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A SMALL REVOLUTION

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It is nearly forty years since the incident transpired of which I am about to write for the benefit of my young officers, and for the advantage of any of the older ones who may think there is anything in the circumstances by which they are likely to profit.

Forty years is a long period out of man's life, and with me very busy years they have been: crowded with all manner of events of stirring interest. But the incident I wish here to describe to you, and the feelings to which it gave rise, stand out in my mind to this day as clearly and distinctly as though they had only occurred twelve months ago.

I was a young Methodist Minister at the time, and was filling my first Circuit appointment. I had reached the pinnacle of my youthful ambition. Nothing had appeared more desirable than this position to me for years gone by. Friends had set it before me when but a boy-preacher in the streets of my native town. I had thought about it by day and dreamed about it by night, and had longed for it with all the enthusiasm of which my boyish nature was capable.

However, after difficulties almost innumerable, and the circumstances which again and again had brought me close up to the goal of my desires and then dashed the cup from my lips, I had at length attained it. I was freed from the cares and toils of business - had nothing to do but preach the salvation of God, look after the interests of His people, and persuade sinners to come to the mercy-seat.

As a preacher I was most favorably fixed up so far as earthly comforts was concerned. I had a most affectionate people. I was popular with all classes. My work was laborious, having many miles to travel as well as a good many sermons to preach. But it was not more than I could by systematic industry perform. My people thought much of me - quite as much I thought at the time as I deserved. I never heard a disparaging comparison made between me any of my predecessors. They wanted to keep me for ever, and feasted and feted me at every turn.

Then I had a marriage engagement with one, since that date well known to many who will read this paper, who was all of affection and ability that the most extravagant heart could desire. Our union was within measurable distance. In fact, it could have been accomplished any time



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at our own choice. And in addition to these things there were many other minor circumstances which were in remarkable harmony with my own wishes and feelings. Indeed, I have often remarked since, that I seemed to be at that time more favorably circumstanced for happiness than it has ever been my lot since, considering the sense of responsibility which I possessed.

And yet, with all this I was not happy. Why? I answer, simply because I felt I was not, from my standpoint, a success in that which I felt to be the great business of my life - that is, as an ambassador for Christ, a preacher of salvation.

First - I saw as clearly then as I do now, what the real end of preaching was - viz., the deliverance of men from sin and hell. I had only wanted to be a preacher in order to accomplish this purpose. The publicity, the influence, and the friendships - nay, all the side advantages of a ministerial life put together - had no charm for me apart from this. I only wanted to preach to save souls.

Second - Then my standard of success was a high one. It had been so from my boyish days. In fact, it has never been much higher since than it was then. I had always aspired to stand in the front ranks of the long list of soul-winners with whose histories and marvelous doing my experience and my reading had made me familiar. And yet, after all the hungerings and thirstings of the past, and the remarkable advantages I had in the present, I found myself a long, long way from being such a success or anything approaching to it. Nay, and what saddened me most was the fact that here I was rapidly settling down and becoming content with little more than the discharge of the formal duties of an ordinary preacher. Not exactly that, perhaps but very far on to it.

For instance, I remember distinctly my reflections at the close of one particular Sabbath's work, and being no little distressed by them at the time. It had been my preaching day in the chief town of the Circuit. I had gone through the duties of the day, preaching three times, and closing up with a prayer-meeting without anyone at the penitent-form. I had supped and chatted in the most friendly manner with one of the leading men with whom I was on terms of affectionate friendship, and gone home in a state of comparative satisfaction with myself and all around me. Of course, I would have preferred much to have seen results. I had not gone down so low



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as to be satisfied without them; but I excused their absence by some of the various lame and groundless apologies that are used by preachers to lull their consciences and those of their brethren on such occasions. Had not the people been pleased; the audiences good; the influences excellent; and the collections satisfactory? Surely the seed had been sown. Fruit might be expected by-and-by, for did not the Book say, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days"?

Now, I can remember using some of this sort of reasoning on that particular occasion, and then I can remember also waking up to feel how godless and senseless and cruel and unlike my past history it was. There were the people right before me going to hell. God had sent me to rescue them and I had failed, and what excuse was there in Heaven or out of Heaven for this failure? Such thoughts as these were constantly before me and made me continually unhappy. I struggled to do better but in vain, and I became seriously afraid that I was on my way to becoming what I had always hated and despised -

A PREACHER AND NOTHING MORE.

