

Humility

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It was during this year I attended for the first time the famous Sea Shore Camp Ground, located midway between New Orleans and Mobile. Situated in a vast grove of pine, oak and other beautiful forest trees of the South, and fronting the Gulf of Mexico, there is naturally no lovelier locality for such an annual gathering to be found in the whole country.

At this time the wooden cottages were of simple construction, and there was no desire or movement upon the part of the people to make it a summer resort or a Chautauqua assembly. Salvation was the chief end in view, and so every year witnessed for quite a while, a genuine revival sweep the camp, and tidal waves of salvation roll as high as I have witnessed since at any camp ground.

In those days not less than one hundred preachers attended this meeting. Sixty or seventy slept in a long, narrow building, whose furniture consisted of as many cots ranged in a double row, with a narrow passage between, perhaps a dozen chairs, two tin basins for washing purposes, and a small looking-glass a foot square hanging on the wall in the center of this airy, breezy tenement.

On these simple canvas beds, ornamented with a straw pillow and covered with a coarse domestic sheet, I have seen stretched in sleep or rest the greatest preachers in Southern Methodism. Not only were some of these men already famous but a number of the younger ones were destined to be distinguished. Out of that band came several bishops, nearly a dozen college presidents, four or five authors, and a cluster of preachers who swept upward to the largest churches in the connection.

In such a large gathering of preachers it was considered a great honor to be called on to fill the pulpit a single time; and the distinction was marked indeed for one to be employed twice by the Committee of Public Worship. Such men as Doctors Wadsworth of Mobile and John Mathews of New Orleans, were of course in great requisition, but there would be often sixty or seventy preachers who would attend the camp and leave without having had an opportunity to preach or lead a single meeting.

This was before the time that one or two men would do all the preaching; and so with an unused seventy there would be twenty or thirty of the one hundred ministers who would be called upon to divide the pulpit labors and honors.

For some reason this year the divine power seemed slow to fall. Doubtless there never had been greater discourses delivered at this camp on any previous year; but the heavens remained locked. So things dragged, or, rather, stood still until the seventh or eighth day.

One afternoon the audience assembled at the ringing of the bell, to this unpopular and undesirable of all the other hours of worship. It was just after dinner and the people were as a rule disposed to be drowsy, and no star minister of the Gospel cared for this appointment, but dreaded it, and some even refused thus to be sacrificed, as they so regarded the matter.

Taking my seat in the congregation I observed a preacher entering the pulpit whom I had not

noticed before on the ground. His face was one of the meekest that I ever remembered to have seen. He a plain-looking man, commonly dressed, and seemed oblivious of himself and every one else. A minister near by whispered that he was stationed on a circuit in the Alabama Conference; that he was not much of a preacher, but was a good man. A brief study of the person referred to, not only confirmed but added to the remark, that here was not only a good but a very pious man. The countenance I looked upon was not simply good; it was a holy face!

I was unaccountably drawn to and interested in this humble appearing person in the pulpit. I noticed he prayed on both knees in his private supplication, and that he remained bowed in this converse with God at least two minutes. Then I had another view of the shining face, saw the man's reverent handling of the Bible, heard his simple, unaffected reading of a hymn, and listened to his quiet but solemn pleading face to face with God for his message and the people.

His text was I Cor. 10:31, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The sermon lasted exactly thirty minutes. In that time the preacher never said a single new, bright or smart thing; but from beginning to end he pressed the truth that we belonged to God, owed him every power of mind and body, as well as moment of time, and that every thought, word and deed of the life should be for his glory.


I would never be able to describe the effect of this discourse. As the quiet-faced, solemn-toned speaker proceeded, a strange influence came from above on the congregation, and every soul seemed to be listening breathlessly to the simple, undisputed statements of this man, who looked like *he belonged to another world and was pleading for a kingdom out of sight.*

When he made the altar call scores upon scores of people rushed forward and fell down at the mourner's bench with sobs and cries. There were twenty-five or thirty conversions in a few minutes.

Nearly forty preachers were at the altar, most of them weeping bitterly. The writer was among the bowed down class. Even then I wanted holiness, but did not obtain the grace, as the preacher of the hour simply described the life, but did not point out the way of its obtainment. Perhaps, like others, he did not know how to lead others into the blessing which I see now he undoubtedly possessed.

Later in the afternoon several excited knots of ministers discussed the sermon, the preacher, and the wonderful results of that service. They all cordially agreed that he was no preacher; that his sermon did not deserve the name; that the text had not been handled as it should have been, either exegetically, homiletically, psychologically or theologically; but on the other hand, it had been treated improperly, shamefully, not to say diabolically.

After being fully agreed upon this, some one spoke up and said, "That may all be so, brethren, but he certainly got the souls." Whereupon, seeing the people standing saved and rejoicing in their midst, they could say nothing against it!



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