preferring to answer personally all his mail in long hand, and the only times he allowed himself to be out of reach of the telephone were during Holy Week and possibly on Saturdays. Everyone who came to the office was able to see him without any formality. I remember showing him an article in a church paper on the misuse of the title "Reverend," and suggesting that it might be well to print it in the Sunday leaflet. He was amused and only said, "What does it matter what we are called as long as they *call* us." This intense desire to give of himself lay back of his disappointment when friends and parishioners failed to communicate with him because they hesitated to trouble so busy a man. Former Mayor Russell Wilson remarked that "Frank Nelson was the spiritual advisor to many men whom you would not think of as having spiritual advisors." The downright sincerity of the man and his "at-homeness" with human beings of all kinds made it natural for men to talk with him.

There was, however, more in his personality than mere sociability and a genial manner, because an indefinable power or strength went forth from him. It was in his ministry to the sick that people felt especially a certain grace in his faith. He carried about with him "the medicine of a merry heart," and patients wanted to see him. He was a door through which a person passed to a deeper consciousness of the mystery and greatness of life and the infinities which brood over it. Therefore, his ministry to the sick commended itself to an unusual degree. One of the leading surgeons of Cincinnati, Dr. J. Louis Ransohoff, declared it his firm conviction that Frank Nelson gave a patient a double chance. Few ministers are welcomed by the medical profession in as intimate a role as this pastor took upon himself. Well known in Cincinnati is the story of his entering a Roman Catholic Hospital to be greeted by the Mother Superior with a hearty "Good-morning, Father Nelson," and the Jewish surgeon, "Good-morning, Rabbi Nelson," while the parishioner-patient said, "Good-morning, Mr. Nelson." His presence calmed panic-stricken

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patients, and if he had sought to carry further along this line, there are those who felt that he could easily have established a clinic or healing class. Of no end are those who maintained that they could not have undergone an operation without his standing beside them. Because he cared he often came out haggard and worn. Such incidents are revealing examples of the acceptance on the part of a large portion of the entire city of the ministry of one who was utterly sincere, utterly genuine. Those who follow the same calling must with pride point to him as superbly a man of God.

Frank Nelson was held in the highest respect by the medical profession because physicians generally felt, in the words of Dr. Ransohoff, that "his life had a spiritual significance; there was no cant, only humility." Sometimes he walked to the operating room beside a fearful patient, and one man later said, "Something came through him to me. The fear was gone." He often went with parishioners to a doctor's office, and sent hundreds of others giving them an infinite amount of time and thought. Because of Frank Nelson the name "Christ Church" was an open sesame for all the little-known workers and assistants on the staff of the church. For these countless favors he frequently expressed publicly his gratitude saying, "We very often have need of the help of lawyers, doctors and nurses. And we never appeal in vain. Without thought of any return the doctors and lawyers of the city, the hospitals, and the Visiting Nurses' Association give us quick response of their very best."

Those who worked with him have unforgettable memories of the way in which he visited the poorest tenements, always with the same courtesy and unconsciousness of environment that he showed to wealthy parishioners. Whether East Hill or Mt. Adams they were his people, and each received the kind of attention, the friendship, the grave dignity and consideration that each most wanted. When it was a Communion Service for the sick in a poor section of the city, he had a deeply sympathetic approach. Usually he himself would clear a little table in the dingy room, and when he had placed the fair linen and the silver vessels where the sick person could watch him and had donned his vestments, the place was transformed. As he commenced the beautiful liturgy, read only as the Rector could read it, there was in the humble room a Presence for which he was the channel.

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In his reading of the Burial Office, there was a play of light and shade upon this man of God who, like Moses, "wist not that his face shone." The majestic notes of faith and assurance which reverberate in the words of this service were, on his lips and in his sympathetic and superb reading, like the overtones and rich harmonies of an organ. There was no formalism nor coldness, no hesitancy to plumb the stark reality of the occasion, but only the vibrant convictions of his own great faith in the goodness of God. Few can fail to recall the clarity and feeling with which he read St. Paul's immortal passage in 1st Corinthians, nor ever forget the prayer he invariably used in this service, "We seem to give him back to Thee, dear God."

Frank Nelson made Christ Church known throughout the city, and on occasions of trouble and stress, as just mentioned, people other than those in his flock turned to him naturally and wistfully. Their desires were not always consistent with the customs of the Episcopal Church. In one such instance a widow requested a eulogy, but Mr. Nelson told her that it was not the procedure of his church and, furthermore, he would not know what to say. Not abashed in the slightest, she replied, "Oh, that doesn't matter. Just give the address you made at the Mabley-Carew Department Store dinner!" However, he did read a poem, and in trying to express her sincere appreciation the widow somewhat astounded him by saying, "Why, that was enough to make Bob stand up in his coffin."

He knew what was in the human heart, and realized the craving for understanding in times of despair and sorrow. Somehow he managed to do and say the right thing. At one time the mother of a parishioner had died in a distant state, and when the family arrived in Cincinnati, he was at the railroad station at seven o'clock in the morning to meet them and accompanied the coffin from the baggage car to the hearse. So simple an act bespeaks the innate dignity and simplicity of the man. It was his custom at the cemetery to walk with the chief mourner, and by such little kindnesses and numberless other courtesies he endeared himself to each generation in his long ministry. A parishioner whose mother died late one Good Friday evening remembers that despite the heavy tax of the day Mr. Nelson came to her house shortly before ten o'clock, and, though no lights were on, rang the bell, calling, "I want to talk with you." By his coming, a sleepless night was shorn of its dread and vastness, and confidence and serenity took their place. At another time when a family received the fearful word from Washington that a son had been killed in the Argonne, Mr. Nelson though confined to his bed with illness went at once to call in the home. On the day of the funeral, before going to the church, he read the identical service in that suburban home for the invalid mother. As many people in Boston have said that until Phillips Brooks came to them in their sorrow they never knew what Isaiah meant in his words, "And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from rain," so Christ Church people found in Frank Nelson a stronghold in time of trouble.

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There are many incidents that illustrate the ideals of this incomparable pastor. For instance, the Council of Churches had two social workers in the Juvenile Court, one of whom was a parishioner, young and beautiful. Mr. Nelson did not really want her to do such work, but her parents thought her trained and equipped for it. In his solicitude he went to the Executive Secretary and asked, "Do you have staff meetings? I want you to have her there in your office. Give her the knowledge that she is dealing with the abnormal, and that not all life is perversion." The welfare of each individual in his church was his personal concern.

He exercised this same solicitude for us young clergymen, some fourteen in number, who were his assistants and to whom he gave a tutelage and friendship that continued long after our

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apprenticeship was ended. He was an exacting teacher and beyond us, but like all others who labored in his parish, we felt a special joy and pride in working under him. It was a tremendous strain to keep up with him, and his own daily stint of work often put us to shame; in the fullness of his powers he made as many as thirty calls a week. One was never through, one could never do enough, and when tempted to let down, there was felt, even when not heard, that imperious voice, "Go on! Don't be easy on yourself." His own shepherding exemplified his belief that in the ministry honor for one's self is nothing, humanity everything. No task, even scrubbing floors, was too menial or too hard to be beneath the position of him who is God's servant. When the problems and the pressure of work in such a large institution weighed upon us, and their full scope inevitably was revealed at staff meetings, it was then as we were on our knees that his informal, absolutely real prayers lifted and strengthened us. Yes, on some rare occasions in his tower study we were on the Mount and gained fleeting glimpses of the City of God.

It was difficult at times for those of lesser faith not to be appalled by the awful waste and stupidity of human life such as any great city unbares. But the Rector used the many instances to illustrate the requirements of wide sympathy, and to teach us to reverence the qualities of personality even when we could not fathom the reasons for apparent foolishness. He would say things like this: "Never forget that the development of our free will is what God wants. Love may make mistakes, but they are not failures. There are times when one's own life is of very little importance compared with the need for sacrifice." The assistants, the deaconesses, and parish visitors had, in addition to a training in modern social methods, the supreme advantage of religious direction. His guidance issued from his own example and experience.

Deaconess Margaret Lloyd writes:

It seemed in those early years as though all our parish poor lived on the top floors of tenements, and I often thought that climbing the famous penitents' stairway in Rome would have been an easy climb compared with the ascent of Mt. Adams! It was climbed almost daily by some member of the staff, and very frequently by the Rector. It was not only the climb, but the drab, dreary houses of the period. For those were the days of heavy, soft coal smoke, of a yellow, unpurified water supply, and a lack of adequate housing or health laws. The consequences were that a large parish like ours always had typhoid or T. B. folk needing material help as well as sympathy and compassion. The annals of such a parish always contain numberless "human interest stories." There was a very large family which never was able to provide shoes or to have quite enough clothing for six children. We suspected that, despite all efforts, sufficient food was lacking, and especially at those times when the head of the family was on one of his happy-go-lucky sprees. Everyone on the staff felt a sense of relief when this bibulous father died for there was enough insurance money not only to bury him, but to leave funds to tide the family over the next few months, and until the mother and her two eldest children had found jobs. Imagine our feelings when, in less than two weeks after the funeral, the widow appeared at the parish house! She had come to ask Christ Church for a little help until she had work. "But what has become of your insurance money, surely you have not used it all up so soon?" "Oh! yes we have, deaconess! You see we always craved gold band rings for the children, and I always doted on having a pink enamel bed." It was really true! The bed that they had longed for stood in their shabby front room, pink enamel, gold curlicue trimmings and all! Its enormous expanse was covered with tawdry silk pillows and silk spread, and it stood out, the one glorious object in the whole tenement. Also the children with the utmost pride showed their gold band rings which according to the custom of those days each wore on the "wedding finger"; even the five year old displayed his golden trophy. Mr. Nelson did his best to modify the protests of his outraged staff. Finally we did see at least something of his point of view, that to the family these symbols of respectability meant what a Persian rug would have meant in a more sophisticated family. For these friends of ours had "arrived," socially speaking, via the pink enamel bed, and their admiring neighbors could never again refer to them as "poor white trash." It takes a long, long time to change ideas, but the Rector's respect for human personality (foolishness and stupidity notwithstanding) and his method of patience, tact, and a sense of humor did change many of us. And a controlled sense of humor has a marvelous effect at times. There was the instance when the Rector went to conduct a funeral service on Mt. Adams. It was a very hot day, the little rooms were crowded, and family and neighbors were close to the coffin. Mr. Nelson put on his vestments in the stuffy kitchen. He had begun the majestic words of the service when there strolled into the room the small boy of the family nonchalantly carrying a very large slice of watermelon! He found a spot on the floor at the foot of the coffin, and proceeded to eat the juicy treat. The Rector continued with the service, and the mourners gave him absorbed attention until the last prayer. No incongruity could possibly change the beauty and dignity of that service as conducted by our Rector.

Frank Nelson was shepherd to all. To be sure, there were complaints that he did not call in every home, and to some who did not have the opportunity to experience at first-hand his sympathy and concern, he seemed aloof. But when a need arose he met it; and as years were added to years he won the confidence of all types of people. To the rich he said, "Your money is the smallest gift you can offer. Yes, Christ Church needs money, but it needs you yourself far more." He said to the poor, "You are splendid in the way you are helping us. The parish could not get along without such workers as you. Keep it up!" In the warm climate of his enthusiasm and appreciation, young and old, rich and poor discovered within themselves an undreamed-of

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capacity to respond to his faith and to his demands for service. In turn he was generous in gratitude. At the time of his twenty-fifth anniversary he wrote the following acknowledgment to a parishioner who had written to him of all that Christ Church and his ministry meant:

Thank you indeed, and thank you still more for these seventeen years of most extraordinary service, and personal loyalty and friendship. I can never tell you how much I have appreciated them, and do appreciate them. I know I have made life harder for you—both in the work I have put on you—and by the way I have often left you to carry the burden unaided. But I know too that the Spirit has carried you on and filled you with new visions and powers of life. And that makes all the rest worth while. I am so glad that you are coming up to us at Cranberry. I know you will love its loveliness, and in its quiet and the sweep of sea and sky, you will find refreshment and renewed strength. And then we can talk not of plans and work, but what lies beneath them, faith and God and the abundant life.

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As his forty years' ministry came to a close, there was throughout the entire city a growing crescendo of acclaim, which found fervent expression in words like these: "He was our best friend for years." Deeper than the affection which drew forth such recognition was his profound faith in the Father-God of all mankind. It was Frank Nelson's limitless trust in his Heavenly Father that gave him his strength and influence. Many an evening on his way home he went into his church or chapel to pray, and lay before God the problems and griefs of his people which he carried in his great heart.

"Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself;
And, at the end of the day,
O faithful shepherd! to come,
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand."^[8]

FOOTNOTES:

[8] *Rugby Chapel* by Matthew Arnold. Macmillan Co. Used by permission.

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The Spokesman of the City's Conscience

*"He so stirred the very soul of our
responsibility for social living that we felt he
had come to break the old city's sleep of habit
or despair."*

—Miss Edith Campbell

4

Frank Nelson loved the city, and was moved by its swift, tumultuous life; hence, he was able to stir it. No mere reformer or "up-lifter" who sees only ugliness and sordidness can effect very far-reaching changes, and retain his faith. Mr. Nelson succeeded in both. He came to Cincinnati under the high compulsion of a mission, and relinquished his work on the same high plane of faith and vision. To have retained such conviction over a period of forty years in the sort of work which was his testifies to a quality of realism that is at once impressive and authoritative. He knew the vice and corruption that lurked the streets, and yet he reiterated to the end that "there is a glory in the city seen in the faces of men and women, boys and girls, which is the immortal soul growing clean, and entering into paradise." Something of that glory he created. Christ Church is located in Ward Six, formerly Ward Eight, and there also Mr. Nelson had his residence

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at 311 Pike Street. One of the boys who grew up in the district and is now a successful business man declares that this ward would be entirely different today if it had not been for Frank Nelson and the work carried on in Christ Church. But this clergyman's work and influence spread far outside his parish and beyond his ward.

