



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

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The pastor of the Methodist Church held a protracted meeting in the month of February. He asked me to help him. This I promised to do, remarking, however, that I was wholly unfitted for such service. But I attended as frequently as I could and put forth every effort I knew how. I prayed and testified and, sometimes, exhorted after a fashion. But how weak I felt. My constant cry to God was "More power! More power! ... Here I am," I said to myself, "trying to pull sinners out of the rushing, roaring river of sin just above the awful Niagara of eternal damnation and it requires nearly all my strength and skill to keep my own head above the water." An unsaved man I was not. A backslider I was not. A child of God I knew I was. And yet so weak! So weak!

One evening the presiding elder, the Rev. J. B. Foote, preached at the church. His theme was "Heart Purity." So far as I can recall, I had never heard a sermon on that subject. In the light of that discourse I saw just what I needed and, in a general way, I saw how to obtain it. After the service I was introduced to the presiding elder. The first thing he said, as he grasped my hand, was, "Professor, you have no business here. You ought to be preaching the gospel!" That was the first time in all my life that anyone ever spoke to me on that subject; and the words made no particular impression at the moment.

At about that time God Himself took me in hand. He turned His great searchlight full upon me and showed me the depths of my inmost soul. I looked down into it as into a well a hundred feet deep and saw it was full of crawling, slimy, venomous, deadly things. I saw my angry temper as I had never seen it before. Then I was fearfully ambitious. I could not bear to have anyone surpass me. I had been so in college. My desire to excel had always been an all-consuming passion. I was proud and sensitive to the last degree. I had always known and deplored it. Now I saw it as never before, and I loathed myself with unutterable loathing. I had an awful will which did not like to yield to anything on earth or in heaven. My main desire had always been to have my own way. When God thus searched my heart, I thought I could understand how Lucifer felt when he raised a rebellion among the angels and undertook to dethrone the Almighty. I saw something in myself which, if it could have its way, would hurl the Creator from His throne. I was horrified at what I saw, and groaned aloud like one undergoing the torture of the rack. I *was* on the rack.

In my last chapter of Reminiscences I tried to tell how the Holy Spirit made me see my need of a clean heart. I said I loathed myself. And yet I felt no condemnation. The Spirit did not show me any sin which I was committing. But He did show me that I had sinful passions in my heart, which were ready at any time to burst out into sinful words and acts. Those things within me, which made my soul anything but a heaven of peace and love, were there without my consent. They had been there from my birth, from the very beginning of my existence. They gave me no sense of guilt; but they did make me feel as though I were a slave, and I longed to be free. I read the words of David: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me," and I said: "That is I." I recalled Paul: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;" and I said: "I have the carnal mind and cannot serve God as I would. There is something in me that must be taken out before I can enter heaven. Why not now? God will have to do the work if it is ever done," I reasoned with myself. "If God is a holy and almighty being, why will He not give me a holy heart at once?" The presiding elder said He would. So I began to pray: "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit

within me.”

From that time on I was an earnest seeker for a clean heart. For fifteen months I sought with all my soul. I was praying for a clean heart almost all the time when I was not obliged to be about my official duties or was not asleep. I spent many sleepless nights searching the Bible and praying the Psalmist’s prayer. With my concordance I went through the Bible, examining every passage which alludes to holiness and purity of heart. I read that part of the Methodist Hymn Book which bore the title, “Sanctification.” I read it again and again. I read no other book on the subject of purity except Dr. Boardman’s “Higher Life.” That gave me considerable light; but not much real help. I longed intensely for the sympathy and counsel of someone who had passed through the same experience as myself and had obtained the blessing of a clean heart. I did not know where to find such a person. I went to my pastor and unburdened my soul. But he could give me no help. All he had to say was that he believed in the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification; every Methodist preacher had to believe it, or say that he did. But he had never experienced it. He did go forward for a clean heart once at a camp meeting; but he did not get anything and he gave up. I went away from the parsonage, after that interview, groaning in spirit and saying to myself: “What are pastors for, if they cannot help a poor fellow like me in such trouble as this?”

In the midst of those terrible fifteen months two very important events took place. One Sunday morning as I was sitting in the gallery of the Fairfield Methodist Church with the choir, of which I was a member, I heard the same voice which spoke to me that May afternoon at Genesee College and felt the presence of the same being behind the chair. This time the voice spoke in a very soft, but very distinct, whisper, as though the speaker’s lips were close to my right ear. I do not say that there was really a voice. But I believed then, and I firmly believe now, after the lapse of forty-six years, that God did actually speak to my soul. The voice said: “Don’t you think you ought to preach?” That was all – a huge interrogation point. But I could not get rid of it for many, many months. Unless my mind was very intently fixed on something else I could see that great, black, crooked sign dancing and making faces at me in the air. From that time on I could not, without a strong effort of the will, hear a sermon without making one of my own on the same text as the minister went on with his discourse – a thing which had never been before.

