

QUIET TALKS ON POWER

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BY
S. D. GORDON



NEW AND REVISED EDITION

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CHOKED CHANNELS.

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An Odd Distinction.

A few years ago I was making a brief tour among the colleges of Missouri. I remember one morning in a certain college village going over from the hotel to take breakfast with some of the boys, and coming back with one of the fellows whom I had just met. As we walked along, chatting away, I asked him quietly, "Are you a christian, sir?" He turned quickly and looked at me with an odd, surprised expression in his eye and then turning his face away said: "Well, I'm a member of church, but—I don't believe I'm very much of a christian." Then I looked at him and he frankly volunteered a little information. Not very much. He did not need to say much. You can see a large field through a chink in the fence. And I saw enough to let me know that he was right in the criticism he had made upon himself. We talked a bit and parted. But his remark set me to thinking.

A week later, in another town, speaking one morning to the students of a young ladies' seminary, I said afterwards to one of the teachers as we were talking: "I suppose your young women here are all christians." That same quizzical look came into

her eye as she said: "I think they are all members of church, but I do not think they are all christians with real power in their lives." There was that same odd distinction.

A few weeks later, in Kansas City visiting the medical and dental schools, I recall distinctly standing one morning in a disordered room—shavings on the floor, desks disarranged—the institution just moving into new quarters, and not yet settled. I was discussing with a member of the faculty, the dean I think, about how many the room would hold, how soon it would be ready, and so on—just a business talk, nothing more—when he turned to me rather abruptly, looking me full in the face, and said with quiet deliberation: "I'm a member of church; I *think* I am a deacon in our church"—running his hand through his hair meditatively, as though to refresh his memory—"but I am not very much of a christian, sir." The smile that started to come to my face at the odd frankness of his remark was completely chased away by the distinct touch of pathos in both face and voice that seemed to speak of a hungry, unsatisfied heart within.

Perhaps it was a month or so later, in one of the mining towns down in the zinc belt of southwestern Missouri, I was to speak to a meeting of men. There were probably five or six hundred gathered in a Methodist Church. They were strangers to me. I was in doubt what best to say to them. One dislikes to fire ammunition at people that are absent.

So stepping down to a front pew where several ministers were seated, I asked one of them to run his eye over the house and tell me what sort of a congregation it was, so far as he knew them. He did so, and presently replied: "I think fully two-thirds of these men are members of our churches"—and then, with that same quizzical, half-laughing look, he added, "but you know, sir, as well as I do, that not half of them are christians worth counting." "Well," I said to myself, astonished, "this is a mining camp; this certainly is not anything like the condition of affairs in the country generally."

But that series of incidents, coming one after the other in such rapid succession, set me thinking intently about that strange distinction between being members of a church on the one hand, and on the other, living lives that count and tell and weigh for Jesus seven days in the week. I knew that ministers had been recognizing such a distinction, but to find it so freely acknowledged by folks in the pew was new, and surely significant.

And so I thought I would just ask the friends here to-day very frankly, "What kind of Christians are you?" I do not say what kind you are, for I am a stranger, and do not know, and would only think the best things of you. But I ask you frankly, honestly now, as I ask myself anew, what kind are you? Do you know? Because it makes such a difference. The Master's plan—and what a genius of a plan it is—is this, that the world should be

won, not by the preachers—though we must have these men of God for teaching and leadership—but by everyone who knows the story of Jesus *telling someone*, and telling not only with his lips earnestly and tactfully, but even more, *telling with his life*. That is the Master's plan of campaign for this world. And it makes a great difference to Him and to the world outside whether you and I are *living* the story of His love and power among men or not.

Do you *know* what kind of a christian you are? There are at least three others that do. First of all there is Satan. He knows. Many of our church officers are skilled in gathering and compiling statistics, but they cannot hold a tallow-dip to Satan in this matter of exact information. He is the ablest of all statisticians, second only to one other. He keeps careful record of every one of us, and knows just how far we are interfering with his plans. He knows that some of us—good, respectable people, as common reckoning goes—neither help God nor hinder Satan. Does that sound rather hard? But is it not true? He has no objection to such people being counted in as christians. Indeed, he rather prefers to have it so. Their presence inside the church circle helps him mightily. *He* knows what kind of a christian you are. Do *you* know?