By many Catholics, Jews, and Protestants Frank Nelson was acknowledged as "the flaming sword of the Charter Movement"; the man who so interpreted the Community Chest that "he made it a platform upon which every man could stand"; and in the minds of some of them he so o'er-leaped sectarian differences that they considered him their minister. His was a position as unique as it was remarkable considering the fact that he held no title or high-ranking office such as Bishop. This minister quickened the conscience of Cincinnati, and brought into full bloom vague, half-formed ideals. Many looked upon him as the spokesman of the city's conscience.

Mr. Nelson did not grow up in an age of radical and revolutionary economic and social programs. He was not a student of such philosophies, yet he had in his heart that particular treasure, namely an affection for people, for the fortunate and no less for the poor and the dispossessed. Without this love for the common man, these philosophies are never translated into the natural order of things nor ever become more than intellectual pronouncements. He was neither a mystic nor a reformer, but a citizen who was deeply cognizant of religious faith as laying upon him and upon everyone a compulsive service. This mighty conviction he expressed in varying ways as we shall see, but never in more arresting words than in a sermon which he preached on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Presbyterian Church of The Covenant from the text, "Ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you." Though delivered in 1916, this sermon was recalled twenty-three years later on the occasion of Mr. Nelson's retirement as a consummate expression of his faith and convictions, namely that we are not isolated individuals each to be saved by means of self-centered piety, but only through practicing religion in fellowship with one another.

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A study of his annual reports indicates that from his St. George's days he was dominated by the vision of the Church as having a mission to the city. As early as 1903 he outlined the conditions that confront Christian people, and the relation of the Church to them:

The city of today is the point of concentration of the forces that are making the character, and determining the standards of our time. So complex is our modern civilization that it is not possible to separate the individual in our estimation of his standards and character from the conditions by which he is surrounded, and in which he lives. For they vitally influence his point of view, his ideals, his efforts to attain them. A boy who grows up in an atmosphere of openly accepted corruption will inevitably lack sensitiveness of moral perception. Our young men and women, our boys and girls are subjected to a moral pressure that is extremely difficult to resist. What is the duty of the Church? The moral welfare of these young people is its intimate concern. It may, and it must, bring to bear a counter pressure of high individual moral standards and ideals. It may, and it must, hold up before them faith in purity and honesty, and persuade them to receive it. But that is not enough. It must utter its word of protest against the rule of the Boss, not because it wishes to enter the arena of politics, not because it differs from him on political questions, not even because he is the denial of democracy, but because he maintains his power of corrupting manhood and womanhood by protecting and fostering vice in order that they may be his allies. It must utter its protest against the dictum, "Whatever pays is right," not because it wishes to dictate business methods, or to set itself up as an authority on economics, but because it finds this corruption in business demoralizing to standards and character. It must utter its protest against overcrowded and unsanitary tenement houses, not because it considers its function to be the censorship of buildings, but because such conditions breed immorality among the boys and girls. The individual message alone is made ineffective by the constant pressure of these conditions. To make that message effective, the conditions must be changed. And it is peculiarly the work of a church, situated as is Christ Church, to say and do what it can to make them intolerable to the conscience of a Christian city. I have said all this because I want you to see clearly the place in the pulpit and church of such preaching and work as we have tried to give and do. We must go forward with increasing energy and purpose, and that whether the results seem great or small. We may, and must, at least sow the seed in the faith that God will inevitably bring it to the harvest.

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Again and again he thundered, "The conditions must be made intolerable to the conscience of a Christian city," and the spirit of the times rolled back the sterile answer, "It can't be done in Cincinnati." But he shook himself like a lion and took up the battle.

The fight for honest municipal government in Cincinnati was a mighty one and the story of it is fairly well known, but a few pertinent facts are essential as a background to Mr. Nelson's part in it. For more than thirty years George B. Cox controlled the city by all the devices known to the wily, astute politician. Few presumed to run for any office on the Republican ticket without his approval. Unburdened by shame, he declared, "I am the Boss of Cincinnati ... I've got the best system of government in this country. If I didn't think my system was the best, I would consider that I was a failure in life." He openly derided reformers. Lincoln Steffens had surveyed and written up the city as he had many others and declared it under the dominance of "the most vicious political gang in any city." Few inroads were made on Cox's preserves until after his death in 1916. At the close of World War I, the city began to reap the bitterest and most evil results of its contentment with benevolent despotism, and in 1922 found itself verging on bankruptcy.

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Aroused citizens were determined not only that Cincinnati should have an efficient, economical government but also that its reputation as a sink of iniquity should be erased.

When the Republican organization perceived that an investigation was inescapable, it determined to name the investigators! The Republican Executive and Advisory Committee appointed a survey committee to devise a plan to solve the city's and county's most pressing administrative and financial problems. A distinguished group was selected; among the members were Frank H. Nelson, George H. Warrington, Charles P. Taft, and other eminent citizens some twenty-one in number. This committee engaged Dr. Lent D. Upson of the Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, who with a large staff of specialists proceeded to turn the city and county governments inside out. The Upson Report furnished the ammunition for what turned out to be nothing short of a revolution.

A City Charter Committee had been organized which, after the Upson Committee reported, proposed an amendment to the city's home rule charter embodying the city manager plan of municipal government and a small council of nine elected at large by proportional representation. In the fall of 1924 the critical issue was submitted to the electorate, and a significant victory won. "This new movement, its representatives youthful, clear-eyed, energetic and determined, took its place in the books of our history as the first reform enterprise of any permanence in a great city of the United States."^[9] In this crusade of civic warriors Frank Nelson ranked as "a flaming sword," to use the colorful phrase of his friend Mr. Ralph Holterhoff. He was a constant worker in planting the first seeds of the moral rightness of the cause, the crusader whose faith clarified the fundamental religious background inherent in good government. During the initial campaign of 1924, Mr. Nelson, preaching this gospel from his pulpit, carried his parish with him into the righteous cause, and he literally toured the city wards as well. When the City Charter Committee was given permanent form, following the sweeping victory of November 1924, it is significant that the organization meeting was held in the Parish House of Christ Church. Among the speakers were Mr. Nelson, Charles P. Taft, John R. Schindel, and Henry Bentley, who was known as "the Commander of the legions that gave a city a new body and a new soul," all of them leaders in the campaign, and members and vestrymen of Christ Church. Another parishioner, Ralph Holterhoff, was, almost single-handed, responsible for financing the Committee's work for its next fifteen years.

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Repeatedly throughout successive years Mr. Nelson spoke at Charter rallies, giving a series of remarkably effective addresses which assisted immeasurably in sustaining the zest and interest of citizens in the reform ideal. As Mr. Murray Seasongood has said, "The technique of good local government has been developed by study, but the will to bring about good local government has not been infused into the residents of our cities." Toward that will and fusion in the city of Cincinnati, men are agreed that Frank Nelson's moral and spiritual contribution was enormous. Leaders declare that in routing the forces of corrupt government from their strongholds, his was the most powerful voice raised in the city. His trenchant words, his statesmanlike ability spurred the lagging energies and fired men's spirits to greater effort; he gave the necessary courage and drive and inspiration to carry through and maintain the reform movement. "It is the man of ideals and faith," Frank Nelson reiterated, "who has more courage than any politician. We shall set our faces steadfastly to the victory not only for good government and efficiency, but for the morality and the righteousness and the power of faith in this community." In the opinion of Mr. Ralph Holterhoff, the treasurer of the City Charter organization, Mr. Nelson, by his extensive contacts with all classes of citizens, radiating not only through his parish but throughout the entire fabric of Cincinnati's economic and social life, aroused the people with more success than any other individual. He literally mustered thousands of recruits who became zealous apostles and voters for the cause, although many had not voted for years because they felt nothing could be done about the existing evils. During the recurring campaigns for councilmen, Mr. Nelson was at the beck and call of the organization, giving extravagantly of his time and vitality at many rallies, particularly at the opening meeting of campaigns, where he either was the keynote speaker or took such part as expressed the religious convictions that lay behind the movement. "Hearing him," wrote Alfred Segal, a newspaper columnist, "people felt that good government was more than a matter of efficiency and economy. It had to do with civic self-respect and social morale and bright ideals."

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Because the issue was clearly moral, this minister did not hesitate to use his pulpit and his parish organization to further the cause. It is a tribute to his church that he met with only minor criticism. He carried his people with him because he enabled them to perceive the relationship between religion and politics. Of course he met with criticism from those who felt that a clergyman should remain aloof from politics, yet at the same time he was genuinely admired and respected by those who did not agree with him. Several of his bitterest political critics, such as, for example, James Garfield Stewart, and Doc Hagen, a ward politician, were not lacking in keen appreciation of his position. And on other civic issues where he made no concealment of his opinions he was, according to Herbert Bigelow, the minister of The People's Church and a former city councilman, "never a trimmer, and those who have seen him in tight places never saw him crawl."

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Though the Cincinnati Community Chest is not in politics, it has definitely influenced the course of good government because of the character of the people who carry on the work of the numerous social agencies which it comprises. In 1913, these agencies were organized into a Council, and Frank Nelson's vision, enthusiasm and tireless efforts were determining factors in welding together the diverse religious and racial groups engaged in social service throughout the city. Through this Council, multiple activities were coordinated, and Jewish, Catholic, and

Protestant welfare agencies were kindled with new spirit and power which resulted in greater efficiency and an increased opportunity for reaching larger numbers of people. As a consequence, the majority of the social welfare enterprises were able to make a united financial appeal, and since 1919 have continued together without a break in the ranks. Charles P. Taft says of the Cincinnati Community Chest:

The executive direction and social vision of C. M. Bookman, and the spiritual leadership of Reverend Frank H. Nelson have given to the campaign and year-round organizations of volunteers a most distinctive quality. It is not that we raise each year an amount greater per capita than most other cities, although we do that; but it seems to one attending our gatherings that all the men and women of good will in our community have come together and that their spirits are welded together in a great cause, the education of the whole city to the highest standards of health, character, and welfare.^[10]

The welding together was again the work of many civic-minded men and women, and Frank Nelson was the fire which fused the different parts into a unity. "He made the Community Chest a platform upon which every man could stand," says C. M. Bookman, the Executive Secretary. His work in the formative years of the Council, particularly in the raising of funds for the first three years, was of untold value. As the Council achieved coherence and a consciousness of its identity, he went on to the larger work of conveying to the city the idea that in this cause the people of Cincinnati could be supremely united, above politics, and beyond racial and religious prejudices. It was his ability to interpret the spiritual basis of this work that made it a common platform. As a result, contributors felt their gifts to have a downright significance. "It is," he said, "God's way of making cities good in spite of themselves."

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Frank Nelson believed so thoroughly in the work of the social agencies that the financial drives became a crusade, an adventure in human relationships. He took off his coat, so to speak, and plunged into the drives as one of the solicitors. The calls assigned him were the general run as well as the difficult cases. He canvassed people of modest means whom he didn't know as well as the large donors. As the calling was done by two men soliciting together, he often found himself teamed with a man whose occupation contrasted sharply with his own, once being paired with a distiller! In the personal interviews his was not the milk and honey approach, and he often became quite indignant if some did not give according to their means. On one occasion he called with Mr. William J. Shroder on a man who headed a large corporation but who refused to give commensurately, using as an excuse the fact that the directors were away. Mr. Nelson's feelings blazed forth and he blurted out, "You run this corporation, and you can do as you please," and with that he strode out of the room leaving his calmer friend to secure a gift of \$500.00. Sham irritated him beyond measure. Again, at headquarters one day Maurice Pollak was holding forth in vivid language on the subject of people who refused to contribute, and he did not notice Mr. Nelson coming in behind him. When he suddenly stopped in some embarrassment, Mr. Nelson exclaimed, "Go ahead, Maurice, you are saying just what I feel but can't express so well." As he was a man of intense fervor, it is probable that he was better at interpreting the inner significance of the cause than in soliciting contributions. In 1922 he was elected the General Chairman of the drive, and from 1916 to 1939 was a director of the Chest.

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As the years went by, Mr. Nelson became something of an "institution" in Cincinnati, and his popularity made him "fashionable" to the superficial-minded. Yet there was something decidedly spontaneous in the acclaim with which he was once greeted by over one thousand canvassers at a campaign dinner in the suburban city of Norwood. To a man the great audience rose when he stood to speak, and applauded with genuine emotion this Christian minister who represented Cincinnati as they wanted it to be. Always sensitive to the reactions of a throng, he poured forth such utterance as made them see the Community Chest as a great moral force, not as just a financial campaign. Their consciences were quickened by his graphic portrayal of their desires for righteousness and decency and fair opportunity.

He was always one of the speakers held in reserve for the crucial last days of the campaigns, and at the large daily luncheons held in the Hotel Gibson for the canvassers he was at his best. The following sentences from a newspaper report of one such address are typical:

You know what this Community Chest has done for this great city, how it has been, as the old seer said long ago, the river of life, flowing through the streets of the city, keeping it clean, refreshing it, strengthening it, heartening it, so that the tree of life, bearing all manner of fruits, through all the year, could grow upon its brink and spread forth its branches to shelter and give new vigor and hope to the inhabitants of the city. That river of life which we call social service is more vital, more important and more needed for the steady maintenance of the morale, well-being, and good life of the whole community than the Ohio River is, believe me.

