

IN HIS STEPS.

"What Would Jesus Do?"

By CHARLES M. SHELDON.

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[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER IV.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Henry Maxwell paced his study back and forth. It was Wednesday, and he had started to think out the subject of his evening service which fell upon that night.

Out of one of his study windows he could see the tall chimneys of the railroad shops. The top of the evangelist's tent just showed over the buildings around the Rectangle.

The pastor of the First church looked out of this window every time he turned in his walk. After awhile he sat down at his desk and drew a large piece of paper toward him.

After thinking several moments he wrote in large letters the following: "A NUMBER OF THINGS THAT JESUS WOULD PROBABLY DO IN THIS PARISH."

"1. Live in a simple, plain manner, without needless luxury on the one hand or undue asceticism on the other."

"2. Preach fearlessly to the hypocrites in the church, no matter what their social importance or wealth."

"3. Show in some practical form sympathy and love for the common people as well as for the well to do, educated, refined people who make up the majority of the church and parish."

"4. Identify himself with the great causes of humanity in some personal way that would call for self denial and offering."

"5. Preach against the saloon in Raymond."

"6. Become known as a friend and companion of the sinful people in the Rectangle."

"7. Give up the summer trip to Europe this year. I have been abroad twice and cannot claim any special need of rest. I am well and could forego his pleasure, using the money for some one who needs a vacation more than I do. There are probably plenty of such people in the city."

"8. What else would Jesus do as Henry Maxwell?"

He was conscious, with a humility that once was a stranger to him, that his outline of Jesus' probable action was painfully lacking in depth and power, but he was seeking carefully for concrete shapes into which he might cast his thought of Jesus' conduct. Nearly every point he had put down meant for him a complete overturning of the custom and habit of years in the ministry. In spite of that, he still searched deeper for sources of the Christlike spirit. He did not attempt to write any more, but sat at his desk absorbed in his attempt to catch more and more of the spirit of Jesus in his own life. He had forgotten the particular subject for his prayer meeting with which he had begun his morning study.

He was so absorbed over his thought that he did not hear the bell ring, and he was roused by the servant, who announced a caller. He had sent up his name—Mr. Gray. Maxwell stepped to the head of the stairs and asked Gray to come up.

"We can talk better up here." So Gray came up and stated the reason for his call.

"I want you, Mr. Maxwell, to help me. Of course you have heard what a wonderful meeting we had Monday night and last night Miss Winslow has done more with her voice than I could, and the tent won't hold the people."

"I've heard of that. It's the first time the people there have heard her. It's no wonder they are attracted." "It has been a wonderful revelation to us and a most encouraging event in our work. But I came to ask if you could not come down tonight and preach. I am suffering with a severe cold. I do not dare to trust my voice again. I know it is asking a good deal for such a busy man, but if you can't come say so freely, and I'll try some-where else."

"I'm sorry, but it's my regular prayer meeting night," said Henry Maxwell. Then he flushed and added: "I shall be able to arrange it in some way so as to come down. You can count on me."

Gray thanked him earnestly and rose to go.

"Won't you stay a minute, Gray, and let us have a prayer together?"

"Yes," said Gray simply.

So the two men knelt together in the study. Mr. Maxwell prayed like a child. Gray was touched to tears as he knelt there. There was something almost pitiful in the way this man, who had lived his ministerial life in such a narrow limit of exercise, now begged for wisdom and strength to speak a message to the people in the Rectangle. Gray rose and held out his hand.

"God bless you, Mr. Maxwell. I'm sure the Spirit will give you power tonight."

Henry Maxwell made no answer. He did not even trust himself to say that he hoped so, but he thought of his promise, and it brought a certain peace that was refreshing to his heart and mind alike.

So that is how it came about that when the First church audience came into the lecture room that evening it was met with another surprise.

There was an unusually large number present. The prayer meetings ever since that remarkable Sunday morning had been attended as never before in the history of the First church.

Henry Maxwell came at once to the point. He spoke of Gray's work and of his request.

"I feel as if I were called to go down there tonight, and I will leave it with you to say whether you will go on with the meeting here. I think perhaps the best plan would be for a few volunteers to go down to the Rectangle with me, prepared to help in the after meeting, and the rest remain here and pray that the Spirit's power may go with us."