Then there is the great outer circle of non-christian people—*they know*. Many of them are poorly informed regarding the christian life; hungry for something they have not, and know not just what it

is; with high ideals, though vague, of what a christian life should be. And they look eagerly to us for what they have thought we had, and are so often keenly disappointed that our ideals, our life, is so much like others who profess nothing. And when here and there they meet one whose acts are dominated by a pure, high spirit, whose faces reflect a sweet radiance amid all circumstances, and whose lives send out a rare fragrance of gladness and kindness and controlling peace, they are quick to recognize that, to them, intangible something that makes such people different. The world—tired, hungry, keen and critical for mere sham, appreciative of the real thing—the world knows what kind of christians we are. Do *we* know?

There is a third one watching us to-day with intense interest. The Lord Jesus! Sitting up yonder in glory, with the scar-marks of earth on face and form, looking eagerly down upon us who stand for Him in the world that crucified Him—*He knows*. I imagine Him saying, "There is that one down there whom I died for, who bears my name; *if* I had the *control* of that life what power I would gladly breathe in and out of it, but—he is *so absorbed in other things*." The Master is thinking about you, studying your life, longing to carry out His plan if He could only get permission, and sorely disappointed in many of us. He knows. Do *you* know?

The Night Visitor.

After that trip I became much interested in discovering in John's Gospel some striking pictorial illustrations of these two kinds of christians, namely, those who have power in their lives for Jesus Christ and those who have not. Let me speak of only a few of these. The first is sketched briefly in the third chapter, with added touches in the seventh and nineteenth chapters. There is a little descriptive phrase used each time—"the man who came to Jesus by night." That comes to be in John's mind the most graphic and sure way of identifying this man. A good deal of criticism, chiefly among the upper classes, had already been aroused by Jesus' acts and words. This man Nicodemus clearly was deeply impressed by the young preacher from up in Galilee. He wants to find out more of him. But he shrank back from exposing himself to criticism by these influential people for his possible friendship with the young radical, as Jesus was regarded. So one day he waits until the friendly shadows will conceal his identity, and slipping quietly along the streets, close up to the houses so as to insure his purpose of not being recognized, he goes up yonder side street where Jesus has lodgings. He knocks timidly. "Does the preacher from up the north way stop here?" "Yes." "Could I see him?" He steps in and spends an evening in earnest conversation. I think we will all readily agree that Nico-

demus *believed* Jesus after that night's interview, however he may have failed to understand all He said. Yes, we can say much more—he *loved* Him. For after the cruel crucifixion it is this man that brings a box of very precious spices, weighing as much as a hundred pounds, worth, without question, a large sum of money, with which to embalm the dead body of his friend. Ah! he loved Him. No one may question that.

But turn now to the seventh chapter of John. There is being held a special session of the Jewish Senate in Jerusalem for the express purpose of determining how to silence Jesus—to get rid of Him. This man is a member of that body, and is present. Yonder he sits with the others, listening while his friend Jesus is being discussed and His removal—by force if need be—is being plotted. What does he do? What would you expect of a friend of Jesus under such circumstances? I wonder what you and I would have done? I wonder what we do do? Does he say modestly, but plainly, “I spent a whole evening with this man, questioning Him, talking with Him, listening to Him. I feel quite sure that He is our promised Messiah; and I have decided to accept Him as such.” Did he say that? That would have been the simple truth. But such a remark plainly would have aroused a storm of criticism, and he dreaded that. Yet he felt that something should be said. So, lawyer-like, he puts the case abstractly. “Hmm—does our law judge

a man without giving him a fair hearing?" That sounds fair, though it does seem rather feeble in face of their determined opposition. But near by sits a burly Pharisee, who turns sharply around and, glaring savagely at Nicodemus, says sneeringly: "Who are you? Do you come from Galilee, too? Look and see! No prophet comes out of Galilee"—with intensest contempt in the tone with which he pronounces the word Galilee. And poor Nicodemus seems to shrink back into half his former size, and has not another word to say, though all the facts, easily ascertainable, were upon his side of the case. He loved Jesus without doubt, but he had *no power* for Him among men *because of his timidity*. Shall I use a plainer, though uglier, word—his cowardice? That is not a pleasant word to apply to a man. But is it not the true word here? He was so afraid of what *they* would think and say! Is that the sort of christian *you* are? Believing Jesus, trusting Him, saved by Him, loving Him, but shrinking back from speaking out for Him, tactfully, plainly, when opportunity presents or can be made. A christian, but without positive power for Him among men because of cowardice!

I can scarcely imagine Nicodemus walking down the street in Jerusalem, arm in arm with another Pharisee-member of the Sanhedrin and saying to him quietly, but earnestly: "Have you had a talk with this young man Jesus?" "No, indeed, I have not!" "Well, do you know, I spent an evening