By the power of simple, forceful speech, strengthened by his great love for people and his belief in them, he enabled Cincinnati to see beyond the horizon, to dream dreams; and by his uncommon labor some of these dreams became actualities. He looked at the city's welfare from the religious viewpoint, and in so doing commended religion to the religiously indifferent. He saw the practical value of spiritual things and the spiritual value of practical things. When, for example, he addressed the National Conference for Social Workers at Denver in 1925 and propounded the theme of Immortality, the audience was at first aghast, and then enthralled. He maintained that they had nothing to work for unless it was for eternity; that their business was concerned with souls, and that the souls of the feeble-minded were as much heirs of immortality as those of others more fortunate, and that no man has the right to condemn or stand in

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judgment. It was a bold speech to such an audience, and held their rapt attention; it was perhaps the more stimulating because it had been preceded by the scholarly and very formal address of the president of the conference. It was this occasion that produced a choice story which Mr. Nelson loved to tell on himself. At the close of the long evening two men were overheard commenting on the speeches. One of them remarked, "The first man was over my head, and the second just plumb crazy."

He not only made the Community Chest common ground for all, but he also enabled the churches to see it as their work, calling the social service organizations "sub-committees of the Church, doing for the churches the work that the churches want done and would have to do themselves if it were not for the Chest."

Frank Nelson's influence on the civic and political life of Cincinnati cannot be measured, but its power was evident and was revealed time and again through the contacts he had with civic leaders. A Roman Catholic priest said that many politicians went secretly to Mr. Nelson before expressing themselves on certain civic matters or endorsing certain projects. If some considered him officious, they could not have known his humility, much less his consuming passion for human beings. When he addressed public gatherings, one could gauge his power by watching the audience; as the sincerity of the man made his words convincing, even cynical faces "broke up," and the light shed by his stirring eloquence often brought tears.

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Among the many tributes paid at the time of Mr. Nelson's death, was one given by the Reverend Jesse Halsey, the beloved former minister of the Seventh Presbyterian Church, who culled the phrase "An Unmitered Bishop," a title which is signally descriptive of the man by reason of the many civic causes to which he was spiritual advisor, and thus a father-in-God to diverse groups scattered over the seven hills and in the "bottoms." He actively furthered many humanitarian causes: the Juvenile Protective Association, the Anti-Tuberculosis League, the Branch Hospital, the Community Chest, the Council of Social Agencies, the Helen S. Trounstone Foundation, the Hospital Social Service, St. Michael's Convalescent Home, and many others. Now that he is gone, the long list of social enterprises ceases to be a mere string of activities and becomes a roll of drums.^[11] His whole life seems to exemplify the words of the philosopher Bacon: "The nobler a soul is, the more objects of compassion it hath." His spirit breathed out upon men, and in his lifetime the city felt its beauty and greatness, drawing from his constancy the courage to endure. He protested impatiently against the nonsense often bandied about concerning the alleged immorality of city folk compared with country folk, and cited confuting evidence out of his pastoral experience to prove his conviction saying, "Heroes of these days are the poor people who live in our big cities."

One of the heroines of Cincinnati, though not one of the poor, was Helen S. Trounstone, a remarkable young woman of Jewish faith, who was responsible for making Mr. Nelson the first president of the Juvenile Protective Association. She was a pioneer in social service work, but her career was tragically cut short when she died at the early age of twenty-six. At her memorial service held in Christ Church Parish House January 21, 1917, Mr. Nelson made the principal address and some of his words indirectly reveal much of himself:

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I remember the organization of the Juvenile Protective Association; I first met her then. I had never known her before and I said to myself: "Here is another person with an enthusiasm come to complicate my life." I tried to get out of it, but because I wanted to help little children (I built this parish house for the young people, making my people support it for their sake), and she knew it, with infinite patience and constant humor and courtesy she kept forcing me, until gradually she landed me in the Presidency of the Juvenile Protective Association, utterly ignorant of what I was to do or what was to be done. And with the same humor and patience she went ahead and did the work and made me and the board responsible for it—made us stand behind her, until at last we were ashamed that our consciences were so dull and poor that we had not seen it long ago. And then we set out to do something.

According to the opinion of Miss Edith Campbell, who was thoroughly acquainted with his social work, though not a member of Christ Church, Frank Nelson's "doing" resulted in legislation for the Court of Domestic Relations which was to be in the future a real guardian for unfortunate children. His relationship with the Juvenile Protective Association is but another instance of the ways in which he not only ministered to the city and awoke its conscience, but also helped to foster understanding between church people and social workers. Possibly in no other city are there such close ties between churches and social agencies, and this relationship was Frank Nelson's achievement. He often attended the social workers' meetings of the Monday Evening Club; the conference of Charities and Philanthropies found a welcome center in his parish house. Thus he wove a pattern for social service that came to fruition in municipal and state laws, the kind of laws which give such work permanence and effectiveness.

Frank Nelson was a chivalrous individual who labored for what he thought was right; he championed numerous causes when many people were marshalled on the other side. It is in keeping with his character that he took a pronounced part in the creation of understanding and the removal of prejudices among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Years before the National Conference of Jews and Christians was organized, he practiced the principles of the inter-faith movement. At one time after presiding at a mass meeting in Music Hall held to protest the persecution of Jewish people in Europe, he wrote his friend, Dr. J. Louis Ransohoff: "I realize how dreadfully you must feel, and I would like to tell you that no matter how badly you feel as a Jew, I feel worse as a Christian because in the beginning Jews were persecuted in the name of Christ." On more than one occasion he preached in the Isaac M. Wise synagogue for his friend, Rabbi

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James G. Heller. In one such instance he spoke on his concept of the spiritual life, considering the great thing in man to be his soul, and pointing out that the journey is superior to the road in the realization of man's destiny. His candor won him the respect and admiration of many in all faiths, for they knew that he honored their opinions. No more dramatic incident illustrates his spirit than the one occurring in the inter-faith meeting at the Rockdale Temple Annex when he confessed his faith. Dr. Heller says there had been a great palaver of generalities by the two preceding speakers, and Mr. Nelson commenced his address by bluntly asking the audience if they wanted him to speak as he saw the truth, and they roared back, "Yes!" Thereupon he launched forth with the ringing declaration, "Let us be honest! I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!" He then proceeded to say that he would like all Jews to become Christians just as he knew the Jews and Roman Catholics desired universal allegiance to their faiths. With one or two exceptions, not a soul in that great audience resented his frankness. His ministry was that of one who lived day by day a life of good-will rather than of one who merely talked about it.

Some men considered that he reflected too much surprise at the degree of harmony already existing among the faiths, and that his expressions of pleasure at finding such unanimity thus raised doubts as to its reality. However, in his broad spirit and totally Christ-fashioned personality, he himself was at home with men of all faiths. In 1939, Mr. William J. Shroder, as Chairman of the Community Chest campaign, chose for the year's theme or slogan "The Unity of Religion and Democracy." So excellent a "sermon" did he preach on numerous occasions that Mr. Nelson jestingly told his friend that he must stay out of his parish!

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On the rare occasions when Jews change their religion, they usually do so because of marriage. One such instance is of special interest. The daughter of a leading Jewish citizen married a Gentile, and since her rabbi would not perform the ceremony they turned to Frank Nelson, admiring as they did his faith and works. In a large sense he was rabbi and minister to all sorts and conditions of people. Dean Friedlander of the University Medical School, as he lay dying, said to a friend, "I have told my students how to treat the dying, but it is different when it comes to yourself. Frank Nelson has given me a hand." Again, another friend in his trouble found such sane religious counsel that, although a devout member of his synagogue, he declared, "It took a Christian minister to bring out my soul." He never hesitated to disagree or argue with his best friends, always maintaining that "works without faith" are not sufficient. Thus all who knew him welcomed him, and in their need turned to him with affection, confident of his understanding.

Mr. Nelson was one of the three founders of the Council of Protestant Churches. No small detail was above him, and with Jesse Halsey he rummaged through second-hand stores for furniture for the first office. With the ministers of other churches he worked in closest cooperation, and together they fought the Cox Gang, supported the Social Agencies, and many other activities to which the civic-minded and church-minded in Cincinnati gave unstintingly of their devotion. The Reverend John F. Herget, the distinguished former minister of another downtown church, the Ninth Street Baptist, says, "For twenty-five years we labored together and the passing years only added to my confidence in his intellectual and spiritual integrity. He was a real friend, and when my only son died, he was the first minister in Cincinnati to step through my doorway. I can never forget it. Do you wonder that I loved him and cherish his memory? We were very different in many ways but those differences never deprived us of mutual respect and deep affection." Without a doubt, ministers of all Protestant churches regarded him as the foremost clergyman in the city.

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In 1901 Mr. Nelson was elected to membership in the Clergy Club of Cincinnati, an organization which is composed of many of the leading Protestant ministers. On the occasion of the club's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1919, Dr. Dwight M. Pratt, then of the Walnut Hills Congregational Church, wrote a witty and apt characterization of each member. The following is his superb sketch of Mr. Nelson:

NELSON: The Apollo of the Club, equally recognized as such whether in ecclesiastical robes and millinery or in outing negligee; the physical having its counterpart in athletic qualities of mind and heart; a broad-minded, tolerant Churchman, incapable of surrendering to the artificial in form and ceremony or to the pretentious in self-constituted human authority, even when sanctified by tradition and usage, and aware of its historic affinities to Rome. Fundamentally spiritual in his conceptions of the Church and of the Kingdom; quickly alert to elements in religion that are born of the flesh and vitiated by human pride; unsurpassed in the Club for his exalted conception of historic Christianity and of the glory and prestige of a spirit-filled and spirit-guided church, having a vision of church unity impossible of realization under the assumption and the exclusiveness of Episcopacy; a genial democrat in spite of aristocratic training and environment; intimately acquainted with the trend and quality of modern critical scholarship, and in sympathetic touch with the social movements of the day, in the church and outside of it; too thorough and vital, however, to make the mistake, more common in his church than any other, of substituting social Christianity for evangelistic, thus making the care, culture and comfort of the outer man more important than his spiritual redemption; a student of men and books; an observant traveller, a recent and scholarly resident of the ancient metropolis of the world:^[12] a keen interpreter of the movements of history, ancient and modern; endowed as a preacher with homiletic skill and the spiritual art of making life seem large and the Kingdom of God the one supreme reality for man; and all this in spite of the fact that he is far from being Puritan; never showing the marks of an ascetic nor any tendency or inclination to self-martyrdom; as much in need of reform in some things as the time

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honored secretary of the Club; popular with men because in so many respects like them; popular also as a public speaker and on occasions where grace of speech and manner constitute an essential factor in the program; a conspicuous personality in a pageant, having the note of sincerity, sympathy and appeal that commands assemblies; a man whose promotion will always be in spite of high-churchmen and the favorites of Bishops; a man indispensable to the breadth and representative character of the Club.

There remains one other activity to be mentioned in Mr. Nelson's city-wide ministry. In 1930 Mayor Murray Seasongood appointed him to the Board of Directors of the University of Cincinnati, a board commonly known as the Trustees. It was a distinguished appointment, characteristic of Mayor Seasongood's primary emphasis on the welfare of the city, and indicative of the confidence placed by intellectual and civic leaders in Mr. Nelson's judgment and ability. The Board was made up of eight business men and lawyers and concerned itself mainly with the financial problems of the University. Mr. Nelson's approach was to the human element in each situation with which this Board had to deal. He served in this capacity for eight years, and became "an acute, piercing trustee." The University Medical School has oversight of the Cincinnati General Hospital, and Mr. Nelson was troubled by the large number of cases of tuberculosis among members of the staff and the nurses and interns. The hours were long, the pay poor, and living conditions deplorable. He was very active in his support of the efforts by the authorities to bring about improvement in these conditions.

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He was chairman of the committee which interviewed candidates for the office of Dean of Women, since many on the Board did not feel qualified to make such a selection. During the depression in the thirties when reduction of salaries and of department personnel became necessary, Mr. Nelson was instrumental in securing fair treatment for the individual teacher. He would ask if the teacher whose salary reduction was under consideration had a family and how many children. His colleagues considered him a very important agent in preserving morale during these difficult years, and the President and deans frequently sought his counsel.

He was a firm believer in academic freedom. When the Engineering College arranged lectures for business men, he gave the plan his hearty support, and occasionally came under fire because of certain radical speakers. He was frequently the choice of the University as its representative on public occasions in the city. At the Commencement of 1924, the University of Cincinnati bestowed upon Mr. Nelson the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, "as one who has ever striven to advance the government of the mind and spirit, and who by his own severe self-discipline and true humility has taught all of us to subdue ourselves to the imperishable laws of reason and faith."

When one considers the recognition which the entire city whole-heartedly and unreservedly accorded Mr. Nelson, it is a sorry commentary on the influence of politics that upon the expiration of his second term as a trustee of the University the new Republican Mayor, James Garfield Stewart, failed to reappoint him. He was deeply hurt, but there was satisfaction in the realization that it was because of his continued denunciation of party politics that the reappointment did not go through. He was a clergyman who never curried favor nor withheld opinion when forthrightness was the moral requisite. The people knew where he stood, and no office could silence him. To behave as a citizen is "to conduct oneself as pledged to some law of life." His faithful obedience was recognized on many occasions and in numerous ways. One such recognition was his place in a group of fifteen leading citizens selected by four Cincinnatians chosen at random by "*The Cincinnati Post*." He was described as "having given vision and voice to public service, and in the art of human relations a leader in many fields for many people."

