

### Chapter 3

BEFORE bidding farewell to the scenes of my boyhood, I would mention two others which left so deep an impression upon me that I think it will last to my latest hour. My father and mother were living in a town, the name of which I forget. Seizing the opportunity of a few weeks' stay, my mother sent me to the National Day School. One morning the master informed us that in the afternoon of that day a Children's Missionary Service would be held, at which a returned missionary, who had preached the Gospel to the heathen, would speak. Forty years ago a returned foreign missionary was a subject of far greater interest than to-day. The romance of missionary work was certainly fresh in those days. In the afternoon of that day, as the time drew near for the meeting to be held, all the scholars were assembled in the large hall. I remember very vividly the flutter of excitement among the scholars when the clock pointed to the hour for commencing the service. All eyes were turned to the door at the side of the desk. At last the door opened, and a rather tall man, with slightly stooping form, pale cheeks, sunken eyes, and dark hair, dressed in a plain suit of broad-cloth, entered the Hall. Standing quietly behind the desk, he addressed the meeting. The words which he uttered have faded from my memory. But the face and form of the missionary live with me still, and will until I see them again transfigured with the radiance of God. I was so impressed with the personality of the man that at the close of the service I went up to the side of the teacher at the head of my form and inquired the missionary's name. He answered: "Boy, that is David Livingstone."

It was not my privilege to stand within the solemn shadow of that tent pitched in the midst of the African desert when the spirit of this heroic saint passed to the skies. He had better company. The chariots of God are twenty thousand. Nor was I present when amid the good and brave of our Fatherland they placed his ashes among the rest of England's mighty dead. But I remembered that I had seen the living man, had heard his broken voice pleading for poor Africa's sons, had looked upon his noble form ere the heart was stilled for ever. The face of Livingstone has attended me in many a waking dream. I have often felt grateful for the influence it has exerted on my soul. To me there is an indefinable charm in a holy life. Like a fragrance, it defies analysis. A good man's life is a holy of holies. Man in sin is like an old historic ruin on which you can trace the hints and evidences of a nobler past. The Christian redemption not only redeems man, it rediscovers him. I think it is God's reverence for man which lies at the basis of His attempt at restoration. Christ crucified is not only a revelation of my shame, it is an estimate of my worth. I have learned to endorse the statement which the great Spanish dramatist puts into the mouth of his dying malefactor, and to believe, that if earth had contained but one lost, guilty, wandering soul like his own, Divine love would have come down from heaven to save it. The good man is the best interpreter of God. I know no mirror of invisible things like the —

“ —human face divine.”

It is from saintly lives we pluck the fruit of the tree of life. I never call to mind the scene of that afternoon long ago without resurrecting in my thought the spirit and life of him who spoke to us. It proves to me that personality is more potent than speech. It is the word in soul, and not the word in syllables which redeems life. God, not in miracle, nor speech; but God in the Flesh, beginning with the cradle and ending with the Cross. "God is Love," that truth is old as eternity, but it must be *lived* as well as spoken; men must *see it* as well as hear it. To hear God's command is the law, to see His shape is the Gospel. So "the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Now, God in Christ is related to;

every man through his flesh if not through the spirit. This thought should lead us, who are akin to Him in soul, to reverence the lowest as well as the highest. We cannot draw the nails and close the wounds of the

MAN OF CALVARY,

but by the grace of God given unto us, we can heal the sores and staunch the blood of the Crucified nature to which both God ourselves are related. God suffering on Mount Calvary - that is past; God suffering in Humanity - that is present. It is Humanity nailed and bleeding at every pore which we must take down from the Cross and bury in Christ's grave, that by the power and grace of the same Christ there may be a better resurrection.

Please, dear reader, pass with me now to another scene of my boyhood's days. The fact which I am now to relate has had much to do with the development of a tender and generous feeling in my own nature. There is a charity which is always governed by the Rule of Three. It is arithmetical, calculating, cold. It considers the worth of its object and the return the gift will yield. It is the charity which can pay large salaries to its officials, and sometimes turn the beggar away without a crust. The charity of God is not on such lines. The sunshine and the rain come on sinner and saint, though one may curse and the other may pray. And this is the generosity Jesus taught as the Rule of Perfection. A rich soul and a full hand, with obedience to this command can make the widow and the orphan's heart "sing for joy." I would rather in my charity be deceived a hundred times than *miss the right man*.

