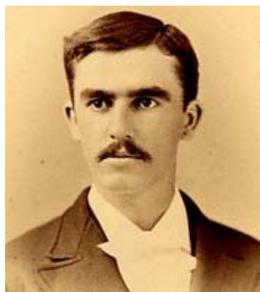


YMCA Spiritual Legacy Series

Charles Ober – Promoter of Leadership Development



Charles K. Ober

Ober was born in Beverly, Massachusetts in 1856. He found his first job as a bootcutter dull and became a cod fisherman. He entered into YMCA work after surviving eight days afloat at sea off the Newfoundland coast. Crediting his survival to prayer, Ober decided to devote himself to Christian work.

Ober enrolled in George Williams College and was a field assistant to Robert McBurney. After his graduation in 1882, he entered state work in Massachusetts, first as an assistant to S. M. Sayford for six months and then state secretary for two years. In 1885, Ober entered student work as secretary for the International Committee, a post he held for six years. It was during this time that John R. Mott became involved in the student movement and with Ober aided in the development of student conferences, and the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions.

For the next twenty years, Ober worked in the Field department, helping to build up state work and to promote the organization. During his career, he was active in recruiting men for Association work. In connection with his work in the Field Department, he developed the "Fellowship Plan" to bring men with high potential into the YMCA and groom them for secretaryship. In 1910 Ober was released from the regular work of the Field Department to concentrate on the development of this program, which he continued until his retirement in 1922. During World War I he also served as a special secretary in France and England.

Ober's seafaring days and conversion are contained in his book Out of the Fog.

Excerpts from Out of the Fog

"The strange thing that I now have to record is that I soon forgot, or willfully ignored, my whole experience of God, prayer and deliverance, and became apparently more skeptical and indifferent than before. The only way I can explain this is that I had not become a Christian, and my dominant mental attitude reasserted itself when danger was past. I practically never attended church. My position and influence, however, were not merely negative; I was positively antagonistic to Christianity, and this attitude continued up to the April following.

But while I forgot, I was not forgotten. God had begun a work in me, the continuation and completion of which waited on my willingness to cooperate, and the most powerful force in the world, that of believing and persistent prayer, was being released in my behalf. My mother was a woman of remarkable Christian character, with rare qualities of mind and heart, knowledge and love of the Scriptures, and a deep and genuine prayer life. Notwithstanding my lack of sympathy with her in the things most fundamental, she had confidence that the tide would turn with me. Her confidence, however, was not

based on me. She knew the Lord and understood that it was not the sheep that went out after the Shepherd who was lost until it found Him. So she kept a well-worn path to the place of prayer..."

"...But I was weary with the effort, and as I thought it over, I said to myself "What are you trying to do?" and the answer was, "I am trying to be a Christian." Then it dawned upon me that trying was not trusting; that, if I succeeded in my effort, I should have only a self-made product and not the religion of the Bible and that it was unreasonable for me to expect the results of faith before exercising faith itself. I was stumbling at the very simplicity of faith. I was working to win what God was waiting to give, while my latent faculty of faith, the greatest asset in personality, was lying worthless through disuse. I thought of my experience on the ocean, when finally, helpless to help myself, I had left my whole problem with the Pilot and He had taken command and brought us through to safety, and so I deliberately gave up the struggle and said to myself, "It is right for me to serve God and to live for Him, and I will do it whether I have what they call an 'experience' or not." And, having settled the question, I dismissed it and waited for instructions."

The man who would lift others must be uplifted himself, and he who would command others must learn to obey.
Charles K. Ober

"And then something happened, for, from without, surprising me with its presence, like the discovery of a welcome but unexpected guest, there came into my life a deep, great, overflowing peace. I had never known it before, and therefore I could not by any possibility have imagined it; but, I recognized it as something from God. It was not sensational, it came quietly; as quietly "as the daylight comes when the night is done." It was not emotional, unless it was in itself an emotion. But emotions are transient and this had come to stay.

With the peace, there came also something that seemed to be a reinforcement of my life principle, an achieving power, a disposition to dare and an ability to do that which hitherto had seemed impossible; and the petty pessimism of the past gave way before this new consciousness.

With this deep incoming tide of peace and power came a clearing of the mental atmosphere, and I saw that the fog had lifted. When I saw this, I said to myself quietly, "I think I am a Christian," and almost immediately added, "I am a Christian!"

The fog had passed, and the drifting was over; I had come within sight of land. What land it was I did not then know, but it proved to be a new world. How great it is I do not yet fully understand, but I have been exploring it thirty years and I think it is a continent.

Rev. Tom Welch
Central Florida YMCA
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