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Few public testimonials have awakened so spontaneous a response as that tendered Mr. Nelson on December 3, 1923, in honor of his twenty-five years of service to church and city. Originating among his own parishioners, the plan quickly developed into a city-wide observance. The committee on arrangements was expanded, and included the Reverend Doctor Francis J. Finn, Rabbi David Philipson, the Reverend John F. Herget, and the Right Reverend Boyd Vincent, as well as a large number of prominent laity outside Christ Church. When the evening arrived, one thousand one hundred people from all paths of life sat down to dinner in the Hotel Gibson. The President of the University, Dr. Frederick C. Hicks, presided. The Mayor, then George P. Carrell, cut short a vacation in order to be present and speak for the city, Mr. George D. Crabbs represented the Social Agencies, Dr. William S. Rainsford came on from New York to join in the acclaim. Mayor Carrell voiced a perfect tribute when he spoke of Mr. Nelson in these simple words: "Here is a true man. He loves his fellows. He does not recognize creed or color. Cincinnati is proud of him. Cincinnati loves him." At the conclusion of the speeches, Mr. Nelson, visibly affected, rose to speak. The tumultuous applause lasted five minutes. With characteristic humility he expressed his thanks, and then drew the attention of the audience to the central theme of any true public servant's work, namely, that "Faith creates; cynicism destroys." This enthusiastic testimonial was a moving demonstration of the place Frank Nelson filled in the hearts of his fellow-citizens, an exception to the rule that a prophet is without honor in his own city. There were two interesting side-lights to the occasion. On the morning of the dinner the Reverend Francis J. Finn, a particular friend, and the pastor of St. Francis Xavier's Roman Catholic Church, offered up the Holy Sacrifice with his Protestant friend as his special intention; and in the evening there stood among the waiters, but not of them, Detroit Williams, the colored sexton of Christ Church, who could not have been present but for Mr. Nelson's skillful arrangement.

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Such was the spirit of Cincinnati's great Christian citizen. His humanity was all inclusive, his spirit discerning, and the city claimed him as its own, for he gave voice to its conscience and helped it find its soul.

FOOTNOTES:

- [9] *City Management* Charles P. Taft, p. 108 Farrar and Rineheart, 1933. Used by permission. Other statements on the Charter Movement are based upon the report of the Consultant Service of the National Municipal League entitled *The Government of Cincinnati, 1924-1944*.
- [10] *City Management* C. P. Taft, p. 30. Farrar and Rineheart. Used with permission.
- [11] Adaptation of a thought expressed by Alexander Woollcott in *While Rome Burns*, p. 7.
- [12] Mr. Nelson twice spent a year in Rome on leave of absence.

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They Came To Be In His Presence

*In This Church
The Reverend Frank Howard Nelson, D.D.
Preached The Gospel of Christ
for Forty Years*

1899-1939

*I thank my God upon every remembrance
of you."*

*—Memorial Plaque at Entrance
to Christ Church.*

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"You can't change me, old man. I am the last of the black Protestants." In this whimsical way Frank Nelson spoke of himself one day in conversation with a friend on some point of ritual. It is abundantly evident that he was in no way a bigoted churchman, and with all his fine, broad sympathies he stood forth as a Protestant. He represented that aspect of the Catholic-Protestant structure of the Episcopal Church, he conducted the services in Christ Church from that angle, his preaching reflected it, and the absence of the clerical collar emphasized it. There is a measure of truth in his droll description of himself.

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In the first decades of this century Mr. Nelson was one of a group of broad-churchmen whose influence was just beginning to be felt. Theologically he was a liberal with reservations, and stood in what is now called "Central Anglicanism" in the sense of "essential orthodoxy, continuity, and breadth and liberality within limits, checked by the principle of discipline, and an outlook, above all, theocentric; fidelity to Christianity as the religion of the Incarnation, and of the Church viewed as Christ's mystical body."^[13]

The truth is that he was different from certain brands of so-called liberals. Like many of them he was an individualist but not, as in the popular conception of that word, an eccentric. His individualism resided in his strong personality, whole and complete rather than partial. He had an immense scorn of the petty narrow-minded points of view. He said, "There is no one so narrow as the broad-minded liberal! Look out! Be sure that you do not develop a closed mind toward the other man's point of view!" Frank Nelson stood in the stream of the best traditions of historic Anglicanism. He had, for instance, a tremendous feeling of reverence for the Altar and the appointments for the celebration of the Holy Communion; and his manner of conducting the Lord's Supper brought that service very close to the most sensitive of worshipers. On the first Sunday of each month the Holy Communion was celebrated at eight and at eleven A.M., and he made it the chief factor in building up the younger members of the parish into the Church. Usually Christ Church was crowded for the first as well as the later service, and it was immensely

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impressive to contemplate the congregation that came at the early hour of eight o'clock from all parts of the city and from distant suburbs. There is communicated serenity as well as reverence in the stately, liturgical service, but that feeling-tone is dependent on the minister conducting it. Mr. Nelson was a medium for the communication of the very spirit of Christ in that service. The ancient, familiar words were given a fresh beauty by his manner and his natural, virile voice. His methods reflected certain qualities of his character. It was his custom to read the service up through the Sanctus from the north end of the Altar, moving to the center for the remainder, and at the moment of the consecration of the Bread and Wine to turn halfway around so that the congregation could see the blessing of the Elements. It was in part an observance of the Apostolic custom of the minister's standing behind the Altar and facing the congregation, and one which he had learned from his days at St. George's under Dr. Rainsford.

In a time of much disparagement, Frank Nelson and his parish upheld the fair reputation of the Church. Bishop Hobson says, "Many a minister and many a church have taken heart and courage because of his ministry." Because he was unafraid to experiment and venture on fresh approaches to old problems, he risked misunderstanding and criticism. He had a marked sense of the dignity of his office, and all who worked on the staff of Christ Church were aware that he was the rector, a czar if you will, but one with a gloved hand. He ran the parish, but not for his own sake nor from delight in power. As a matter of fact, he distrusted power, particularly when wielded by small men in the office of Bishop, and because of that distrust, and because of the democratic nature of the government of the Episcopal Church, he held the leadership of rectors to be equal in value to that of the Episcopate.

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In the management of the parish, he was "a man set under authority." He expected hard work of those to whom he delegated responsibility. Though he occasionally interfered, he invariably backed up his leaders even when they were in the wrong. He did not hesitate to criticize: a retiring choir-master said to his successor, "He is a tyrant, and you won't last three months." After eighteen years, he is still there! There were those who sometimes found Mr. Nelson abrupt, but as they came to understand his temperament and to appreciate his insistence that things should be run decently and in order, they were the very ones who would have stood on their heads for him because his nature inspired endless devotion. It is easy to lose sight of human values in a large institution, but he was the kind of person who was quick to apologize for any rudeness, and if the instance had to do with some fine point of procedure, he would grin and say, "But I was right!"—and he was. A unique thing about his rectorship was his willingness to take the blame upon himself when something went wrong. He felt he was at fault for not having given his subordinates the right training. The conception he held of his office of rector impelled him to give each year a comprehensive report of his parish work along with an audited financial accounting of all monies that he had handled personally.

In the services of Christ Church, Frank Nelson's individuality found complete expression. The Prayer Book offices were marked by an absence of ceremonial, but filled with a profound simplicity and a noble dignity. People coming from other parishes and accustomed to considerable ritual and better architecture (Christ Church has been likened to a Moorish mosque!) learned that such externals occupy in reality a subordinate position in the Christian life, as the rector's manner and forceful preaching lifted them to the plane of spirit-filled worship. He was concerned not with the creation of an atmosphere in which to bathe with satisfaction one's feelings about God but with the living message of the Gospel. One came at last to love the old church building because there the spirit was fed, the mind enlightened, and the will impelled to action.

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People came to be in his presence. They found a new, bright sense of the glory of religious faith; they felt how precious is the least of the human vessels into which God pours His Spirit. The man in himself communicated a personality so wholly infused with the grace of the Lord Jesus that his hearers were stirred to action, which result stems from the authentic note in preaching. "Effective preaching can only mean effective in the sense of doing God's work."^[14] Frank Nelson did God's work. He stirred people to do God's work. The atmosphere of conviction generated by the preacher is due to his whole personality rather than to his words; hence the impact made upon his hearers at the moment of his speaking is never conveyed through the printed page. Its influence, however, continues in their lives, and measured by this standard Frank Nelson was a powerful and effective preacher. The gift of swift, magnetic, eloquent speech was his. Words with the quality and vigor of intuitive imagination poured out of him. Yet preaching was never easy for him, and as it was dominated by his characteristic intensity and fervor, he was nervous beforehand and exhausted afterward. His emotional range sometimes led him off the main thread of a discourse; at times he ranted; and more than once preached an entirely different sermon from the one outlined in his written notes. His preaching was "feeling warmed up to vision," and the word of God passed through him to men. He believed tremendously in preaching; there were few services in Christ Church at which he did not preach,^[15] but he was not a so-called popular preacher; crowds did not constantly fill the pews. To some his driving power was wearing, and even some of his admirers would exclaim, "Oh, I do wish Mr. Nelson would not tear his throat so when he preaches." But his very force of delivery, and his vehemence were a part of the man, and he no more could have preached in another manner than have changed his stature.

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But these characteristics had compensations or off-setting factors. After Mr. Nelson's exchange with the rector of St. Paul's Church, Rome, Italy in 1912, a certain dowager commented, "Mr. Lowrie's sermons made me feel comfortable, but Mr. Nelson makes me feel a miserable sinner!" A newcomer, on his first Sunday in Cincinnati, went to Christ Church intending to "sample"

several churches before casting his lot with one. The choir came in, followed by a young, boyish-looking clergyman whom the man presumed to be the assistant. During the sermon Mr. Nelson continually entangled himself in his stole and gave the impression of one so inextricably caught up in his message that he was a part of it, stole and all! The newcomer was Frederick C. Hicks, later the President of the University of Cincinnati. He did not go elsewhere but continued at Christ Church and eventually became a vestryman.

Mr. Nelson did not talk in an amiable sort of way about the Christian virtues; his sermons, thank God, were not colorless essays on the doctrine of God, and the Church. He preached with abandon, and there issued forth a fiery stream of conviction that stabbed his hearers into life. Within those in whom the seed found good soil there was reproduced his hunger for righteousness, his integrity of character. What we heard from the pulpit of Christ Church was the product of hard-won battles, the forthrightness of a man stirred by his struggle to live as a follower of Jesus Christ. He was no respecter of persons but of personality, saying "We don't dare to be Christians." Some said Frank Nelson did not preach doctrinal sermons, but if not, then church doctrine needs another name, for this man preached the Christian faith, pouring it forth in great bucketfuls. If after hearing him one didn't know something about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, then there is no such thing as doctrine.

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The rector was sensitive about his failure to attract larger congregations, and deprecated his ability as a speaker. He was forever saying that he could not preach, and that he preached too long, but jested that he was too old to change! Once in the midst of an after-dinner speech, he paused to make an aside to his friend, J. Hollister Lynch, "Am I talking too long?" "Yes," whispered Dr. Lynch, but he kept right on! Cincinnati is not a church-going city like Pittsburgh, for instance, but, as one witty observer has remarked, "Cincinnati has fewer moral lapses!" In making judgments on this point, one should take into consideration the fact that there was a large Roman Catholic constituency, and that the predominant German population of Cincinnati which came in such large numbers during the middle of the nineteenth century, was definitely anti-religious. Christ Church, moreover, is a downtown church, and the greater number of the communicants live in suburbs. His parish took him for granted as was inevitable over a forty-year period, but when we recall his multiple civic associations, and the fact that whenever he spoke there was a religious foundation to his address and in his presence, we perceive that Mr. Nelson's preaching reached far beyond the bounds of Christ Church.

The sermons of Frank Nelson were pervaded with a fine ethical perception. He was in the succession of the ancient Hebrew prophets in their profound love of justice and concern for humanity. He had a keen, quick feeling for spiritual values, and succeeded in relating them in vital fashion to the throbbing stress of daily living. Beyond his piercing eloquence, captivating as it most certainly was, was the compelling fact that in his interpretation of the religious significance of human experience he stood forth like a pine tree towering above scraggly growth. No one can ever forget that tall, dynamic figure in the spacious pulpit of Christ Church preaching the Word of God with gripping power. It was not merely the power of virility and eloquence, but the power of grasp, of comprehension, the ability to communicate truth and make it come alive, and cry out for expression in the hearts and lives of his hearers. We felt the majesty of the human spirit, the impatience of sure faith with the rags and blemishes of doubt and cynicism. "Like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth," Frank Nelson poured out his soul, and revealed the grand proportions of human destiny.

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In his beautiful address at the Helen S. Trounstone Memorial Service, a portion of which follows, we find one of the best examples of Mr. Nelson's ability to interpret human experience, as well as of his intuitive understanding of another's travail of soul:

And then her courage. There are the lesser courages and the greater. There are many who dare face danger and undertake hard tasks, and face ridicule and failure. It is a fine and a true courage and I do not underrate it. Helen Trounstone had it and had it to the full. She tackled hard tasks; she faced some men whose interests she opposed. She fought out her fights against all comers, and never flinched. She would go into the court or into the saloon or dance hall, the places of commercial recreation, and fight her fight with all, for what she believed to be right; and she won most of the time. It was a noble thing to see that delicate woman unafraid before the problems and evils of the world.

Yet that was not the finest courage she had. That other finer courage is the one that I would emphasize. It was given her to reconcile a spirit filled with high ideals and great desires, with a body weak, often bent and torn with pain, unsuited to the tasks she longed to do, until at last she was stricken with utter helplessness waiting for the end. For only a few brief years was her body adequate, even a little, to her will. And instead of bending before that limitation and saying that she could do nothing because of it, instead of growing bitter with resentment at a fate that had so burdened her, she but grappled with it the more determinedly. With utter courage of heart and mind, she fought her inner fight and won the victory of cheer and energy and peace. With no excuse and no complaints, and no relaxing of her will before the limitations of her strength, she lived and loved and served as if she had the health she longed for. The limitations of her stricken body meant the giving up of many dear desires, of hopes that would have made life sweet and joyous, of work she yearned to undertake.

