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PRACTICAL RELIGION

CHAPTER 6: "COMPEL THEM TO COME IN"

ON a certain Sabbath, some years ago, I was passing down a narrow, thickly-populated street on my way to hear a much-honoured minister of Christ, anticipating an evening's enjoyment for myself and hoping to see some anxious ones brought into the kingdom, when I chanced to look up at the thick rows of small windows above me, where numbers of women were sitting, peering through at the passersby, or listlessly gossiping with each other. It was suggested to my mind with great power, 'Would you not be doing God more service, and acting more like your Redeemer, by turning into some of these houses, speaking to these care-less sinners, and inviting them to the service, than by going to enjoy it yourself?' I was startled; it was a new thought; and while I was reasoning about it, the same inaudible interrogator demanded, 'What effort do Christians put forth, answerable to the command, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled?"' This was accompanied with a light and unction which I knew to be divine. I felt greatly agitated. I felt very guilty. I knew that I had never thus laboured to bring lost sinners to Christ, and trembling with a sense of my utter weakness, I stood still for a moment, looked up to heaven, and said, 'Lord, if Thou wilt help me, I will try;' and without stopping longer to confer with flesh and blood, turned back and commenced my work.

I spoke first to a group of women sitting on a door step; and oh! what that effort cost me, words cannot describe; but the Spirit helped my infirmities, and secured for me a patient and respectful hearing with a promise from some of them to attend the house of God. This much encouraged me: I began to taste the joy which lies hidden under the cross; and to realise, in some faint degree, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. With this timely, loving cordial from my blessed Master, I went on to the next group standing at the entrance of a low, dirty court. Here, again, I was received kindly, and promises were given—no rude repulse, no bitter ridicule were allowed to shake my new-found confidence, or chill my feeble zeal. I began to realise that my Master's feet were behind me; nay, before me, smoothing my path and preparing my way.

This blessed assurance so increased my courage and enkindled my hope, that I ventured to knock at the door of the next house, and when it was opened, to go in and speak to the inmates of Jesus, death, judgment, and eternity. The man, who appeared to be one of the better class of mechanics, seemed to be much interested and affected by my words, and promised with his wife to attend the revival services which were being held at the chapel farther on. With a heart full of gratitude and eyes full of tears, I was thinking where I should go next, when I observed a woman standing on an



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adjoining doorstep, with a jug in her hand. My Divine Teacher said, 'Speak to that woman.' Satan suggested, 'Perhaps she is intoxicated;' but after a momentary struggle, I introduced myself to her by saying, 'Are the people out who live on this floor?' observing that the lower part of the house was closed.

'Yes,' she said, 'they are gone to chapel;' and I thought I perceived a weary sadness in her voice and manner. I said, 'Oh, I am so glad to hear that: how is it that you are not gone to a place of worship?' 'Me!' she said, looking down upon her forlorn appearance; 'I can't go to chapel; I am kept at home by a drunken husband. I have to stop with him to keep him from the public-house, and I have just been fetching him some drink.' I expressed my sorrow for her, and asked if I might come in and see her husband. 'No,' she said, 'he is drunk; you could do nothing with him now.' I replied, 'I do not mind his being drunk, if you will let me come in; I am not afraid; he will not hurt me.' 'Well,' said the woman, 'you can come if you like; but he will only abuse you.' I said, 'Never mind that,' and followed her up the stairs. I felt strong now in the Lord, and in the power of His might, and as safe as a babe in the arms of its mother. I felt that I was in the path of obedience, and I feared no evil. Oh, how much the Lord's people lose through disobedience to the leadings of the Holy Spirit! If they would only keep His words, He would dwell with them, and then they need fear neither men nor devils. The woman led me to a small room on the first floor, where I found a fine, intelligent man, about forty, sitting almost double in a chair, with a jug by his side out of which he had been drinking that which had reduced him beneath the level of the beasts that perish. I leaned on my heavenly Guide for strength and wisdom, love and power, and He gave me all I needed. He silenced the demon, Strong Drink, and quickened the man's perceptions to receive my words. As I began to talk to him, with my heart full of sympathy, he gradually raised himself in his chair and listened with a surprised and half-vacant stare. I spoke to him of his present deplorable condition, of the folly and wickedness of his course, of the interests of his wife and children, until he was thoroughly waked up and aroused from the stupor in which I found him.

During this conversation his wife wept bitterly, and by fragments told me a little of their previous history. I found that she had once known the Lord, but had allowed herself to be dragged down by trouble, had cast away her confidence, and fallen into sin. She told me that her husband had a brother in the Wesleyan ministry, who had done all that a brother could do to save him; that they had buried a daughter two years before, who died triumphantly in the Lord, and besought her father with her dying breath to leave off drinking, and prepare to meet her in heaven; that she had a son, then about eighteen, who, she feared, was going into a consumption; that her husband was a clever



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workman, and could earn three or four pounds per week as a journeyman, but he drank it nearly all, so that they were compelled to live in two rooms, and often went without necessary food. I read to him the parable of the prodigal son, while the tears ran down his face like rain. I then prayed with him as the Spirit gave me utterance, and left, promising to call the next day with a temperance-pledge book, which he promised to sign.