The other event was my marriage to a Lima girl, who was graduated from Genesee Wesleyan Seminary the same year in which I was graduated from Genesee College. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister and an earnest Christian. She soon knew all about my spiritual troubles and became a seeker with me of His Rest. Together we searched the Scriptures to know the mind of God on this subject. Together we spent many seasons and many hours of prayer.

Meanwhile, my agony of soul was becoming more intense. I had consecrated all to God; I knew I had. I was willing to do anything the All-wise might require. One day I remember that I said to my wife, “If God commands I will preach the gospel; or I will go as a missionary to the most distant islands of the sea; or I will sell my books and resign my professorship and take a shovel and go to digging ditches. I know what Jesus meant by hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I am sure that no castaway at sea ever longed for food and water as I longed for the fullness of the Divine Spirit. I could not think of anything – not even heaven – that I wanted a thousandth part as much as I want to have my heart cleansed from all sin. If that blessing were a hundred feet away, and the only way to reach it were to walk to it with naked feet over red-hot bricks, I know I would start for it without a moment’s hesitation. I must have it or I shall die. I will seek it till I have it or till I die.”

I spent hours and hours on my knees pleading and groaning for a clean heart. Whenever I could catch a moment between recitations I would lock the door and throw myself upon my knees. My very breath was prayer. Once on the train, returning from a vacation trip, I saw a man to whom I had never been introduced but whom I had seen, when in college, conducting a revival meeting with a praying band, of

which he was leader. I said to myself: "That is a devoted man of God; he must know all about this doctrine and experience." So I introduced myself to him and sat down beside him and unburdened my heart. But the good man, though a "Master in Israel," could not understand me and could not help. On that particular day it seemed as though I should die. And still I did not feel condemned. I felt that God smiled upon me and called me His child. I was as deeply convicted of the need of a clean heart as I had ever been of the need of pardon and regeneration. But the two kinds of conviction were very different. Then I was a guilty rebel, seeking escape from the sword of divine justice. Now I was a child of God seeking the portion which belongs to every member of the divine family. Sometimes I almost had the blessing, as it seemed to me. Again and again I would seem to see it just above my head, and I would actually stretch up my hands to seize it, but it would elude my grasp. Then I would pant and groan and cry, like a starving child tantalized with a piece of bread.

I think someone who reads these words would say, were he present as I write: "If you relate your experience correctly, do you not present God in a bad light? If the Holy Spirit was showing you your need of something really provided for you in the gospel, and you were seeking so earnestly and sincerely, why did not your loving Heavenly Father give it to you? Why did He make you wait so long for what He had commanded you to seek and had promised to bestow?" I answer, "God was doing the best He could with me. There was a hindrance in my personality which He was overcoming as rapidly as He could. I was blind and ignorant. I did not understand the way of faith. There was very much earnestness in my seeking, a considerable measure of impatience, but very little trust in God. I was in God's school, learning the great lesson of faith. I was a dull pupil, the schooling was very hard, the course was very long, the tuition was very high. But, when at last I had finished that course, the results were very blessed. I learned much about faith which has greatly helped me all through the subsequent years, and, I humbly trust, has enabled me to teach and help others. I thank God now for those fifteen months of conflict and agony.

Before the fight was over I was called to the professorship of Latin and Greek in the Central New York Conference Seminary at Cazenovia...

I left Fairfield with many regrets. My relations with fellow teachers, students, trustees, church and citizens had been very delightful. But I thought that it was right and wise to go to a church school, to an institution of higher renown, to a larger salary and to better opportunities for growth and promotion. I can see now that there was a providence in my going to Cazenovia. God sent me there, I believe, that I might have spiritual help which I could not get at Fairfield. My fifty-two weeks in Fairfield Seminary were very profitable to me. I gained every way while there. When I left I was stronger in body, I had made considerable progress in my studies, I knew that I was a successful teacher, I had gained much knowledge of human nature and how to get along with the same, and, best of all, I was in a much better spiritual state than I had ever been before. I still had that insatiable and agonizing hunger and thirst after righteousness. But I knew that I was a child of God and that I was walking in the light; and I believed that the promised cleansing would yet be realized...

I took with me to Cazenovia the intense hunger of soul which I had had so long at Fairfield. I looked around me at once to see what kind of a religious atmosphere I was in and what helps I could find to get my hunger satisfied. I think it was my second Sunday at Cazenovia when I first met E. G. W. Hall at the regular preaching service in the Seminary chapel. He had charge of the commercial department and was a student in my department. He had been in Washington to spend the brief interval between the winter and spring terms and had returned late to his work. He was late because, stopping to spend a Sunday with a relative in the country and being invited to preach, a revival broke out and he felt obliged to stay a few days to turn it over to competent hands. He was introduced to me that Sunday night after the service. I immediately put to him the strange question: "Do you believe in holiness?" feeling sure that the answer would be "Yes," as it was. "Come with me to my room," I said. He went

with me. I told him all about my spiritual troubles. He was the first person I ever found who could understand and help me. He stayed and talked and prayed with me for an hour or longer. He afforded me some help; but my struggle of soul continued. For two hours I was alone. I seemed to myself to be like Jacob at Jabbok. All my possessions were over the brook. I was on my knees till midnight in an agony of prayer. My agony at length became so intense that I thought I felt somewhat as Jesus did in Gethsemane. I was at the end of all my efforts. I could do nothing more. "If I were sinking into hell," I said to myself, "I could do no more." Just then I heard the very same voice which I had heard twice before – in my room at College and in the gallery of the Fairfield church; and I felt the presence of the same being. This time the voice said: "Why don't you believe?"

