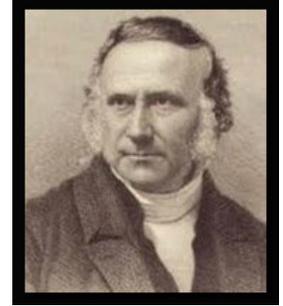


The Persecuted Wife



Just before one of our seasons of communion, I called upon a woman whom I had often seen, and who for some months had entertained a hope in Christ, to have some conversation with her in reference to her uniting with the church. She thought such a step to be her duty; for she believed the Holy Spirit had renewed her heart, and Christ had accepted her. She delighted in faith to repose upon him; and she said it would rejoice her heart to come to his table, and try to honor a Saviour, whom she had neglected for so many years.

But she feared her husband would oppose it. He was somewhat intemperate, and when intoxicated, tyrannical. She wished to unite with the church, but she did not wish him to know it. He seldom attended public worship, and cared and said so little about religion, that she deemed it quite probable he would never know anything about it, if she should make a public profession of her faith. She proposed, therefore, to unite with the church, but to keep it a secret from him.

To this proposal, I could not consent. I explained to her why I could not. There were several reasons. He was her husband, whom she was bound to honor. And though there might be much in him which she could not respect, his irregular life and his opposition to religion, still she was bound to treat him kindly. If she should unite with the church without his knowledge; he would be more likely, as soon as he knew it, to be offended and treat her unkindly, and to have his opposition to religion

increased. She must not be ashamed of Christ, or fear to do her duty in the face of all opposition. And if she had so little faith, that she could not confess Christ for fear of any wicked man's displeasure; if her faith in God was so small that she could not do her duty and trust him to take care of her; I could not have confidence enough in her piety, to consent to her reception into the church.

She appeared greatly cast down. She wept bitterly. "Then," said she; "I can never come to the Saviour's table!"

I replied, "I think you can, Madam. In my opinion, your husband will not be so much opposed to you, as you think. If he should be, you can pray for him; and He who hears prayer can remove his opposition." She was much agitated. "What shall I do?" said she. "I do think it my duty, to come out from the world and own Christ, as my Saviour and Lord; and I long to do so. But I am afraid of my husband. I know he would never consent to it; and would abuse me, if I should name such a thing in his hearing!"

"You have not tried it, Madam. You have nothing to fear. God loves his children; and for their sakes often restrains wicked men. Besides, your husband is not so bad a man as you think, probably."

"Oh! sir, you don't know him. He sometimes talks to me in a dreadful manner, if he finds me reading the Bible, or crying."

"Well," said I, "it is nothing but talk. He has just manliness and courage enough, to bluster and abuse a poor woman like you, with his tongue; but he will go no further. If you do your duty, he will not dare to injure you. And quite likely, when he sees you are firm, your example will be the means of leading him to repentance."

"What shall I do? I wish you would tell me."

“I will tell you, Madam. When your husband comes home, take some favorable opportunity, when you are alone with him, and when he appears calm, sober, and good-natured; and just tell him seriously and kindly, how you feel, what you think of your past life, what you believe God has done for you, and that you have come to the conclusion, it is your duty to unite with the church. If he is angry, or speaks unkindly to you; have no disputes, not a word of argument, hear all he has to say, in silence. You may tell him, if you think best, that you have done all your duty to him, as well as you could, while you had no religion; and now you mean to do it better. But you think you owe duties to your God also, which ought not to be neglected. But do not say one word, unless your feelings are kind, and mild, and calm. You must feel rightly, or you will not speak rightly. You can at least tell him this; and see what he will say.” “Well, I will do it,” said she, “if you think it best.”

I left her. Three days afterwards I called upon her, and found her in deep depression. She had followed my advice, employing my own words as nearly as possible, in speaking to her husband. At first, he was silent, and she thought he was going to make no opposition. But after saying a few words, he seemed to be worked up into a dreadful passion. He swore he would never live with her another day, if she joined the church. He would turn her out of doors. He declared, “the church folks were all hypocrites;” and as for her minister, he was a villain; and if he ever came to his house again to destroy the peace of his family, he would “put him out of the house quick.”

“What time will he be home?” said I.

“In about an hour.”

“Very well,” said I, rising to go; “I will back here in an hour.”