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Any of you who have had much to do with one stricken with a sore disease, who knows he never can be well again, know that it is not the sickness, the physical weakness and pain that make the problem and the tragedy. It is the reconciling of the

will to surrender life's hopes and the readjustment of the life to the conditions that have got to be, that nothing can change. That was Helen Trounstine's problem and her tragedy. She sat down with her fate and fought that fight and won it. It must have meant many hours of untold darkness and suffering and bitter questioning and struggle. But of such hours she gave us no outward sign. At least I saw none in the years I knew her, except that finest one of all, the victory of her soul in the glad and joyous doing of what remained within her power.

It is not surprising that his addresses on Good Friday and his sermons on Easter Day were more nearly adequate to those great days than is commonly the case. He cared for these days tremendously, and never ceased to be heartened by the throngs that crowded the old church, filled up the chancel, and stood in the vestibule through the Three Hours on Good Friday. It seemed as if the whole city was aroused as people from offices and factories, and from the outlying districts came to these special services year after year during his long rectorship. It stirs the imagination to think of that gathering, the rich and the poor, the highly-cultivated, and the meekly endowed, shop girls and clerks, the faithful and those groping for faith, all drawn by the mysterious fire kindled by this man of God. There was a concentrated intensity to his preaching on these occasions, for he saw clearly and felt deeply the tragedies of life. In that vibrant voice and in his passionate concern for the soul of men, there burned a white-souled homage to God, and a faith and love that spoke to each one's condition. Out of his long brooding over the darkly colored stream of history, and the chequered progress of Christianity of which his daily contact with the city's life as well as his study gave him profound knowledge, there came forth "great outbursts of unshakable certainty which stand up like Alpine peaks in the spiritual landscape of humanity." The integrity of the man along with the power and dramatic quality of his speech was unveiled for all the world to see. One recalls in this particular a certain Good Friday after World War I when he took up Sarah Bernhardt's ghastly reversal of the First Word from the Cross, "Father, do *not* forgive them for they *know* what they do," and with terrific intensity literally shouted, "That is a lie straight from hell."

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His preaching always illumined a fine feeling for the mastery of language, and those who heard him over the span of the years were conscious that in his Good Friday addresses he employed plain, Anglo-Saxon words, fundamental, strong words that lent a cumulative effect to his speech. Because of his modesty he never consented to the publication of any of his Good Friday addresses, which is lamentable for without a doubt they represent his best preaching. A full, stenographic report, however, was made of his last addresses in 1939, and certain paragraphs from the Third Word may well be quoted. This Word from the Cross, "When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!", was greatly loved by his people because he gave to it an interpretation that was entirely original:

As those of you who have been here on other Good Fridays know, I give that my own interpretation. Some say that I am wrong: that when Jesus Christ said "Woman, behold thy son," He meant He was directing her attention to His friend, St. John, who would be a son to her now that He was going away. Perhaps. But I like to think the other way: that He was revealing to that mother of His the thing that should justify her motherhood, and her faith, and her love. He was saying, as it seems to me, things like this:

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"Behold, your Son, bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh. Known and yet unknown. The Son whom the angel announced to you long ago among the Judean hills. The things that you have treasured and pondered in your heart must be brought out now to allow God to open to you their hidden meaning. For I am your Son, your first-born. In these years of wonder and strangeness I have not forgotten the love and care and protection given me. Through you I grew up in the knowledge of the Scriptures and the love of God's House. No, I have not forgotten those years in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, and the laboring for daily bread. Neither was it easy to break away, and leave home, but God called me, and deep down in your heart you were glad that God chose me—it was the confirmation of all that the angels had whispered in your heart. You were proud of me, sure that God had somewhat in store for me that had never been known in the world, never known to the mothers of other sons. And then murmurs came to you of opposition, of the hostility of men high up in the synagogues, weird reports of my deeds, and strange teachings, and finally all that I said and did seemed to go against the authority and sanctions of your religion, and you were fearful of my mind. And now I have come to this disgraceful end. This cross is the fruitage of those thirty years spent with you and in the fulfilling of God's pleasure. This fruitage of the Cross is not the fruitage that God gives to the sons of evil as seems to be the just fruitage of these thieves crucified beside me. In reality this Cross is the crown of my life, and some day the world will see it, and take Me unto itself, and the Cross will have become a throne."

It is the word of justification and comfort that Jesus gives the broken-hearted Mary. It is the word of God to woman. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." In Jesus, the son of Mary, we see what the world will be like 'when the years have died away.'

It was on these special occasions that he so frequently was inspired. Easter Day, for instance, with its many services and huge congregations stimulated him to the utmost, and to many of us it seemed as if we stood in one of the vestibules of immortality, certainly in the temple of this man's faith. He preached at both the eight and the eleven o'clock services, and each time with

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undiminished vigor and clarity of thought. In the interim, he personally greeted all the parishioners who remained after the first service for breakfast in the parish house.

Frank Nelson loved the ministry, and his convictions glowed and radiated pervasively. Innumerable scenes flood the memory, and I recall an ordinary Sunday which included the early celebration of the Holy Communion at eight forty-five A.M.; an address to his Chapel Class at nine forty-five; and a sermon at eleven o'clock; in addition to all these he went, in the afternoon, to a labor union memorial service. There he repeated the morning's sermon from the text, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." It was the fruit of all his ministry to the bereaved, and of his penetrating, sympathetic insight into the loneliness and devastation of death's inroads. As he brought the Christian faith to bear upon the problem, he imparted by clarity of thought and eloquence of words as well as by accent and genuineness of emotion that certitude which is possible only for one who himself possesses that which he proclaims. This sermon was a notable example of Phillips Brooks' definition of preaching, "Truth conveyed through personality." The few notes here included give only a glimmer of the range of his thought, and do not adequately convey the personal factor which made one want to rise up and call him blessed:

Men have ever striven to conquer death, and never succeeded. Christ too died and though He rose from the dead, He did not return to this life and take up its habits and tasks again. St. Paul was not thinking of overcoming death in this way, but rather of the new consciousness and gift of power that Christ has given men. Christianity is a conquering power. Faces what appears to be the impossible, what experience declares to be impossible, but does so with the word that "all things are subject to Christ." "We see not yet all things put under him—but we see Jesus." There is nothing that may not become subject to the spirit of man through Christ.

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Christ facing human problems: the fear of God's wrath, superstitions arising from doubt of God's moral goodness, sickness, sorrow, hopelessness, sin, worldliness, bitterness of spirit and mind, suffering, and at last conquering death as an enemy by His resurrection.

Death's mastery over us is not a physical thing. It is its power over our spirits, its apparent defeat of hope, of work begun, of love entered into, of faith laid hold upon, and the bitterness that is the fruit of that defeat. Through Christ the power of achievement was strengthened, and released by death. We resent death perhaps—reason for shrinking is that so impersonal and physical a process should be able to overcome a spiritual consciousness and experience. We resent always the victory of a lower over a higher order. (Feb. 28, 1926)

Frank Nelson combined a happy idealism with common sense, and when the occasion moved him to inspired utterance, he drew upon the deep wells of his being, and spoke without effort as waters flow from a fountain. This quality characterized many of his speeches, such as the one in Music Hall after the Armistice of 1918 which he himself considered his best, and those at Masonic gatherings when men flocked to drink in his words and to be in his presence. He overshadowed other speakers, and what Henry Ward Beecher said of another is doubtless applicable to Mr. Nelson: "When he speaks first, I do not care to follow him, and if I speak first, then when he gets up I wish I had not spoken at all."

The worth of so much preaching troubled him at times, and he too had his darker moments. Sometimes he paced up and down Howard Bacon's study never saying a word, or perhaps bursting out in boyish petulance, "When I am down, the parish is down. Why can't they stay up?" At a staff meeting one morning he told the incident of an organization that had requested him to address them, and when he asked on what subject, the reply was "Oh! just talk!" He passed this off as a sort of reflection on his fluency of words.

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Preaching was desperate business to him because "the burden of the Word of the Lord" lay upon him, and if he rose to great heights, he also was dashed down to the depths. To preach for forty years from the same pulpit is an exacting task, and the net result of such an experience is no better summed up than in the remark of a humble parishioner by whose house he was walking one morning with Frederick C. Hicks. It was Monday, and the woman was hanging out her wash. Mr. Nelson said, "Let's stop and ask her what she remembers of my sermon." The good soul was non-plussed, and could not recall even his text. And then with a leap of inspired insight she said, "But Mr. Nelson, this cloth is whiter every time I pour water over it." Perhaps this is the lasting effect on every humble soul who patiently waits as God communicates His truth in earthen vessels.

People came to be in Frank Nelson's presence. He never let them down. He had said of William S. Rainsford's preaching: We came here as church people, professing the faith, and as "we sat before him we saw poured forth the reality of the thing we had professed to believe in ... He took us to whom religion was a profession, and made it a passion." Christ Church people find these words set up poignant echoes of a day when they sat before Frank Nelson and heard the living Word of God.

FOOTNOTES:

- [13] *Central Anglicanism*, Charles W. Lowry, Jr. *The Witness* May 27, 1943. Used by permission.
- [14] *The Servant of The Word*, Farmer p. 6, Charles Scribner's Sons. Used by permission.
- [15] Farmer in his brilliant book, *The Servant of the Word*, makes this illuminating comment

on preaching:

"The wisdom of the reformers appears in always associating the speaking of the word with the other sacraments, and the protestant habit, which is sometimes derided, of always having an address at every meeting is seen to have sound reason behind it. It is part of our whole understanding and valuation of the person and the personal way in which God deals with him. I want the thrusting intrusiveness, the interjection, of another's serious speech. I believe there can be no substitute for the sermon." *Ibid* pp. 80-81.

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Beyond Cincinnati

*"He was easily the prince of us all in diocese
and national church."*

—ZeBarney Phillips

6

The diocese of southern Ohio, of which Christ Church is a part, was vastly strengthened by the leadership of Frank Nelson. In the earlier years of his rectorship he had had little time for diocesan affairs, not that he was indifferent, but he was essentially the kind of person who did one thing at a time, and never allowed himself to be diverted from the immediate task. Moreover, because he was impelled by burning convictions to express freely his pronounced views, he was considered radical, and was misunderstood and disliked by many churchmen. The diocese of those earlier years was conservative and static, and politics then played a more weighty part than now. A clerical friend in speaking of Mr. Nelson candidly stated, "I had to grow into friendship with him. In those early days I had a sort of prejudice against him as a militant opponent of things, but I soon saw my mistake and recognized that he was of nobler cast." He never sought position, and never until 1916, with one exception, was he elected a deputy to the General Convention, which is the highest body of authority in the Episcopal Church. Even when the Convention met in Cincinnati in 1910 and Christ Church was the host to numerous services and meetings, he had no vote. Until 1916 he had represented his diocese at the General Convention only in 1904; he was defeated for re-election in 1907 because he had defended Dr. Algernon Crapsey in a once famous heresy trial.

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His larger interest in the diocese probably had its beginning when in 1908 as a member of the Social Service Commission he visited the Hocking Valley, and was shocked by the abominable living conditions of the miners and the almost intolerable injustice of their economic circumstances. His interest, thus fired, increased with the years until he came to be depended upon in every sphere of diocesan life, serving on the Standing Committee, the Bishop and Chapter, the Board of Strategy and Finance, and in practically every other committee and department of importance. He was most insistent on maintaining the missionary program, which he held to be the very heart-beat of the life of the Church. Even during depressions, Christ Church never lowered its missionary giving of \$24,000, and one year voted \$3000.00 from its parish budget to make up a deficit in the missionary budget because as he said "We have failed to educate the people." His thorough knowledge and good judgment were of infinite value to a succession of bishops. On the occasion of Mr. Nelson's Fortieth Anniversary, the present Bishop, Henry Wise Hobson said, "In all parts of the Diocese I have heard clergy and lay people say such words as these: 'The spirit of honesty, courage, fellowship, and service which has grown up in the life of our Diocese is primarily the result of the influence of Frank Nelson, whose own spirit has been a contagious force in our midst.'" Others who have observed the remarkable growth and increasing strength of this Diocese say that its present vitality has been generated, not by numbers, nor by wealth, but by the passionate spirit of certain recognizable characters of whom Frank Nelson was easily the leader. During Bishop Reese's long illness, Mr. Nelson largely conducted the business of the Diocese, and for a man with such positive convictions, he was extremely fair in presiding at the Convention. He leaned over backward to be just, and did not silence even those who brought up petty reasons for disagreement on the subjects under debate.

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When in 1929 the illness of Bishop Reese necessitated his resignation, the Diocese spontaneously turned to Frank Nelson as his successor. There is a certain piquancy in the contemplation of the change that by this time had come over the Diocese. A man who at one time had been distrusted, and branded as radical if not reckless, had so won the respect and affection of his associates that they desired to express their trust and belief in him by electing him to the highest office of his Church. Reverend Sidney E. Sweet, now Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis, nominated Mr. Nelson at the Convention saying, "He is a man whose intellectual and spiritual gifts rank him with the finest in the Church throughout the United States. It will make the Diocese of Southern Ohio proud to present the name of Dr. Nelson to the House of Bishops as the representative of this Diocese." Another discerning friend, Alfred Segal of *The Cincinnati Post*, put the case dramatically when he wrote in his column: "The other day Rev. Frank Nelson stood on the threshold of ecclesiastical glory. He needed but to take one step and he would have been on his way to the eminence of Bishop. But he turned away, though many welcoming hands beckoned him."

