

# *The Unknown Presence of the Spirit*

As I was passing along the street one morning, I saw a lady, a member of my church, just leaving her house, and I supposed she would probably be absent a half an hour or more, —long enough for me to accomplish what I had often desired. There was a young woman, a member of her family, who was very beautiful, and reputed to be quite gay, to whom I had sometimes spoken on the subject of religion, but I had never found any opportunity to speak to her alone. I had thought that she was embarrassed and somewhat confused by the presence of this lady, whenever I had mentioned the subject of religion to her, and, therefore, I was glad to seize this opportunity to see her alone,—such an opportunity as I thought the lady indisposed to furnish me.

I rang the bell, and the young woman soon met me in the parlor. I then felt some little embarrassment myself, for I had rushed into this enterprise through an unexpected occurrence, and without much premeditation of the manner in which it would be most wise for me to proceed. I expected a cold reception, if not a repulse. I deemed her a very careless, volatile girl. I thought she would be unwilling to have me urge the claims of religion upon her; and the idea that much depended upon the manner in which I should commence, embarrassed me for a moment. But I soon came to the conclusion that I owed it to honesty and truth, to my own reputation for frankness, and to my young friend herself, to tell her plainly what was my intention in then calling to see her. I did so, in the most direct manner possible.

“I am very glad to see you,” said she. “I have wanted to see you for a good while; for I want to tell you my feelings. I thank you for thinking of me, and being so kind as to come and see me. I should have gone to your house many a time, when you have so often invited persons like me; but when the hour came, my courage always failed me, for I did not know what to say to you. I am in trouble and know not what to do; I am very

glad of this opportunity.” She opened to me her whole heart in the most frank and confiding manner. Among other things she said,—

“I know I have been a thoughtless girl,” (while her voice trembled, and tears dimmed her eyes,) “I have been gay and have done many things you would condemn, I suppose; but, my dear minister, I have been urged into gaiety, when my heart was not there. I do not believe I am such a girl as they think I am, may I say, as you think I am? I know I have a wicked heart, and have too much forgotten God; but I have often wondered what there is about me, that makes my religious friends think that I care for nothing but—” She sprang from her seat, clasped her hands upon her face, and hurried out of the room, sobbing aloud.

In a few moments she returned. “I know you will pardon me for this,” said she, the tears still coursing down her checks, “I do not wish to make any excuse for my sins, nor do I wish to blame any one for supposing me thoughtless; but I am sure I want to be led in the right way, I am ready to do all you tell me. I hope I can be saved yet.”

“Certainly you can be, my child.”

“Then tell me, sir, what to do.”

I did tell her, and left her, one of the most grateful and affectionate creatures that ever lived.

As I took my leave of her and found myself again in the street, I commenced my old business of street meditation. My first emotion was gladness, the second shame: for I was ashamed of myself; that I had just been thinking of that young girl so differently from what she deserved, and that I should have gone into her presence, and opened my lips to her with no more faith in God. The next reflection was, how much more common than we think, are the influences of the Holy Spirit. God does often what we never give Him credit for doing. The influences of the Holy Spirit are more common than our unbelief allows us to think.

The inquiry then came into my mind, may there not be others of my congregation who would welcome me also? I stopped in my tracks, and looked around me for another house to enter. I saw one; I rang the bell, and asked for the elder of two sisters, a girl of about nineteen I

suppose, and reputed to be very fond of gaiety. She soon met me, and I immediately told her why I had come.

“And I thank you for coming,” said she. “I am glad you have spoken to me about religion. Why did you not do it before? I could not go to your house. I know it is my duty to seek Christ, and I do want to be a Christian.”

After some conversation with her, in the whole of which she was very frank, and in the course of which she became very solemn, I asked for her sister.

“Yes sir, I will call her. I was going to ask you to see her; but don’t tell her anything about me.”

“Her sister came; and as the elder one was about to leave the room, I begged the younger one’s permission for her to remain, stating to her at the same time why I had asked to see her. She consented, and the elder sister remained, I thought, gladly.

I then stated to the younger my message, and having explained her condition to her as a sinner, and explained the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, I was urging her to accept the proffered salvation, when she became much affected; she turned pale, covered her face with her hands,—“I will try to seek God,” said she sobbing aloud. The elder sister, who had delicately taken her seat behind her so as not to be seen by her, clasped her hands together, overcome with her emotions, and lifted her eyes to heaven, while the tears of gladness coursed down her beautiful cheeks, as she sat in silence and listened to us.

I prayed with them, and soon found myself again in the street.

I immediately entered another house, in like manner, and for the same reason as before; and another unconverted sinner met me with the same mingled gladness and anxiety, manifesting the same readiness to seek the Lord.

By this time I had given up all thought of finishing a sermon which was to have been completed that day; for if I could find, among my unconverted parishioners, such instances of readiness and desire to see me, I thought my duty called me to leave my study and my sermons to

take care of themselves, and to trust in God for the preparation I should be able to make for the pulpit on the coming Lord's day. I therefore went to another house, and inquired for another acquaintance, who was not a member of the church. I did not find her. But in the next house after that, which I entered, I found another of my young friends, who told me she never had paid any particular attention to the demands and offers of the gospel, but that she would "neglect it no longer;"—" I will, sir, attend to my salvation," said she, "as well as I know how."

Here, then, I had found five young persons, in the course of a few hours, all of whom were "almost persuaded to be Christians." They all afterwards became the hopeful subjects of grace; and within six months of that morning were received as members of the church. I knew them all intimately for years, prayerful, happy Christians.

The strivings of the Holy Spirit are more common than we think. If unconverted sinners would improve these secret calls, none of them would be lost. These persons had been awakened before. Probably at this time, as formerly, they would have gone back again to indifference, had not their seriousness been discovered and confirmed. It is important to, 'watch for souls.'