So half a dozen of the men went with Henry Maxwell, and the rest of the audience staid in the lecture room. Maxwell could not escape the thought as he left the room that probably in his entire church membership there might not be found a score of disciples who were capable of doing work that would successfully lead needy, sinful men into the knowledge of Christ. The thought did not linger in his mind to vex him as he went on his way, but it was simply a part of his whole new conception of the meaning of Christian discipleship.

When he and his little company of volunteers reached the Rectangle, the tent was already crowded. They had difficulty in getting to the little platform. Rachel was there, with Virginia and Jasper Chase, who had come instead of the doctor tonight.

When the meeting began with a song in which Rachel sang the solo and the people were asked to join in the chorus, not a foot of standing room was left in the tent. The night was mild, and the sides of the tent were up, and a great border of faces stretched around, looking in and forming part of the audience.

After the singing and a prayer by one of the city pastors who were present Gray stated the reasons for his inability to speak and in his simple manner turned the service over to "Brother Maxwell of the First church."

"Who's de bloke?" asked a hoarse voice near the outside of the tent.

"De First church parson. We've got de whole high tone swell out tonight."

"Did you say First church? I know him. My landlord has got a front pew up there," said another voice, and there was a laugh for the speaker was a saloon keeper.

"T'row out de life line 'cross de dark wave!" began a drunken man near by, singing in such an unconscious imitation of a local traveling singer's nasal tone that roars of laughter and jeers of approval rose around him. The people in the tent turned in the direction of the disturbance. There were shouts of "Put him out!" "Give the First church a chance!" "Song, song! Give us another song!"

Henry Maxwell stood up, and a great wave of actual terror went over him. This was not like preaching to the well dressed, respectable, good mannered people on the boulevard. He began to speak, but the confusion increased. Gray went down into the crowd, but did not seem able to quiet it. Henry Maxwell raised his arm and his voice. The crowd in the tent began to pay some attention, but the noise on the outside increased. In a few minutes the audience was beyond Maxwell's control. He turned to Rachel with a sad smile.

"Sing something, Miss Winslow. They will listen to you," he said and then sat down and put his face in his hands.

It was Rachel's opportunity, and she was fully equal to it. Virginia was at the organ, and Rachel asked her to play a few notes of the hymn:

Saviour, I follow on,
Guided by thee,
Seeing not yet the hand
That leadeth me,
Hushed be my heart and still;
Fear I no further ill;
Only to meet thy will
My will shall be.

Rachel had not sung the first line before the people in the tent were all turned toward her, hushed and reverent. Before she had finished the verse the Rectangle was subdued and tamed. It lay like some wild beast at her feet, and she sang it into harmlessness. Ah! What were the flippant, perfumed, degraded, besotted humanity that trembled and wept and grew strangely, sadly thoughtful under the touch of the divine ministry of this beautiful young woman? Henry Maxwell as he raised his head and saw the transformed mob had a glimpse of something that Jesus would probably do with a voice like Rachel Winslow's. Jasper Chase sat with his eyes on the singer, and his greatest longing as an ambitious author was swallowed up in the thought of what Rachel Winslow's love might some time mean to him. And over in the shadow outside stood the last person any one might have expected to see at a gospel tent service, Rollin Page, who, jostled on every side by rough men and women, who stared at the swell in the fine clothes, seemed careless of his surroundings and at the same time evidently swayed by the power that Rachel possessed. He had just come over from the club. Neither Rachel nor Virginia saw him that night.

The song was over. Henry Maxwell rose again. This time he felt calm. What would Jesus do? He spoke as he thought once he never could. Who were these people? They were immortal souls. What was Christianity? A calling of sinners, not the righteous, to repentance. How would Jesus speak? What would he say? He could not tell all that his message would include, but he felt sure of a part of it, and in that certainty he spoke on. Never before had he felt "compassion for the multitude." What had the multitude been to him during his ten years in the First church but a vague, dangerous, dirty, troublesome factor in society, outside of the church and his reach; an element that caused him occasionally an unpleasant feeling of conscience; a factor in Raymond that was talked about at associations as the "masses" in papers written by the brethren in attempts to show why the "masses" were not being reached. But tonight as he faced the "masses" he asked himself whether,

after all, this was not just about such a multitude as Jesus faced oftenest, and he felt the genuine emotion of love for a crowd which is one of the best indications a preacher ever has that he is living close to the heart of the world's eternal life. It is easy to love an individual sinner, especially if he is personally picturesque or interesting. To love a multitude of sinners is distinctly a Christlike quality.