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In declining the nomination, Mr. Nelson said that his decision came as a result of consultation with friends whose opinions he valued, and from his own best judgment which counselled against his acceptance. He felt that it was desirable to elect a man with no local associations, and his own long ties with the diocese made him an unsuitable candidate. He had confided in friends his lack of diocesan consciousness, and confessed a reluctance to assume at his age another kind of work. Furthermore, the parish of Christ Church and the city were by now so deeply embedded in his very soul that even a change, if not a severance, of such ties was unthinkable. He put forward the name of Dr. Howard Chandler Robbins, who later refused the election. The selection of Dr. Robbins, important as it was, nonetheless seemed secondary to the insistent attempts of leaders to place this humble servant in the office of Bishop. Upon Mr. Nelson's entry into the luncheon hall after the convention, he was greeted by a tremendous ovation. He was a strong man among strong men. The following letter from the late Right Reverend William Lawrence of Massachusetts did not dissuade him from his firm decision:

November 22, 1929

My dear Frank:

You well know that it is my rule not to "butt in," but as a Pullman conductor once told me, "there ain't no use in having rules that you can't break when you have to."

I believe that you respect my judgment; my judgment is that you are the one man who has the qualifications to be Bishop of Southern Ohio. I know your loyalty to your parish and your humble estimate of yourself. But the Diocese and the opportunity which the Church will give you as Bishop are greater than your parish. Think of Trinity, Boston, at Brooks' election and its result today. Spaulding of Utah brought into the House of Bishops a breeze of fresh air, a new life and courage which abide there still—You will do the same.

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Think of the cheer that your election will bring to Vincent, Reese, and the whole Diocese.

Let them have your name and your life. I never wrote such a letter before and no one knows that I am doing it now.

Yours affectionately,
William Lawrence.

At the succeeding convention another concerted effort was made to induce Mr. Nelson to become Bishop. It was refreshing to find the office seeking the man, especially a man who had never sought for himself positions of prestige, a man never found in the society of office seekers. Although he was gratefully aware of the well-meaning intentions of his friends, and felt in the proposed honor the warmth of their personal affection, he did not want it said that he had permitted the election and then declined it. In as tactful a manner as possible he labored to prevent the Committee on Nominations from presenting his name. During a stormy session of the Committee a movement was under way to over-ride Mr. Nelson's wishes and present his name as the nominee of the Committee anyway. At this juncture Dr. Hicks, his close friend and a Vestryman of Christ Church, rose and protested with considerable indignation, "Gentlemen, this means you simply do not know Frank Nelson." The debate went on, but Mr. Nelson remained firm, saying on the Convention floor, "I *may* not be Bishop of Southern Ohio," and he used the word *may* in the ancient sense of having "power to prevent." "I cherish the tribute, but I tell you without recourse to thought or prayer that I cannot do it." Finally, the Convention proceeded to the happy election of Henry Wise Hobson, and the Diocese of Southern Ohio remembers with gratitude that it owes Bishop Hobson to Frank Nelson.

From 1916 until his death, Mr. Nelson was a deputy to the triennial meetings of every General Convention, and became the principal spokesman in the House of Deputies. This body is not always as decorous and staid in its deliberations as the House of Bishops, but Mr. Nelson at all times commanded a respectful hearing among the deputies. He came to be one of the leaders who, as a veteran church-paper correspondent put it, "could read the signs of the times." His opinions carried enormous weight though not habitually swaying votes.

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In Diocesan circles as well as in Christ Church, he was absolutely fearless in utterance, and was among those who were eager for the Episcopal Church to make large ventures of faith. Like Bishop Brent, he commanded a vision and a breadth of spirit which were incomprehensible to those who could not conceive of a universal Christianity free of sectarian doctrines and dogmas.

In this respect he reflected and perpetuated the greatness of Phillips Brooks who thus stated his position: "I cannot live truly with the men of my own church unless I also have a consciousness of common life with all Christian believers, with all religious men, with all mankind." As a natural consequence of such conviction, Mr. Nelson was insistent that the Episcopal Church become a constituent member of the Federal Council of Churches, and lived to see accomplished that small but significant step towards cooperation among the churches.

In the debates that occurred in various years on such subjects as the proposal to eliminate the word "Protestant" from the official name of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and on the status of the Presiding Bishop, he was very firm but kindly and tactful in setting forth the Protestant emphasis in the Catholic-Protestant fabric of his church. He argued that the word "Protestant" in the title is there to protect the right of every sort of churchman. His candor was disarming, and he could get away with such unvarnished statements as this: "As you know I am a Protestant of the Protestants. I do not belong to the Catholic party in the Episcopal Church. I belong to the Protestant party. I believe in Protestantism; I do not believe in Catholicism, I never have, and please God, I never will. I believe in Protestantism; but I believe more, and deeper, and further and broader, and higher in manhood and womanhood. I can see a vision of God in the man and in the woman, in the Catholic as well as in the Protestant, in the Jew, in the atheist, as well as in the Episcopalian."^[16] He was alert to any move that threatened the democratic basis of the Episcopal Church and diminished the power of the clergy and the laity, holding in the instance of the Presiding Bishop's status that the proposal for something similar to an archbishopric would introduce a monarchical form of government into a church whose government closely resembles that of the United States.

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At those conventions when the Prayer Book was under revision, Mr. Nelson's spiritual discernment, large-heartedness, and wise judgment were an important supplement to the work of the liturgical authorities. One of the really notable speeches of any General Convention was his plea for the church to place the emphasis in the Baptismal Service where the Apostles did, namely, on discipleship rather than on Creed. "The Creed ought to be on the Altar, not at the door of the Church," he said. "I want the Creed in the service, and I believe it will receive more emphasis than before if it is inserted where I have proposed to place it."^[17] The important thing required of Christians is to follow Christ. It is harder to follow Christ than to accept a creed, and God forbid that I should make membership in the Church easier than Christ made it." His earnestness and deep religious feeling made a profound impression, but there were those who saw in the proposal an opening wedge for the subordination of the creeds, and timidity and caution overcame the surge of approbation which followed immediately on his speech.

Commencing in 1925 and continuing until his death, Mr. Nelson served on the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony, which dealt with the highly controversial issue of divorce. In upholding the high standards embraced in the canons of the Church, he supported that section of the Commission which sought to take into account the far-reaching human factors involved in marriage and divorce. He was absolutely convinced that the Church was not approaching the problem in the right way. To him it was not an ecclesiastical problem but a definitely human affair. He said he preferred to submit a delicate, ethical problem to a human bishop rather than to the arbitrary operation of a rule. He maintained, "Divorce is now on a legalistic basis. That was not the way of our Lord, and the Commission desires to lift it out of the legal atmosphere into the sphere of the fellowship of the Gospel." Towards this end the Commission had (in 1931) drawn up a proposed canon which was the result of six years' study on the part of an extremely able group of clergymen and laymen. Among the latter were some of the great lawyers of America, such as George W. Wickersham, Roland Morris, and Professor Joseph Beale of the Harvard Law School. This Commission proposed that "any person to whom a divorce from a former marriage has been granted for any cause by a civil court may apply to his Bishop to marry another person." In other words the Commission was endeavoring to have the matter decided not by some hard and fast rule which was bound to do many injustices to individuals, but by a more general principle to be interpreted by the Bishop or Marital Court. The proposal was defeated, but in the battle which ensued and has not ceased "Frank Nelson," says Bishop William Scarlett of Missouri, "was a leading figure. He was trying to see this whole matter through what he believed to be the mind of Christ, and to act and legislate accordingly."

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At the Church Congress in Richmond, Virginia, in 1926 in a paper on *What Is Loyal Churchmanship?* he boldly stated:

Even when it comes to the canon in regard to remarriage of divorced persons, when I find in my conscience, standing before God in the presence of Christ, as I try to do, that a man and a woman have a right to be remarried, I will remarry them and take the consequences. I do not mean that I would go about seeking ways of disobeying the Church. I am putting extreme cases. Of course I do not mean that.... My first loyalty, my highest loyalty is to the Spirit and to the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ as God gives me grace to see it.... The human soul is more sacred than constitution or canons. Canons and forms of worship are used to illuminate and guide men's minds and souls to Christ, not to dominate them or compel them to conform to this or that.^[18]

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In a few exceptional instances he remarried divorced persons. He held the present canon of the church to be utterly ridiculous in permitting reinstatement to communicant status following remarriage after divorce: "If one commits so grave a sin as to demand excommunication, how can one be reinstated while continuing to live in that sin? It is absurd on the face of it."^[19]

There were those who sneered at his position, saying it was individualistic and amounted to the setting up of oneself against the law of the church, yet he of all people was most conscious of the

sin of pride and excessive individualism. At his last Convention in 1937, he reemphasized the point that the object of rewriting the marriage canon was not to liberalize divorce and remarriage: "We have been trying to interpret the mind of our Lord. We have presumed to separate men from the love of God by excommunication. This Commission is trying to set free to a higher plane this tremendous question which is facing us, to lift this tremendous relationship from regulation to the life of the spirit. We want this church to face reality." Nevertheless, the Commission marched from one defeat to another, but it still marches! There was passed in 1931 one constructive piece of legislation bearing on instruction in Christian marriage which was enacted largely through the extremely forceful defense of Frank Nelson.

The same human touch which guided all his thought and effort was apparent in his work on another Commission, namely, the Budget and Program. He usually was chosen to present the report in the House of Deputies, and it was always a masterly presentation. Like Gladstone, he had the faculty of making people like figures, because he set them forth in terms of human values or in what the newspaper writer calls "human-interest" stories. This same humanness was delightfully manifest on occasions when friends endeavoured to make him the presiding officer or President of the House of Deputies. He would never consent, and humorously said that if he became an official, he would have to attend all the extra meetings and couldn't play golf!

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In 1937 the General Convention met in Cincinnati. Though far from well and worn out after the usual strenuous year in his parish, Mr. Nelson gave up a large part of his vacation to assist in the arduous preparations always entailed by such affairs. At the opening service in the University Stadium he was selected by the Presiding Bishop to read one of the Lessons, the deserved recognition of his place in diocese and national church.

In the extensive work of forwarding the policies set up by the General Conventions he was called upon, as one of the representative rectors, to speak in many parts of the country. He was foremost in commending the Nation-Wide-Campaign or budget plan of operation instituted in 1919, as a means of re-awakening the church to a sense of national responsibility. Despite heavy work in parish and city he never spared himself, and willingly put his services at the command of the Presiding Bishop. Only eight months before his death, he spent an entire week in the Diocese of Massachusetts speaking two and three times a day to groups of vestrymen on the forward work of the church.

When General Convention met in Kansas City in 1940, the first meeting after Mr. Nelson's death, the President of the House of Deputies, the late ZeBarney Phillips, said at the opening session:

Later on we shall have the regular memorial to all members of the Convention who have died during the triennium, but as the Convention opens without them I cannot refrain from paying tribute to some of those whom we loved best and best remember. First you will all agree is Frank Nelson who was the outstanding member of this House at Cincinnati. His genuine Christian devotion, his courtesy, his fairness and his gentleness can never be forgotten. Let me tell you one little thing that shows his character. You all know his type of churchmanship, and yet, for the sake of others he placed candles on his altar for the corporate communion. It was a little thing but it was so like Frank Nelson.^[20]

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Whether in parish, city, or the whole Episcopal Church, his work was affected by a mighty vision of the Kingdom of God on earth which set him apart as an unusual servant who humbly read the scroll of life as it is unrolled to the children of men. He passed on to others the torch of faith which lights the path to the City of God.

FOOTNOTES:

- [16] Address at the Centennial of Christ Church, 1917. He spoke in this vein at Conventions though I cannot locate exact statements in official records.
- [17] Mr. Nelson's proposal placed the Creed immediately after the Lesson.
- [18] *The Church and Truth*, p. 138, Macmillan Co. 1924. Used by permission.
- [19] Letter to the author, September 12, 1932.
- [20] Letter to Mrs. Nelson from Mr. Richard Inglis of Cleveland.

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*"There is not one of us but in some measure
is in his debt."*

—The Cincinnati Enquirer

7

"All the hold those people have on God is me. It is terrible. It bothers me. They love me but they don't come to church." Mr. Nelson confided in this vein one night to his intimate friend, Jesse Halsey, into whose study he had stopped on his way home from a call in a distant suburb. While it was inevitable that some people should use him as a crutch or should let him do their climbing for them, the truth of the matter is that he was a chosen channel for the communication of the Divine Spirit to earth-bound men. Because he was genuinely humble, he was troubled about those people who could approach God only through him. If they little sensed that what they loved in him was God, they nevertheless were compelled by their limitations to think of God in terms of Frank Nelson.

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He was only a voice in the successive generations of men whom God has sent to minister unto this world, but men loved the voice and though it is now no longer heard, the mystery and wonder of his personality still remain. The happy blend of the spiritual and the human in his nature had a profound influence upon those who knew him. Though poor, faltering words may suggest the salient outlines of his character, the richness and singularity of it defy complete expression.

Mr. Nelson's rare gifts of mind and spirit were enhanced by a robust physique. He was tall, well-proportioned, and in his last twenty years took on an almost majestic bearing which gave him a distinguished appearance in any company. In his manner there was that graciousness which men call charm or presence. Those who associated with him, whether rich or poor, talented or commonplace, felt his friendliness. He was at home with all kinds of people, and though born on the sunny side of the street, and by birth and breeding an aristocrat, he became one of the most democratic of men. Because of his greatness some approached him hesitatingly, but they went away remembering only his kindness of heart. He never stood on his dignity in that sense which conveys condescension. His gay, infectious laughter which so often filled a room put people immediately at ease, and yet he never belittled his calling nor lowered himself to meet men.

