

Words of Counsel.

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Prefatory Note.

The following little paper was never intended for publication. It was written expressly and exclusively, for two very dear and valued friends. A brother whom I greatly love and esteem, happening to see it, urged me to give it to him, with a view to publication. I demurred; but my friend so earnestly pressed me to allow him to print it, that I gave way.

May the Lord graciously deign to use it! C. H. M. Dublin February, 14th, 1889

NO. 1.

You enter your room, and find the fire all but out, there seems scarcely a trace of vitality. The fire-irons are there, all polished and laid in order; but what could they do? Nothing! A thousand sets of the most splendid fire-irons could not produce a single spark. There must be a living *hand* to move them, or they will lie there motionless and powerless.

What is to be done? You seize the poker, rake out the ashes, and introduce a current of air; then you *stir up* the almost dead lumps of coal; and, in a few moments, you have a brilliant and beautiful fire. Who thinks of praising the poker? Who would say, "Dear, what a marvellous poker!" It is not the lifeless poker, but the living hand that does the work. True, the hand uses the poker; but the poker is useless without the hand.

Now, there is a fine moral lesson here for all who are, in any little way, used in the Lord's blessed work. We have ever to bear in mind that the works that are done upon the earth, God is the doer of them. If He deigns to use us, let us never forget that we are but mere instruments, just as helpless and powerless as the poker. No doubt, we have enjoyment in the work; but we are not now dealing with the question of enjoyment, but ability. If any real work is done, God is the doer of it. To Him be *all* the glory. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." (1 Cor 3: 5-7.)

It is a very serious thing to attach undue importance or give an undue place to men, how much soever they may be used in the Lord's work. We have seen the work marred and workmen morally ruined by this very thing. It is a fatal mistake. Men are taken out of the place in which God has put them they are lauded, lionised, and gazed at as a sort of phenomenon; their lives are written and published before their death. In this way, they are lifted into an entirely false position, like a person walking on stilts, and then some terrible fall comes, to bring them to their senses, and recall them to their true place.

The Lord's servants should carefully guard against this terrible evil. See how the blessed Master ever retired from human applause and human excitement. When men wondered at His teaching, He said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." When they would come and take Him by force and make Him a king, He retired into a mountain to pray. When they wanted Him to show Himself to the world, He said, "My time is not yet come." We ever find Him hiding Himself, blessed for ever be His precious, peerless Name Oh, to drink more into His spirit, and walk in His footsteps! To be well content to be a nothing and a nobody, so that Christ may be magnified! May God grant us this immense

favour

NO. 2.

I REMEMBER coming into my room, one day, and seeing the fire very low, indeed, nearly out. On examining it more closely, I observed about half a dozen of dying embers scattered all over the bottom of the grate — quite too far apart to help one another, each fast fading away for want of a little help. What was to be done? To throw in a lot of fresh material would simply be to put the whole thing hopelessly out. The embers could not help the coals, and the coals could only quash the embers.

At once, I hit upon a very simple plan. I gently gathered the scattered embers close together, and the little bit of life in each soon made a good bit of life in all, and the little company of dying embers became quite a nice little collective fire, capable of acting on some fresh material.

Here, thought I, is a fine lesson for me. If I come to a place and find the Lord's beloved people in a very low, feeble, dying state, I must just seek to get them together for mutual help and blessing, in order that they may be in a condition to act on others outside.

This mutual help is of all importance. People are so prone to lean upon gifted men. And if they cannot have such, they get discouraged and scattered, instead of getting lovingly together and helping one another by their mutual faith.

NO. 3.

ON another occasion, the housemaid was called to attend to the fire in the sitting-room. She found it just as I had found mine; but she adopted a different mode of treatment. Instead of collecting the few dying embers together, she flung in a huge block of coal, and completely quashed the dying embers. In a few moments all was black and cold. The block could not help the embers; and the embers could not help the block. It was a complete failure. The block of coal was very good, but it was out of place. The embers were not in a condition to profit by it.

Now, I learned a lesson from this. I said, that block is like a "big brother" coming into a feeble little meeting, and, instead of seeking to strengthen and develop the little modicum of life in the feeble few, he takes the place of a *factotum*, and sets them entirely aside.

This must be carefully avoided. Let every servant of the Lord watch and pray, and live against this evil; and not suffer the "big brother," or the "minister," to be put upon him. How beautiful are the words of the inspired apostle, in his epistle to the Romans! "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye *may be established*, that is, that I may *be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*" (Rom. 1: 11, 12.)

This is uncommonly fine — the very opposite of the "big brother" principle. Only think of this blessed servant of Christ, the greatest teacher the church has ever had, longing to be comforted by the faith of the very feeblest saint in the assembly! He longed for fellowship — he was ready to help, but he did not want to monopolise. He would not quash the dying embers, but gather them together and edify them, that he and they might be "comforted together."

Nothing can exceed the moral beauty of this. It is simply divine. May we all learn from it! Assuredly we all need it. There is danger on both sides. Some are in danger of taking too much upon them, others of taking too little. May we all be in such a condition of soul, such an attitude of heart as

will fit us for any little work in which our gracious Lord may be pleased to use us — not seeking a place for ourselves, but lovingly serving all. The Lord, in His great mercy, grant that thus it may be, with all His beloved people!