When the meeting closed, there was no special interest shown. The people rapidly melted away from the tent, and the saloons, which had been experiencing a dull season while the meetings progressed, again drove a thriving trade. The Rectangle, as if to make up for lost time, started in with vigor on its usual night life of debauch. Henry Maxwell and his little party, including Virginia, Rachel and Jasper Chase, walked down past the row of saloons and dens until they reached the corner where the cars passed.

"This is a terrible spot," said Henry Maxwell as they stood waiting for their car. "I never realized that Raymond had such a festering sore. It does not seem possible that this is a city full of Christian disciples."

He paused and then continued: "Do you think any one can ever remove this great curse of the saloon? Why don't we all act together against the traffic? What would Jesus do? Would he keep silent? Would he vote to license these causes of crime and death?"

Henry Maxwell was talking to himself more than to the others. He remembered that he had always voted for license, and so had nearly all of his church members. What would Jesus do? Could he answer that question? Would Jesus preach and act against the saloon if he lived today? How would he preach and act? Suppose it was not popular to preach against license. Suppose the Christian people thought it was all that could be done—to license the evil, and so get revenue from a necessary sin. Or suppose the church members owned property where the saloons stood. What then? He knew that these were the facts in Raymond. What would Jesus do?

He went up into his study the next morning with that question only partly answered. He thought of it all day. He was still thinking of it and reaching certain real conclusions when The Evening News came. His wife brought it up and sat down a few minutes while he read it to her.

The Evening News was at present the most sensational paper in Raymond. That is to say, it was being edited in such a remarkable fashion that its subscribers had never been so excited over a newspaper before. First they had noticed the absence of the prizefight, and gradually it began to dawn upon them that The News no longer printed accounts of crime with detailed descriptions or scandals in private life. Then they noticed that the advertisements of liquor and tobacco were being dropped, together with certain other advertisements of a questionable character. The discontinuance of the Sunday paper caused the greatest comment of all, and now the character of the editorials was creating the greatest excitement. A quotation from the Monday paper of this week will show what Edward Norman was doing to keep his promise. The editorial was headed:

"THE MORAL SIDE OF POLITICAL QUESTIONS."

"The editor of The News has always advocated the principles of the great political party at present in power, and has therefore discussed all political questions from a standpoint of expediency or of belief in the party as opposed to other organizations. Hereafter, to be perfectly honest with all our readers, the editor will present and discuss political questions from the standpoint of right and wrong. In other words, the first question will not be 'Is it in the interest of our party?' or 'Is it according to the principles laid down by the party?' but the question first asked will be, 'Is this measure in accordance with the spirit and teachings of Jesus as the author of the greatest standard of life known to men?' That is, to be perfectly plain, the moral side of every political question will be considered, its most important side, and the ground will be distinctly taken that nations as well as individuals are under the same law to do all things to the glory of God as the first rule of action.

"The same principle will be observed in this office toward candidates for places of responsibility and trust in the republic. Regardless of party politics, the editor of The News will do all in his power to bring the best men into power and will not knowingly help to support for office any candidate who is unworthy, however much he may be endorsed by the party. The first questions asked about the man, as about the measure, will be: 'Is he the right man for the place?' 'Is he a good man with ability?'"

There had been more of this, but we have quoted enough to show the character of the editorials. Hundreds of men in Raymond had read it and rubbed their eyes in amazement. A good many of them had promptly written to The News, telling the editor to stop their paper. The paper still came out, however, and was eagerly read all over the city. At the end of the week Edward Norman knew very well that he had actually lost already a large number of valuable subscribers. He faced the conditions calmly, although Clark, the managing editor, grimly anticipated ultimate bankruptcy, especially since Monday's editorial.

Tonight as Henry Maxwell read to his wife he could see in almost every column evidences of Norman's conscientious obedience to his promise. There was an absence of slang, sensational scare headlines. The reading matter under the headlines was in perfect keeping with them. He noticed in two columns that the reporters' names appeared, signed at the bottom, and there was a distinct advance in the dignity and style of their contributions.

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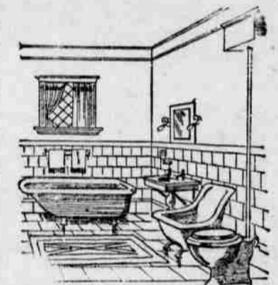
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