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There was a look of keenness in his eyes that sometimes pierced one through and through, but always there shone forth faith and sympathy and understanding. It was the warmth of his humanity that drew people, and consciously or unconsciously gave them confidence and a stronger readiness to meet life. Bishop Edward L. Parsons of California writes, "When with him you felt as if you were entirely safe. You knew that his judgment would be sound. You knew that he was too big to be dominated by personal considerations."

The same warmth expressed itself in his appreciation of other men's opinions, and because he was decisive in outlook and views, he found pleasure and stimulus in the spirited exchange of ideas and in sprightly repartee. In the Episcopal Church there is an amazing diversity of thought on ecclesiastical matters. Frank Nelson, for instance, represented one conviction, and the Right Reverend Spence Burton, now Lord Bishop of Nassau, quite another. "We were the best of friends," writes Bishop Burton, who is a Cincinnati by birth, "and we often disagreed but got on happily together because I think that temperamentally we were somewhat alike—what might vulgarly be known as whole-hoggers. In that way we understood each other and did not annoy each other nearly so much as if we had had the idea that we could have only as much affection for each other as we had agreement with one another." The admiration and affection which Mr. Nelson elicited was pointedly demonstrated at his funeral. Bishop Burton sat in the chancel alongside the Reverend Jesse Halsey, the Presbyterian minister. Dr. Halsey said: "Bishop Burton, perfect gentleman that he is, not once crossed himself in deference to Frank's (to him, atrocious) low church prejudices!" Frank Nelson was like that. Respect for him sometimes came grudgingly, but it came because there was no personal animosity in the man. He was honored because he was a moral and a spiritual force with which to be reckoned.

His election to the Commercial Club of Cincinnati in 1923 is another indication of his democratic and appealing character. This club is one of the city's most exclusive, its membership being comprised entirely of business executives, captains of industry, and a small sprinkling of professional men. The constitution of the club allows for three honorary members, and at the time of Mr. Nelson's election, the only honorary member was William Howard Taft. An extract from the Club's minutes reads:

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Believing that it would be a merited recognition of one of our most worthy citizens, won by his unselfish zeal for the cause of humanity, and as a leader for higher ideals in our civic life, your Executive Committee unanimously recommend the election of Rev. Frank H. Nelson to be an honorary member of the Commercial Club.

Each year at the Club's Christmas dinner, Mr. Nelson invariably gave an address on some contemporary significance of Christmas. His message was deeply impressive to this inner circle

of representative citizens, for he was one with them in spirit, even as he was one with the humblest of his parish. In turn, such associations gave him courage and reënforced his will to persist in a difficult calling, as the following lines penned to a club member reveal:

I wonder if you and a few men who are like you in real understanding and real goodness, realize what your confidence and friendship do for a minister? It isn't easy for us to keep our faith in what is right and just and true, when successful men tell us we don't know what we are talking about—that our faith is plain foolishness in the face of realities.

He entered into the Club's frolics with huge enjoyment, and on one occasion took part in a pageant, dressed in the vestments of a mediaeval bishop. During an outing in the South, the Club attended a religious service, and while in the church Mr. Walter Draper had his pocket picked. After the service, in some excitement he freely expressed his indignation, continuing at great length until Mr. Nelson gleefully returned the filched article!

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Out of his warmth of human feeling there came a real capacity for enjoying simple, ordinary things. If he was stirred by the tragedy and the immemorial pain of humanity, he was also moved by the elemental ties of family and friendship, and by all the simplicity that lends them zest and joy. He loved anniversaries, and was deeply appreciative of the innumerable remembrances he received on those occasions. Christmas parties in his home were a particular delight to friends and to those members of the staff fortunate enough to enjoy the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson. He was child-like at heart, and those close to him were warmed by his gaiety and thoughtfulness. He had a feeling for music and when he led the carol rehearsals in the parish house hall before Christmas and Easter, the boys and girls responded whole-heartedly. He took charge in a firm manner; in fact no bronco was ever more competently restrained than his youngsters. The chorus of boys and girls sang softly or loudly at his will, and enjoyed it, and when he left the platform, they did not growl an adieu, they applauded!

Mr. Nelson's interest in people, and the work he accomplished had for a background the sort of home environment which enhanced his capacity. In 1907 he was married to Miss Mary Eaton, the daughter of William Oriel Eaton, a Cincinnati artist of distinction. Their adopted daughter, Ruth, was an unending delight to him, and he lived to officiate at her marriage, and to become a happy grandfather. Mrs. Nelson's admirable arrangements of the household left him free of the many details that might hamper a man in public office. He did not have to worry about bringing home unexpected guests, and when he was not at home Mrs. Nelson carried on in a loyal manner expressive of his interest in people. At one time before the Travelers' Aid Society was organized, a mother and two children arrived at the railroad station in some sort of pressing difficulty. Not knowing where to go, the mother inquired of the telephone operator, who suggested "Rev. Nelson." The woman in her distress went to the rector's home on Pike Street. Mr. Nelson was out of the city, but in characteristic fashion, his wife took them in and kept them overnight. Mrs. Nelson's interest and work in the parish, particularly with the young candidates for the Girls' Friendly Society, was of a notable quality, and her fine understanding of their problems was not only an important factor in the effectiveness of that organization, but also happily supplemented her husband's unceasing labors.

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Frank Nelson was continually sensitive to his good fortune in possessing adequate means, in contrast to the deprivation and financial difficulties of many others. He was incapable of concealment and there was a refreshing frankness to his acknowledgment one Sunday morning when, speaking on the parish budget, he facetiously told his congregation that his salary was too large but he did not have the moral courage to refuse it! He was also fortunate in many other ways, such as being free from illness the larger part of his life, and from personal bereavements, for his parents lived to a ripe age. His gift of imagination in dealing with many problems not experienced by him personally was, therefore, the more unusual. "Genius is the power of getting knowledge with the least possible experience, and one of the greatest differences between men is in the amount of experience they need of anything in order to understand it."^[21]

The even tenor of his lot in life did not produce in him self-satisfaction and complacency, but often did make him uneasy. He had inherited his father's sternness of conscience and moral fibre. At one time when a parishioner sold a piece of property and asked Mr. Nelson to use the money to buy his first car, he was sorely perplexed as to the appropriateness of accepting such a gift and allowing himself the luxury of an automobile. He wondered what some of the people in his parish would think. When calling in the "Bottoms," he often wore an old, blue serge suit. He was acutely aware that his salary came in part from many who had little, and to the end of his days his conscience troubled him about this, wanting as he did to share the life of the least of his people.

Frank Nelson was a singularly modest person. In the early years of his ministry one did not hear much about what he was doing. Everywhere people talked of Stein's distinguished preaching, and not much was said about Mr. Nelson's talents. He belittled his own abilities, and imagined that things which were difficult for him came easily to other people. He not only deprecated his skill in preaching, but thought he had no capacity for meeting intellectuals on their own ground. It cannot be said that he had an inferiority complex for that implies weakness, and in Frank Nelson power and gentleness were happily and usefully joined. The honor and acclaim that came to him from church and city never impressed him unduly; in fact, he was saddened by them because they represented a seeming success which in comparison with the great ideals of the Christian ministry approximates failure. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."

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His exceptional sense of reality and proportion, which is the very essence of humility, made him a forceful leader and at the same time congenial company. Because he was completely sincere and unaffected, his friends felt no self-consciousness in the presence of "the cloth." They in turn could be candid with him. This fact was once amusingly demonstrated when the music at Christ Church was not at its customary high standard, and Mr. Nelson, happening to meet a parishioner who had not been in church for some time, asked her why, and enjoyed a good chuckle over her reply: "Oh! I am tired of hearing the choir bawl and you bawl!" There was always a lively give and take in his friendships. On one occasion at the close of an inter-faith meeting, he was chided by a Roman Catholic friend about his poor speech. Admitting that he had come unprepared, Mr. Nelson without the slightest sign of resentment offered to drive his friend home, and they had a good two hour talk in front of the Roman Cathedral.

The range of his friendships was extraordinary for he possessed the capacity to kindle admiration and affection. Many a man found him a refreshing tonic, and would say, "I felt better for contact with him." He was a frequent participant at the Round Table discussions in the University Club, and delighted in the exchange of thought that came from all sorts. At the time of the death of his friend, Father Finn, the Pastor of St. Xavier's Church, which is in the vicinity of Christ Church, Mr. Nelson attended the Requiem Mass, and afterwards was observed standing by the hearse, head uncovered and tears in his eyes, for they had been the best of friends. A great personality is more than what he says, and many times brushes aside the trammels of the popular conception of the institution which he represents. Frank Nelson had a well-nigh perfect concept of what it means to be a Christian; and, therefore, in his wide range of friendship among all faiths and those of no faith, he carried himself without the faintest hint of disloyalty to the Episcopal Church. As he was never colorless, men knew where he stood, and though sometimes disagreeing with him, friends and critics alike recognized his genuine goodness and knew his motives to be without guile. He would say, "Always believe a person right until proved otherwise. Take people at face value. I am a fool, but that is the only way to begin." Such were the tenets of his quiet pugnacity of faith in human beings. It is no wonder that a working-man called him, "The greatest Christian in shoe-leather I ever met; a Christian capitalist worthy of anyone's emulation"; or that his faithful colored sexton, who waited on him, shined his shoes, and served him devotedly to the end of his days, should say, "We were pals. He was always tops with me."

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Mr. Nelson was often the one called upon when grace of speech, dignity of manner and discriminating taste were required. At a community mass meeting in Music Hall in 1927, he was chosen to introduce the speaker of the evening, Miss Maude Royden, the noted English preacher. He accompanied Miss Royden to the center of the platform with all the courtliness of a true gentleman, and with that deference due a gentlewoman and an eminent personage. His introduction was an instance of his singular felicity of expression and his ability to state in choice language the sentiments prompted by the event of the moment. Such was Mr. Nelson's gift for being master of every occasion. Sitting in the back row of the immense hall which was crowded to the doors, I felt that the audience quickly sensed the fitness of the presence on the same platform of two such estimable representatives of the Christian Church.

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To illustrate further his command of language and his absolute candor, there is an incident which also neatly tested his tact and truthfulness. One sultry evening in Holy Week, when a long-winded clergyman was preaching, it appeared to me that the rector dozed. I wondered what he could honestly say to the man. After the service when we were in the sacristy, he put his arm around the preacher's shoulders, and said, "Old man, you set me to thinking!" His tact was never failing, though often its diplomatic flavor could be more than faintly sensed!

Accompanying his humility of spirit there was in his nature and his opinions an air of authority wholly unecclesiastical, purely personal, but immensely impressive. It came in part from his particular type of intellect. He had an assimilative mind, which enabled him, for example, to acquire rapidly the gist of a book, and to state succinctly and clearly a point which he was desirous of making. His was an intuitive knowledge rather than a scientific. It was not the kind of knowledge of which the dogmatists speak and in which they alone can believe. Mr. Nelson's knowledge was the sort which sees into the life of things and of men. His intellectual powers were richly developed by his parish work and heavy responsibilities, and by his reflection upon all kinds of experiences and his understanding insight into other people's problems. A forty years' ministry combined with such a type of mind gave him, for one thing, a rather fine grasp of medical science. He knew its principles, and was able to simplify and help at times when technical terms leave the layman baffled and vague. Because of this special kind of mind and the sweep of his experience, his general effect on people was sometimes overwhelming. To illustrate a minor angle, he was not adept in leading discussions; he could not draw out a group because he had pretty thoroughly covered the subject himself, and the impact of his personality was a bit overpowering.

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But above all, the authority one felt most in his personality was that which came as a result of his being Christ-fashioned. He of all men possessed the kind of nature which cannot live without God. There was within him a spontaneity that was entirely himself, impossible of duplication, totally socialized. He was not a mystic and maintained that he was puzzled by their writings. He admitted that the prayer-life was difficult for him, that he could not meditate or think about God for long periods. His was not the ascetic or contemplative nature; he did not live in reflective calm. In the whirlpool of human relations he was an explorer, a bold adventurer bringing people into the presence of God; and what does it matter whether one prays in words or acts? He exemplified in his life one definition among many, namely, "To labor is to pray." The weight of people's needs pressed down upon him so relentlessly that he was driven to do something about

them. His was the temperament which animates an ancient prayer, "Lord, I am so busy this day, if I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me." We are disposed to have our tight little crystallizations of what prayer should or should not be. Frank Nelson was impatient of such, for he ventured upon a scale more broad than that envisioned by the average parson or layman. There are no theological concepts which fit him.

Mr. Nelson had a natural talent for enjoying people, which implemented all his work, but for a man in his position such a gift has its price: either one wears himself out or neglects his major task and so spreads himself thin. He chose the first course, and as we contemplate this record of vast accomplishment who are we to say that he did not choose wisely? He was a very busy man, and went about doing good, not just doing. His description of Helen Trounstone's life of activity is applicable to his own:

It was not restlessness, the hurrying on from one thing to another, just to be busy. It was the true energy of full-hearted and full-minded interest in life, and all that it holds; the passion to learn that she might teach; to enjoy that she might give joy; to rest that she might have strength to do her work; to serve because men need her service. It was energy of mind and heart so full of the vision of the greatness of life and the opportunity of living, that she could not waste time except as it ministered to the part she was to play.

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Mr. Nelson did not scatter his interests indiscriminately but concentrated his efforts in the fields where he was most competent: social problems and the relation of the Church to the most concrete activities of human life. All these fitted into his prime purpose.