"Believe what?" I answered. "Believe that the blessing is yours. Have you not consecrated all to me? ... "Yes, Lord," I answered with all my heart, "I know I have consecrated all to thee. I have no desire but to be thine wholly and forever." "Well, then," said the voice, "believe that I accept you as the object of my sanctifying power. Believe that I do the work now, this minute, according to my promise. Is it not written, 'What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them'?" With my whole soul I cried back to God, "Yes, Lord, I do believe it. It is done according to thy word." I sprang to my feet. "It is done," I said again and again. I looked down at the chair where I had been praying so long. It seemed to me that it would be a sin to pray for a clean heart any more. For fifteen months I had been praying for the blessing. I stopped praying and began thanking God that the work was done; that the blessing was mine. And yet I had no feeling. So far as my emotions were concerned, I was just where I had been for more than a year, except that I had left off struggling and was at rest. I went to bed, saying to God: "The blessing of a clean heart is mine. Your Book says so and I say so. You have given me the blessing. You have not yet given me the witness of the Spirit that my heart is cleansed from all unrighteousness, but you will when you get ready. I am willing to wait till the judgment day if that is your will."

I distinctly remember (forty-five years ago) that I used those exact words. I spoke with the utmost confidence and assurance. I knew that I was standing on the rock – the immutable rock of God's word.

The next morning I awoke in the same state of mind and heart in which I went to sleep. So it was *all week* – a perfect faith that the blessing was mine, but no feeling, or very little feeling, that it was. That was a very hard and trying week. The boys in the dormitory were unusually unruly and full of pranks, and the devil was unusually active. But my faith did not veer a single point and my soul was kept in perfect peace. I seemed to see a wall of fire all around me, about ten feet high and thirty feet in diameter. Satan would come every little while and thrust his head above the fence and make faces at me; but he could not touch me.

Thus God taught me the way of faith. It was no man who was my teacher. Faith had never been presented to me in that light by any human being. I had learned nothing, or very little, about holiness except from the Bible. I had never been to a "holiness" meeting in my life except the little meetings held at Lima in Professor Draper's recitation room, and I remembered nothing that I heard there. God Himself taught me the Scriptural doctrine of holiness and taught me the way of faith I have been enabled to point out the way of faith to many other seeking souls. If this seems egotistical to anyone, it is the truth, nevertheless.

The next Sunday afternoon, May 9, 1869, I was sitting with Mrs. Winchester in our room. She was reading to me from "The Life of Carvosso." She came to a stanza of a hymn. It was this:

"Thee I can love, and thee alone,
With pure delight and inward bliss;
To know thou tak'st me for thine own:
O, what a happiness is this!"

I said: "Let us sing it." I began to sing without any emotion. But when I reached the end of the second line I could go no further. Suddenly I was deluged with waves of glory. I was in a perfect ecstasy of joy. All heaven seemed to have come down into that little room. It was Bethel. It seemed to be filled with the brightness of a thousand suns. I was a thousand times happier than I had ever supposed I would be in heaven. I knew that there was a personal God; for He was right there speaking to me. He was as real to me as though I could see Him with my mortal eyes. The great billows of bliss kept rolling over me, higher and higher every time they came in. It seemed as though immense wings overhead were fanning me. The weight of glory became so heavy that it seemed as though it would crush me. I remember that I rose from my chair and staggered to the piano and leaned against it for support. For about thirty minutes I stood there bracing myself against the boundless ocean of divine love which kept hurling its mountain-like waves over my head. At length I could endure it no longer and I said: "O, God, withhold Thy hand or I shall die of joy." Soon my emotion somewhat subsided. If it had not I really think I should have died. There was nothing but joy in the thought of dying; but I thought I ought to live.

All this time I felt so clean. I felt and knew that my old passionate temper, which had tormented me all my life, was gone. All the pride and selfishness and unholy ambition and self-will were gone, branch and root. All sinfulness was gone. I was as sure as I was that I was alive that God had cleansed my heart from all sin. The words "All gone, all gone, all sin is gone" kept reverberating through the chambers of my inmost soul, and I knew that they were the words of God.

That night, at the religious service held in the seminary chapel, I gave testimony that the blood of Jesus Christ cleansed me from all unrighteousness.

The doctrine of entire sanctification, as taught to me by God Himself nearly half a century ago I hold today unchanged, confirmed by extensive reading, study, self-examination and the testimonies of hundreds of unimpeachable witnesses.

Source: "Reminiscences Of Fifty Years Of Christian Service," Chapters 4-7, hdm2045

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