“Oh! no, sir, no!” said she, “I hope not! He will abuse you! I don’t know what he would not do!”

“Never fear,” said I. “He will not trouble me. You need not tell him I have been here, this morning. And if I meet him here at noon, do not leave me alone with him; stay and hear what he will say to me.”

She begged me not to return; but in an hour afterwards I returned, and found him at home with his wife. I spoke to him, gave him my hand, and conversed with him for some minutes. He was rather taciturn, appeared a little sullen, but he did not treat me with any special rudeness. I mentioned to him the altered feelings of his wife; and expressed my hope, that he would himself give immediate and prayerful attention to his salvation. I solemnly assured him, that without being born again he could not see the kingdom of God; and that though he had neglected it so long, salvation was still within his reach. But that he would soon be on the down-hill of life, even if God should spare him, of which he had not an item of security. To die as he was, would be dreadful. And if he would seek God, like his wife, they would live together more happily for themselves, and would set an example for their numerous” children, which certainly would be beneficial to them, and be fondly remembered by them, when he and his wife were gone to the grave.

He heard all this in silence; but did not seem to be much affected by it, beyond an occasional sigh, while I was speaking. When I arose to depart, he coldly took leave of me. Before the next season of communion arrived, I called upon his wife, expecting to find her prepared to confess Christ before men. She had seen that her husband did not treat me as he had sworn to do; and I thought she would be convinced by that, that there was nothing to be feared, if she should unite with the church, as she steadily maintained it was her duty to do. But I was disappointed. She seemed more determined than ever, to yield to her husband’s wishes. “He has dreadfully threatened me,” says she.

“And will you obey his threats, and disobey what you yourself say is the command of Christ?”

“I do know it is my duty. I feel it. The Testament makes it plain in Jesus Christ’s own words. But we are poor people. I am a poor woman, without friends, dependent upon the daily labor of my husband, for myself and my children. He says he will not live with me a single day, after I join the church; and I don’t know what will become of me and the children. The most of them are very young. I have eight of them, and the oldest is not sixteen. And what would become of this baby, if I had no house or home?”

As she said this, she was holding the little thing in her arms, and the tears gushed from her eyes, and fell in quick drops upon its little cheek. The scene was too much for me. I turned away, and wept.

But repressing any emotions, I said to her:” My dear friend, I am sorry for you. But I do not fear for you. Do whatever you seriously deem your duty, and God will take care of you. Your husband will do no such thing as he threatens. He will not leave you. He will not turn you out of the house. He will not drive you and the children into the street. If he should, remember ‘Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. Ye cannot serve two masters. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels. If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Every man that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my

name's sake shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.' Such are some of the solemn words of Christ. I cannot alter them. It is your solemn duty to weigh them well. They appear to have been uttered for just such cases as yours. In the first ages of Christianity they were obeyed. Men and women became even martyrs for Christ. I do not know what God may call you to endure—not martyrdom, I believe; but if he should, it were better for you to die a thousand deaths, than to dishonor and disobey your Lord. My heart bleeds for you, but I cannot help you. Go to your God. Cast your burden upon him. Pour out your heart to him. I have told you before, that I do not believe your husband will execute one of his threats. But if you cannot have faith in God, and obey his commands, come what may, do not think yourself a Christian. 'My sheep hear my voice. They follow me.' If you do not believe it to be your duty to come to the Lord's table."

"Oh," said she, (interrupting me, and sobbing as if her heart would break,) "I know it is a duty. It is my duty. Christ has commanded me."
"Well, will you obey him?"

She did not answer. She could not. She seemed crushed beneath a burden she was unable to bear, and continued to weep bitterly.

"I will leave you," said I. "I will not even pray with you now. You are the one to pray. You can pray better than I can, on this occasion; and God will hear you."

I left her. That communion season passed by, and another, and still another. She was still undecided. I mentioned the subject to her more than once; and on one occasion she told me she did not any longer fear anything on her own account, for she could herself bear death even; but it was her fear about her children, that kept her from her duty.

"God can take better care of them than you can," said I.

It appeared to me to be no part of my duty to urge her to unite with the church. I never had done so. I believed God would teach her her duty, as she prayed for the Holy Spirit. But I often exhorted her to learn her duty from her Bible, and by prayer; and when she had learnt it, to do it in good faith, and fear nothing. And she always affirmed, she knew her “duty to be, to confess Christ before the world.”