I now felt that my work was done for that time. Exhausted in body, but happy in soul, I wended my way to the sanctuary, just in time for the conclusion of the service, and to lend a helping hand in the prayer-meeting.

On the following day I visited this man again. He signed the pledge, and listened attentively to all I said. Full of hope I left him, to find others similarly lost and fallen. From that time I commenced a systematic course of house-to-house visitation, devoting two evenings per week to the work. The Lord so blessed my efforts that in a few weeks I succeeded in getting ten drunkards to abandon their soul-destroying habits, and to meet me once a week for reading and expounding the Scriptures, and prayer. We held three or four blessed little meetings, and I doubt not our numbers would have increased more and more, but, in the inscrutable workings of Divine Providence, my health gave way, and I was most reluctantly compelled to abandon my happy and promising sphere of labour. I was shortly after removed from the town, and my way opened to a new and still more fruitful work in the vineyard.

You will not be surprised, dear reader, after this little sketch, to hear me say that I esteem this work of house-to-house visitation next in importance to the preaching of the Gospel itself. Who can tell the amount of influence and power which might be brought to bear on the careless, godless inhabitants of our large towns and cities—nay, on our whole nation if all real Christians would only do a little of this kind of work! The masses of the people look upon Christians as a separate and secluded class, with whom they have no concern and possess nothing in common. They watch them go past their houses to their various places of worship with utter indifference or bitter contempt; and, alas! Has there not been too much in our past conduct calculated to beget this kind of feeling, much of Pharisaic pride and selfish unconcern? If the zeal of the Lord's house had eaten us up, if we had realised more fellowship with Christ in His sufferings, if we had understood the meaning of His words, "Compel them to come in," if we had been baptised with Paul's spirit, when he could almost have wished himself accursed from Christ for his brethren's sakes, should we not have gone out amongst the people as our Master did, by the road-side and into their houses, to have spoken to



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them the "words of this life," to have persuaded, implored, and compelled them to come in? Alas, we are verily guilty? nor has it been in many instances for want of light, or for want of the leadings of the Holy Spirit; but it has been for want of OBEDIENCE, and because of our pride, or shame, or fear.

O that, with all who read this, the time past might suffice to have walked after the flesh in this matter! Oh that from this hour you, my dear reader (if you are a child of God), would set yourself individually to this work; YOU CAN DO IT. However weak, timid, or "slow of speech," He says, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say;" and "It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.' All that is needful is for you to give yourself up to the leadings of the Spirit. Lean on Him for all you want[lack]. He will inspire you with the constraining love, the melting sympathy, the holy zeal, and the mighty faith alone necessary for the task.

This is the work that most needs doing of any work in the vineyard. There are teeming thousands who never cross the threshold of church, chapel, or mission-hall, to whom all connected with religion is as an old song, a byword, and a reproach. They need to be brought into contact with a living Christ in the characters and persons of His people. They want to see and handle the Word of Life in a living form. Christianity must come to them embodied in men and women, who are not ashamed to "eat with publicans and sinners;" they must see it looking through their eyes, and speaking in loving accents through their tongues, sympathising with their sorrows, bearing their burdens, reproving their sins, instructing their ignorance, inspiring their hope, and wooing them to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Dear reader, here is a sphere for you! You have long wished to do something for your "blessed, blessed Master." Here is work, boundless in extent, and momentous beyond an angels power to conceive. For it, you need no human ordination, no long and tedious preparation, no high-flown language, no towering eloquence; all you want is the full baptism of the Spirit on your heart, the Bible in your hand, and humility and simplicity in your manner. Thus equipped, you will be mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. You will find your way to many a heart long since abandoned by hope and given up to despair; and in the great day of account you shall have many a sheaf as the result of your labour, and the reward of your self-denial.

I think I hear some timid one saying, 'Ah! I wish I could: the Lord knows how I long to be doing some real work for him; but I am so weak, and so little adapted to this kind of labour, I fear I should not succeed.'

My dear brother, sister, we are of little use in any department of the vineyard until we have been



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made to realise our own weakness. The weaker we feel ourselves to be, the better. It is not a question of our STRENGTH, but of our FAITH. "Why look ye so earnestly on us (said Peter to those who marvelled at the miracle wrought on the lame), as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? ... Faith in the name of Jesus has made this man strong, whom ye see and know." God does not call us to any work in our own strength; He bids us go and do it in His. "Give ye them to eat," said He to the Disciples, but He knew who must supply the bread; so now he requires us to break the Bread of Life to the multitude, trusting in Him for the supply. He hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. Why? That the excellency of the power may be seen to be of God, and not of man.

No matter how simple the words, or how tremulous the voice, if He blesses, then it shall be blessed. The 'Does you love God?' of a little child, accompanied by the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power," will do more for Christ and souls than the most talented and eloquent sermon without it; for it is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Dear reader, are you willing to be one of God's chosen ones? or will you anger Him by saying, 'Send by whom Thou wilt send,' but not by me? Are you willing to trample on self, and, taking hold of the strength of omnipotence, to go in the power of His might, and do what you can? If so, His word to you is, "Fear not; be strong, and of good courage; neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest;" and "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

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