

Fill Up The Seats.

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DURING my fifty-seven years of ministerial life and labor, there is one place in which I have never been able to do any good, and that is in an empty pew. If any gospel-seed chanced to light there, there was no more hope of a harvest than if corn were flung out on to yonder stone pavements.

Empty pews often have a voice of their own; they cry out in solemn testimony against the church-members who are not in them, but who ought to be there. Perhaps one reason why the professed Christians stay away from God's house is the state of the weather. Yet on Monday I have noticed that these same men do not find it too hot or too cold, or too wet for them to go to their business, or for these women to go to the market or out shopping. In cases where Christians live at some distance from their own church, let them, on a stormy Sabbath, attend the nearest Evangelical church. Three good results would follow: They would get their Sabbath food; they would encourage the minister who must preach in all weather; and they would promote unity between the churches. The simple fact is that much of the blame for thin congregations—in all kinds of weather—lies on the members of the church themselves.

Eavesdropping at Prayer Meeting.

DR. H. CLAY TRUMBULL's latest work is entitled *Individual Work for Individuals*, and, as might be inferred, it is a record of personal experience, especial emphasis being laid on the fact that "the way to reach the many is to reach the one." Many of the illustrations are drawn from Dr. Trumbull's life as chaplain in the civil war, and among the most striking incidents related is the following:

There were many strange characters as well as strange experiences encountered in my army Christian work. The army brought all sorts of persons together, and I had to become acquainted with and interested in them all. While at St. Augustine, Fla., in the winter of 1863-64, a part of our regiment did garrison duty at the old Spanish coquina fort, with its bloody memories and its weird legends of former occupants. I was accustomed to hold Sunday School services each Sunday afternoon, and also midweek evening services in the little chapel opposite the main entrance of the fort. Just outside of that chapel there was a pile of rusty cannon, on which men would sometimes loiter while we were having services inside. And as I moved about the fort I had many a talk with men whom I rarely met so familiarly elsewhere.

One day in walking through the fort my attention was drawn to a strange face glaring through an iron-barred opening of a dungeon door in the southwest corner of the casemated walls. It was the most repulsive I had ever seen. Low-browed, coarse-featured, dark-complexioned, with small, black eyes under shaggy eyebrows and thick, sensuous lips, it seemed like a cross between a Digger Indian and a New Zealand native, with the worst peculiarities of both. The expression was one of low cunning with a mixture of hate and derision. It was an unhuman face, yet the man who bore it was evidently one of my parishioners, or he would not be where he was.

"Who are you, my friend?" I said. "Where do you belong?"

He answered in a low, gruff voice, as if he were resenting an attack, "I belong to the Tenth Connecticut."

"You belong to the Tenth Connecticut?" I said. "Why, then I am your chaplain."

As I kindly questioned the man I found that he had been most of the time since his enlistment in confinement for insubordination, and therefore I had not met him. After a brief talk I left him. Soon he was released from confinement and was again with his comrades. I saw him occasionally and spoke to him kindly, but I did not look upon him as a hopeful case in comparison with others, and had comparatively little to say to him. It seems, however, that I had gained more of a hold on him than I was disposed to recognize.

After a while we left Florida for Virginia. As we moved up along the coast in a crowded transport this man came to me in the throng and said softly:

"Miser Chaplin, I want to talk to you.

"Well, I am always glad to talk to you," I said. "But where can we go to talk? Let us learn over the steamer's rail. That is our only place to talk by ourselves." As we leaned there together he told me his strange, pathetic story.

"Miser Chaplin, you member when you talked to me at the dungeon door. You spoke kind to me. You said you're my chaplain. I never forgot that, Miser Chaplin. I'm a rough fellow; I never knowed much, I suppose I'm human, that's about all. I never had no bringin' up. Fust I knowed of myself I was in the streets of New Orleans. Never knowed a father or mother. I was kicked about. I came north and listed in army. I've had a hard time of it. My cap'n hears the very ground I tread on." Then with a chuckle and a leer, as he thought of his Ishmaelitic life, he said: "I did worry my cap'n, and he hated me. Ten months with ball and chain. A hard time of it. But what you said at the dungeon door's all true. And what you said in prayer meetin' is all true."

"Prayer meetin'?" I said. "I never saw you in prayer meetin'."

"No, I was jus' outside on those old cannon. And now, Miser Chaplin, I suppose we's goin' into a fight and I want to do my duty. They say I'm a coward. I've never been in a fight, but I want to do my duty." As a friend of mine to whom I told this story said, "The only religious instruction this man ever got was through eavesdropping at a prayer meeting."

Then in a voice strangely tender in contrast with the first gruff utterance which I heard from him in the dungeon, he said: "Miser Chaplin, you're the only man who ever spoke kind to me. If I get killed I want you to have my money. And if I get killed, won't you have it writ in the paper that Lino died for his country?"

That was another noteworthy incident to my personal Christian work for others. We reached Virginia. We were in a fight. Lino bore himself so bravely that his captain, whom he had "worried" so long, called him out before the entire company at the close of the engagement and commended him for his bravery and good service. Hearing of this I looked him up after the fight was over and congratulated him on his well-doing in active battle.

"You've done bravely, I hear, and I'm glad."

"Yes," he said, with a softer chuckle than before. "They called me a coward, but I tried to do my duty. Tain't always the frisky ok that's at the far end of the yoke."

That long friendless man showed, in his way, his intention of doing what God would have him do. Who of us has forever improved his opportunities?

When the Iron Cools.

THE old expression, "Strike when the iron is hot," is founded upon an important truth. We strike while the iron is hot because striking at this time counts for more than it would under any other circumstances. Striking after the iron has cooled is profitless for more than one reason. It is a waste of strength and is likely to be disastrous to the iron. The iron-worker understands all this, and profits by it. We do not always profit by the same principle that underlies things material. Men, like iron, are not at all times equally easy to mold. We need to take advantage of the moods and tempers of men if we would change their state. It is true that it is possible for metal to become too near molten to be used with good results; so when the mind and heart are overloaded, they cannot be satisfactorily dealt with. This, however, is no argument against taking advantage of the softened heart and the awakened conscience.

At the close of a revival meeting, during which many people had been brought into the Church, those who had their good near their heart got together to plan for some method of helping the young people and keeping them in the way in which they had so earnestly made the start.

"I believe in all this," said a woman of influence, "but would it not be better for us to defer the meeting until the autumn? Our forces will soon be scattered, and the organization of a young people's society at this time could not be as auspicious as it would be at a later date." Her advice was taken; but, alas! when the autumn days came and the effort was at last made, the good people found that the iron had cooled. The young people who had been so ready to be molded in the right way were no longer to be interested.