Nearly a year after I had contrived to meet her husband at his house, when he had threatened to put me out of the house, if I came there; she sent for me. I went. Immediately after I entered her house she said to me:

“I have made up my mind to join the church, if you are willing to receive me. I know I ought to have done it before, but my faith was weak. I could not endure the thought of what is to come upon me and my children. After I got over all fear on my own account, I still feared for them. And even now I am afraid my faith will fail me, when the communion day comes. But if you are willing to receive me, and God will give me strength, I will go forwards where my Saviour commands.”—I said to her:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”

“Precious promise!” said she; “blessed promise! God has said it, and I can trust him.”

She appeared very solemn indeed, but not unhappy. She said she expected all that her husband had threatened; but she had for months been thinking of the words of Christ, which I had quoted to her; and she could not hesitate any longer. “He gave his life for me,” said she; “and shall I not give my worthless life for him, if he asks it?”

I told her I had no more to say to her, than I had said so often before. But she must tell her husband, that I had been there, and that she was going to obey the dying command of Christ. “You may tell him, that you have done your duty to him and to the children, as well as you could, and intend to continue to do it, as a good wife and mother ought.” But she need not reason with him at all, if he made any opposition. She must not dispute or argue. And I would call to see her the Saturday before the communion Sabbath.

I did so. She informed me that she had done as I advised her. She told her husband what she meant to do; and he replied very sullenly:

“Well, you know what I told you. Not a day shall you stay in this house after you join that church! I will not live with you—not a day!”

I told her to repeat the same thing to him again that night. I afterwards learnt that she did; and he merely replied:—“You know what I told you—and I’ll do it!”

Their house was situated too far from the church for her to walk; and some one must take care of the children, while she was absent at church. It was now Saturday. I engaged a conveyance for her to church, and procured a woman to take care of her children on the Sabbath.

She retired to bed on Saturday night, with a heavy heart. The thought would come over her mind, time after time, that she had spent her last day of peace—that before another night should come, her family

would be broken up, and she and her children separated, perhaps forever, without home, and without a friend to lean upon. She could do nothing but weep and pray; and she wept and prayed till she fell asleep.

When she awoke in the morning, her husband was gone. This alarmed her. She knew not what to expect. He had not commonly risen on Sabbath morning, till a late hour; and she supposed his doing so now foreboded no good. She hastily rose, dressed herself, looked for him;—he was nowhere to be found. The children hunted for him, but all in vain. With a sad heart she busied herself in preparing breakfast, and in about an hour he came in. “Wife,” says he, (with a sort of careless accent;) “I suppose you want to go to church to-day; and it is too far for you to go afoot. You know I am too poor to keep any horse; and I have been down to Mr. B—’s to get a ride for you in his wagon. He says you can ride with him, as well as not, if you want to go and I will stay at home and take care of the children.”

She was so astonished, that she could scarcely believe her ears. She hesitated for a moment; but as the truth burst upon her, she threw her arms around his neck, and wept like a child. He wept too. But he aimed to conceal it; and making some expression about breakfast, as if to divert his own thoughts, he said he “would go back and tell Mr. B. that she would ride with him.”

She did ride with him. Her husband stayed at home and took care of the children. When she returned in the afternoon, he met her pleasantly; and when in the evening she told him, (as I had directed her to do,) that she had been at the Lord’s table; he merely replied in an affectedly careless manner,—“Well, what of that?”

Ever after that time, he made no opposition to her religion; but would take pains to accommodate her, all in his power. He would procure some means for her to attend church; would offer to stay with the

children while she was gone; and, in every possible way, aimed to gratify her desires about her religious duties. He came with her to the church, when she presented her children for baptism. For a time he was more temperate; and we had no small hopes, that he would himself turn to the Lord. Indeed, I had confidently expected it, all along. But I never knew of any decided change in his habits. Whenever I spoke to him about his wife; he seemed to be glad on her account. He said he believed, “she was a true Christian, and no pretender; and wished all the members of the church were as good as she.” But I could not induce him to seek the Lord. What it was, that produced the sudden change in his feelings on that Saturday night, I never could ascertain. But it requires no great amount of faith to believe, that God interposed in behalf of that praying and weeping wife; and by the power of his own Spirit put a stop to the opposition and rage of that rebellious man. “He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he will restrain.”