

THE AVERAGE CONTRIBUTION

At one time there were two funeral parlors in Brigham City that sold furniture as well as coffins. Or, it could be said that it was the other way about. Without deprecating either livelihood it should be pointed out that in those days it was customary to conduct undertaking services in connection with the furniture business. Competition was pretty stiff and one brother in quite high standing in the Church was known to be doing a little soliciting. An equally prominent woman of the community whose sister's husband had recently been buried came to discuss the ethics of the mortician trade.

"I'm not saying he waits in anticipation for people to die, but it seems more than happenstance that he acquires a sudden special interest in real sick people. He visits in homes where folks don't even know him and he doesn't know them, although he pretends he's a good friend of the ailing one. On or three occasions he's actually lingered around and been there when the poor soul passed away. In fact, that's exactly the way it was when my sister's husband died. Of course, since he happened to be handy he took care of the funeral arrangements. I think something ought to be done about it before it becomes a town scandal."

Father was not anxious to move hastily on this matter. Besides, he was preoccupied with the renovation and redecorating of the tabernacle. This project had been going on for weeks but was stalemated for lack of funds. More contributions were needed and much of it had to be solicited on a person to person basis. A pledge and subscription list had been made up of potential contributors and he was contacting them one by one. It so happened that the undertaker's name was prominent on the list and so after about two weeks the time seemed right to kill two birds with one stone. By invitation he came to our home, probably expecting to be pressed for a sizeable contribution and prepared to minimize his capabilities along that line, but little suspecting that there was an even weightier matter to be discussed. He was hardly prepared for what he heard.

After a recounting of the circulating rumors and reference to certain specific charges of unethical and unchristian conduct he was left completely disarmed. He realized it was useless to try to project himself as any vindicator of the oppressed or comforter of the sick. He sat there completely abashed, unable to do more than bubble and sputter for a few moments. Until at last he composed himself enough to say. "What should I do Brother Clem, to make it right?"

"There are some scoundrels. Brother. who do not recognize their indiscretions and follies, even when they are pointed out to them. I can see that you are not that kind. The first thing to do is to mend your ways so that the Lord can shield you from saucy tongues. The next thing is to show the Lord and your fellow members that you are penitent and humble about it all. Be prepared to sacrifice considerable to show your humility and good intentions. Come to think of it, I believe I've got just the thing in mind. Here's a list of prominent and righteous men in the community who are good men at heart and ready to share the burden of the Lord's work. We're asking these men for a substantial extra contribution to finance the completion of the renovating and redecorating work at the tabernacle. Your name is on this list."

"Well, Brother Clem, what would you consider a proper amount for me to donate?"

"We're trying to keep the average contribution at about two hundred dollars."

"That seems pretty steep, but under the circumstances maybe I can manage it.

"Let me put you down for the two hundred and you'll feel better about the whole thing."

Father put the list in front of him on the table as the check was handed to him and carefully noted the receipt of the two hundred dollars by the side of the donor's name. There were varying amounts recorded by the names of several others but none for any amount more than fifty dollars.

The undertaker was quick to observe this fact and hastened to remind Father that he had referred to an average contribution of two hundred dollars.

"Why there isn't another two hundred on the whole list.

"Well, dear Brother, you have the privilege in the eyes of the Lord of being the first one to come up to that average."