The vision which governed his days was strengthened every year in the long vacations that he took at his summer home in Cranberry Isles, Maine. There beside the sea he dreamed long dreams, and drank in the salty air which brought indispensable relaxation, and mental and spiritual refreshment. In his small cabin on a point of land overlooking the limitless ocean, he could be very much alone. Something of that setting and its influence is conveyed in a letter to the Reverend Theodore Sedgwick, a life-long friend, which discloses Mr. Nelson in a reflective mood:

Sept. 6, 1928

Dear Ted:

Many, many thanks for your intensely interesting letter, and its review of Julian Huxley's book. Such a view of life and religion does make one stop and think—and hesitate. It is the terribly earnest spiritual problem that we face today in the ministry. It is the sort of thing I had in mind, in suggesting the subject of "God" for the next Swansea Conference. For we have got to face the issue with eyes open, minds familiar with the biologist's point of view. The old affirmations of formal theology are not adequate to meet the issue. And yet in those affirmations I am sure lies the truth—that God lives, God our Father—conscious of Himself and of us—a person in a very real sense—from Whom we derive personality—from Whom we came—and to Whom we go. If mankind loses that, "his arms *do* clasp the air" and he drowns in the infinity of time and space and his own nothingness. We have from Christ the truth and somehow we must learn it with a new understanding—or rather with *the* new understanding that modern science and modern reverent scientific thought have given us. I am sitting at my desk in my cabin at sunset. The day has been cool and grey—a heavy curtain of cloud over the sky—But now—that curtain is thinning and through the break in the west—the whole glory of the sun has colored sky and sea with a golden light beyond description for exquisite beauty. The gulls are winging their way across the sea to a distant island where they rest and go back to each night. As I sit and look, my whole spirit is moved by the beauty and the evening quiet. There is infinity here—of space and imagination. Yet—the gulls—I think, are unconscious of all that—but I am moved by it and keenly conscious of it. It is not just biology—or I would be as the gulls—and I am not. And men are not. They want God—behind the glory—God clothed with the glory—adequate to the glory—that their own imagination and hunger and aspiration may be justified—That is what Christ has given us to preach and it is the truth. Now the gold has turned to a flaming red—thrilling almost to the point of pain. One must believe—and then face the chill grey of the coming night with the memory of it to lighten and interpret it.

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We go a week from tomorrow, back to work, to the men and women who have so bravely gone on working through long, hot summer days in the streets and factories and tenements of the city. And in that bravery and drudgery, there is the same flaming glory of God. It isn't just biology—it is the spirit of God, making the physical the dwelling place of God and glorifying it with His presence.

Frank Nelson had an almost Elizabethan zest for thought and action, and even at Cranberry he entered enthusiastically into the local life. He preached at least once every summer in the Congregational Church, and in that church today are numerous memorials to him: a silver alms bason, the Service Book of the Congregational Church beautifully bound in red morocco, a United States flag, and several pictures. Each year at Easter there is a large cross of geraniums in the church, and after the service the flowers are distributed among the families on the island with a card saying, "Given in memory of Frank Howard Nelson with the Easter message of Christ's Resurrection." When he left Cranberry the last time, all the public school children were dismissed to wave their goodbyes. His unaffected interest in the affairs of the community expressed itself in

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practical ways, and his unassuming and simple manner gave little inkling that he was a foremost citizen of Cincinnati.

"There is nothing comparable," says Coventry Patmore, "for moral force to the charm of truly noble manners." Frank Nelson's manner was not only the result of a choice family inheritance, but also the rich fruitage of a lifetime of faithful obedience to a consuming passion and vision. He was a life-giving river flowing in a parched land. In him the ancient prophet's words found a fresh fulfillment: "Everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh."

FOOTNOTES:

- [21] R. L. Nettleship *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, p. 129, published by Macmillan Co. Used with permission.

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Last Years

*Then of those shadows, which one made descent
Beside me I knew not; but Life ere long
Came on me in the public ways, and bent
Eyes deeper than of old; Death met I too
And saw the dawn glow through.
—Anon*

8

Frank Nelson never became an old man. Toward the end of his life his body could not fulfill the demands of his spirit, and he was not able to undertake as much nor see as many people as he wished, but he never neglected any responsibility. At times he could not keep going and had to stop on the street to rest because too much exertion caused pain, but he would not spare himself nor did he ever complain. He was a happy soldier who smiled through his closing years.

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In 1931-1932 he suffered from a blocking off of the blood vessels that drain the leg, a condition which has very serious possibilities. He weighed these possibilities, says Dr. Richard S. Austin, but like most patients he figured there was always the chance that he might not have to pay the price. He was like the physician who when told to practice what he preached replied, "Did you ever know a sign-post to walk down the road?" He bore his illness with fortitude, concealing from his family and friends the vexation that he felt as the activities which were life itself to him were curtailed more and more. When entering the church in procession with the choir, he would never use a cane though he was often suffering acutely, but squaring himself, and throwing back his shoulders, he would march resolutely on. As he crossed the chancel to enter his pulpit, something of his old vigor was apparent, and as he preached, his voice was strong and clear. If he was less animated, he was no less intense, no less the tremendously invigorating preacher. One day in the parish house Canon Symons met him carrying a heavy bag. He was about to leave for one of his frequent periods in the hospital, and Canon Symons remonstrated with him and tried to take his bag, but Mr. Nelson refused, saying, "No, I won't. I would rather drop in my tracks than to save myself and spend endless days in hospitals."

At the Annual Meeting of the Parish on April 10, 1939, Mr. Nelson presented his resignation, "not because I want to quit, but I am concerned that this parish should not weaken. This church is facing, as every church is facing, a new day; and it needs the leadership of younger and stronger men." It was accepted with marked reluctance to take effect when his successor should be chosen and had arrived. On May 21st the parish and many of his friends outside Christ Church celebrated his forty years' ministry in the one church and city, and there was a singular outpouring of people.

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At the conclusion of the observance he wrote a friend:

Though it was not so stated in the bond, it saved me from a farewell celebration. I

preached at all three services, and it saved me the embarrassment of listening to eulogies, and saved others from having to deliver them! But everyone was fine about it. They decorated the Altar with gorgeous red roses, and me with my red Seminary hood (He wore his Doctor's hood rarely and always looked rather sheepish when asking his secretary to take it out of the safe!), and we had the two choirs at eleven o'clock, and lovely music at all the services. So the day went well, and we're all glad it is well over.

In a letter to another friend he said:

It wasn't easy to speak and to face the services, and that they meant the real end of my rectorship, my active ministry. There were dear friends and very loyal parishioners there. And I think you know my love for Christ Church and for Cincinnati, and my inexpressible appreciation of all that this church and city have given me. It is terribly hard to try to realize that after this summer I shall no longer be rector of Christ Church—and all that that has meant and means—and in very deep gratitude I saw the many, and my mind and heart were very full. Indeed I hope I shall not "retire" from the friendships, and from the life of the people and city. Thank you more than I can say for what only you could so write. I have had a very rare opportunity, and very privileged forty years, and I hope the coming years—or weeks or months, whatever God wills—will bring in their own way the same high things and find me worthy of them, and chief of them, worthy of your friendship and faith.

He had given the church and city a lifetime of service, loyalty, and love, and the place he held in the affections of his people had been abundantly made known to him.

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In July before the last Sunday he was scheduled to preach, he was stricken by a heart attack, and so his ministry came to a close without further sadness of farewell. He spent a few weeks in the hospital, and improved sufficiently to journey to his beloved Cranberry Isles accompanied by his wife and daughter. But a doctor, knowing what others did not realize, broke down and wept when Mr. Nelson left the hospital. His friends and he himself felt confident that a protracted rest would do the work of healing. In August he sustained another and a more severe attack, and as the chilling, autumn winds blew in from the Atlantic they brought him to the Phillips House in Boston. He saw no one at first, but then he grew restless, and the doctor permitted visitors. There were many, and as he was making no progress, he was moved to the old family home in North Marshfield, near Cape Cod. There as a boy he had roamed the spacious, rambling house and the bright fields, and there his parents had lived the last twenty-five years of their lives. The lovely, old home with its atmosphere of peace brought back many tender memories. In the absolute quiet of these surroundings which he loved, he lingered some two weeks. With another attack he lapsed into unconsciousness, and his boyhood friend, the late Dean Philemon F. Sturges of Boston, came down to be with the family. On the morning of October 31st as the end approached, Dean Sturges knelt beside him and in the dear familiar words of the Prayer Book said, "Lift up your hearts," and the family bravely responded, "We lift them up unto the Lord." The Dean continued, "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and *in all places*, give thanks unto Thee, O Lord." It was meet and right that Frank Nelson should depart this life on such a note of thanksgiving.

At the burial in Cincinnati, November Third, the parish, life-long friends, and representatives of the city thronged Christ Church not to say "Farewell," but "Hail!", for as Alfred Segal grandly put it, "He was like one going away to gather in his victory." For a night and a day preceding the service, his body lay in the beautiful chapel of his own creation, and great numbers of men, women and children of all faiths came to pay a final tribute. The burial service was the same as he himself had always used, only read now by his successor, and the Bishop of the Diocese. To his friends and beloved people it all seemed passing strange if not unreal. Frail beings that we are, we had never sensed more than a vague possibility that his ministry would one day terminate. It was not past human knowing, of course, but it was beyond the grasp of human imagining that the day would come when Frank Nelson would no longer walk the city's streets, no longer hurry to the distant suburbs. We felt this way because in an unusual sense men loved this servant of the servants of God in Cincinnati who had dwelt among them for forty years. Yet the great congregation rose above human grief and surmounted the consciousness of personal loss in the tremendous note of triumph and thankfulness that prevailed throughout the simple service from its opening sentences, "I am the resurrection and the life," to the Bishop's final words of commitment, "Unto God's gracious mercy and protection." They sang only hymns of victory, hymns that he especially loved and which were expressive of his faith and spirit: John Bunyan's "He who would valiant be," and "There is a wideness in God's mercy." The recessional moved to the church door to the triumphant words "For all the saints who from their labors rest," set to the stirring tune of R. Vaughan Williams. Thus in the simplicity and dignity of the things said and done there that afternoon did the passing of this noble minister symbolize the destiny of all mankind.

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They took him to beautiful Spring Grove Cemetery and laid him beneath a majestic sycamore tree whose spreading branches seemed to represent the out-reach of his life. Years ago at his behest Christ Church had been given a plot of ground for the poor, the friendless, and the forgotten of men, "God's Acre." There, by his express wishes, Frank Nelson lies among the least of his flock, the faithful shepherd who called his own by name. Then every man "went away again unto his own home."

The Afterglow

9

It is now more than five years since Mr. Nelson's death, and today the old church in the hands of his successor, Nelson M. Burroughs, whose first name singularly suggests a prolongation of the Nelson dynasty, and whose spirit and abilities are a worthy continuation of an unusual rectorship, is still animated by Frank Nelson's vision, his joy in service. His ideals live today in the parish of Christ Church, which has not failed him but carries out that which he committed unto them in his farewell address:

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The Church is the important thing to all of us. We need the Church, for faith, for courage, for guidance. The Diocese needs this Parish—its loyalty—its support—its fellowship—as we need the Diocese. The City needs this Church. You will never forget, will you, the Vision, and the power that came with it, that Mr. Stein gave us forty years ago, viz;—that the Church is the Body of Christ, not a club, to minister, and not to be ministered to. The people all about us, the whole city, are our concern, to bring them the Gospel of Christ. So, I pray God you will go forward into the new day with high faith and enthusiasm. You have a mission from God.

The mission goes on in the spirit of readiness to embark on great ventures, and of youth not knowing defeat, for on Easter Day, 1941 the authorities of Christ Church announced it as their purpose to erect a glorious new building on the site of the present edifice as the only adequate memorial to Frank Nelson. As in the dark days of 1917 the parish audaciously built the Centennial Chapel, so the tragic repetition of world war sees in the present rector and people no diminishing of that daring and firmness of vision. This plan is, as Mr. Nelson would have it, not for his own glory, but for the larger range of the Church in the service of the city. He had said, "This is the work of those who will come after me."

Christ Church will one day be clothed in garments of new beauty because Frank Nelson preached the Gospel that is the hope of a better democracy. The grandeur of his accomplishment impels men to undertake this task; and thus it is a living fact that his vision is still an influence in the city, and is the choice heritage of an unnumbered host.

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If because of human frailty we think of heaven as rest, his spirit corrects us. If in our partial understanding he seems to deserve release from labor, yet for the very reason that he "wrought with tireless hand through crowded days,"^[22] we know in our moments of vision that for so knightly a spirit the only possible reward is authority over ten cities.

From that kingdom of the spirit, he speaks to us across the abyss of time, and nowhere is his voice stronger, his thought clearer than in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians. Here, forever sealed in the enduring words of Saint Paul, is the heart of Frank Nelson's ministry, a ministry valiant and without blemish:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you ... for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

FOOTNOTES:

^[22] Inscription on a tablet in the chapel of Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N. H.

Transcriber's Note

Research has shown that the copyright on this book was not renewed.

Typographical errors corrected in the text :

Page ix incaluable changed to incalculable
Page 9 incaluable changed to incalculable
Page 9 interne changed to intern
Page 23 enternal changed to eternal
Page 25 Legionaires changed to Legionnaires
Page 35 unconsciouness changed to unconsciousness
Page 40 notwithstanding changed to notwithstanding
Page 47 immeasurably changed to immeasurably
Page 49 Farrer changed to Farrar
Page 58 self-martydom changed to self-martyrdom
Page 58 internes changed to interns
Page 59 Gareld changed to Garfield

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK H. NELSON OF CINCINNATI ***

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