Then, again, about this time a dark gloom settled down upon my inward experience, and I found myself all at once the prey of sore and perplexing temptations. The devil harassed me in most unexpected directions, and buffeted me until my life became all by unbearable. While I was the life and joy of all around me, preaching peace and victory to others, I was anything but a glad conqueror in my own heart. Indeed, when I look back on the conflicts of those days, I can only wonder at and adore the compassion and power of the Mighty Saviour Who sustained and brought me through it all.

It was while I was thus struggling on my own spirit and disappointed in the results of my ministry that arrangements were made by my people for the visit of an Evangelist, who was a man of no little soul-saving repute in those parts. True, the more respectable and intelligent portion of my little community were disposed to look down upon him as being vulgar and severe, but his name was ever mentioned with the greatest respect and affection by the poor people from one side of the Circuit to the other. As I had sat by the firesides of my people in their cottages after the evening services, they had been wont to beguile the time by telling me stirring stories



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of his marvelous power in the pulpit, the wonderful influence he exercised over his hearers, and the remarkable conversions that ever followed his preaching. To them he appeared to be nothing short of a prophet - a man sent from God, who had spiritual gifts to impart, and whose presence always betokened the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In consequence of this high estimation the announcement of his coming to any part of the country naturally raised great expectations. People walked in from every place for miles round to hear him, returning, usually, greatly blessed in their own hearts, and with stories of the wonderful things that had taken place.

The coming of this brother at this particular juncture of my history created much curiosity in my mind. I could not help feeling that perhaps I might be able to learn something from him that would prove helpful to me in my discouraged and helpless condition. I could not but covet the spiritual power of which he was said to be possessed, and long after the success with which he was so commonly favored. Consequently I looked forward to the day of his visit with unspeakable interest, being determined to learn the secret of his power, and moreover, if possible, to acquire it for myself.

We first met at the tea table of the gentleman already referred to if I recollect rightly, but I forget exactly what were the impressions made up my mind on that occasion, beyond thinking that he appeared to be a thoughtful, serious person. It was at night however, when I was to see him in action, that I prepared myself to observe him more closely, and when I hoped to make the discovery that had led me to look forward to his coming with such interest.

I can remember as though it were only yesterday, how I sat down that evening in that hall to look this man through and through, to watch his every movement, and to listen to his every word. And I wonder whether comrades ever set themselves to observe me as closely, with a similar purpose, and whether I ever have the good fortune to make the useful impression on other hearts that was graciously made on mine that night.

I had not to wait long for the object of my interest. The door of the vestry opened, and he stepped out. I watched him cross the hall, ascend the pulpit stairs, kneel down and pray with



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his head buried in his hands, as was the custom with us all in those days - speaking first with God before speaking to the people. I saw him then rise up, open his hymn-book, and look round on his audience with grave and penetrating eyes, as though he were reading their hearts, and then proceed, in tones that seemed to me to have a ring of strange determination about them, to give out his hymn.

These things may all seem trivialities to my readers, but they were not to me at the moment. I do not know what it was, but there was something in the preacher's manner, the way he crossed that hall, looked on that audience, and gave out that hymn that spoke volumes. Something seemed to say to me, "Here is a man who is full of a big mission, who has a purpose, who is determined to gain it - nay, who is confident of its accomplishment, and who will get every man, woman and child in this building on to his Master's side before he leaves it if he can. All else to him are secondary matters - whether the people are pleased or not, think him a good preacher or a bad one, give to the collection or not, are trifling questions. What he wants is the salvation of the people. That gained, he will be satisfied. That lost, all besides is nothing."

All that followed, in his praying and his preaching and his conducting of the prayer-meeting, was in keeping with this impression. I am not sure about the text. I have forgotten the sermon and the prayer-meeting and such further intercourse as I must have had with him. But I do know that souls came to the penitent-form in distress about their sins. I should have gone myself if I had been unconverted. And - most wonderful of all to me -

I HAD FOUND OUT THE SECRET.

It was a very simple one. He wanted souls. He had prepared his mind and his heart to win souls. He aimed straight at souls, and souls were given him for his fire.

I said I should have gone to the penitent-form if I had not been saved. But I did go to it elsewhere. From that building I went to my own chamber and shut to the door, and went down straight before God, confessing to Him my backsliding from my boyhood's first love, when I only ate and drank and prayed and preached - indeed only lived - to save sinners. I sought



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forgiveness for the past, and gave myself up, without reserve and without regard to consequences, to be, before all else besides, a soul-winner.

God was pleased to accept me. A revolution was wrought in my inner experience and my outer life. Inwardly, I had immediate victory over the tempter; and outwardly, God graciously endued me with the Holy Ghost. Within ten days I had the privilege of seeing such soul-saving results as I had not known during the whole of my previous life time, and the career of direct usefulness then commenced has, of His great mercy, continued to the present day.