My father's manner of life often reduced my mother and her children to the direst straits. The peremptory dismissal of my father from his employment through neglect of work would place us in very peculiar circumstances. To travel by coach or rail was out of the question; we must take to the road. My mother's stock of money often diminished to the last sixpence. This coin would be carefully reserved to find us some rude shelter, when, tired and often hungry, we came to the close of the day. Sometimes the last penny would be spent for bread, then God, as to the wanderer of old, gave us a stone for a pillow and the sky for a roof. In summer time it was not so bad after all. What finer covering for a couch than the sky? What grander sentinels than the innumerable stars and the eternal hills? And over all the Almighty God as Protector. No king could boast a finer palace and a nobler guard. To be wafted to sleep on a summer's night with the scent of new-mown hay would, but for the hunger-pangs, have been a perfect luxury.

One summer's day my mother and I were passing along the high-road between two large towns, the names of which I forget. About half the distance had been travelled, miles still untrodden lay before us before we reached our intended destination for the night. My feet were blistered, and what to me was worse, my stomach was empty. I began to cry. My mother stopped and inquired the reason of my tears. I told her I was both hungry and tired. She tried to ease the pain of my feet with cheerful words, but for my empty stomach, God help her she had no words which could satisfy that. Since my own children have gathered at my feet I have, in some measure been able to understand what my mother's feelings, must have been when, homeless and friendless, I, her youngest-born, cried to her for bread and she had none to give. There is a hunger which is delicious - a pain of nature through lack of food, born of healthy exercise, which makes the knowledge of immediate supply a happy feeling. But to have every faculty of the body benumbed through weakness, and to feel the pangs of a maddening yearning for bread, with plenty all around and yet no opportunity to

appease your agony - this is an experience which must be endured to be rightly understood. It was this experience which was vividly before me when, in addressing the National Free Church Council in the City Temple (1897), I uttered the following words: "I recollect that the Ex-President of this Council in 1889 published a book on 'Social Christianity,' which I have read and reread. In it, on page 9, are the following words, 'It is almost impossible for some of us, even by the most desperate effort of the imagination, to enter into the feelings of the suffering and starving poor. I shall never forget the revealing word which my friend, Mr. Henry Broadhurst, uttered to me two years ago. Looking at me as I sat on the other side of his fireplace at Brixton, he said, "Why, you don't know what hunger is. You have never been hungry in your life!" And as I reflected, I felt it was true. I had been what they *call* hungry, but the hunger of the starving poor who go for days without bread, I had never felt- And I should like to know how many persons there are in this hall to-day who have experienced the gnawings of an unendurable hunger.' Had I been present in St. James' Hall when Mr. Hughes asked that question, I could have responded with a 'Yea.' The sufferings of the poor are part of my experience. And knowing my country's wealth, her boasted civilisation, her standing among the nations of the earth, I never meet a starving man on her streets but I blush for her name." "The impressions we receive from personal suffering or experience last longer and strike deeper than mere theories," so says Hazlitt in his "Life of Napoleon." With me, the suffering and the experience are one. Grace, I trust, has refined these in my life, and transfigured them into larger and more beneficent ministries. A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind. The moan of a hungry child means more to me than some. I caught an old man in my arms one day in the London High Street, and bore his fainting form to a coffee-house close by. "What is the matter with you?" I asked, as I rested his body on a chair. "I'm starving, sir; I'm starving," hissed through his knit teeth. In a moment the glory of the West; passed before me - the West where luxury is mad and fashion reigns. And here on the city street a man, God-made, redeemed by the blood of Christ, is fainting, dying for lack of bread, and I wondered what the Son of God thought of the two extremes.

But let us return. My mother telling me to dry my tears, said she would try and beg me some bread at the first house to which we came. Dragging my weary limbs a little further along the road, we came to a house pleasantly situated on a rising knoll a short distance from the road. The picture of that house, together with what happened there, are imprinted on my memory as with the point of a diamond. Everything around it was of the rustic order. A trellis-work of flowers hung round the porch. Mignonette, jasmine, honeysuckle, - I can see them now - were entwined in beautiful confusion, each contributing its share of rich perfume to the scented air. The sun poured down its hot rays from a cloudless sky full upon us. The cattle in the meadows had sought the friendly shade of the trees, and were quietly resting there. The children, returning to school, were sporting themselves about the road in innocent glee. The birds, no doubt overcome by the heat, had hushed their song. Yet nature seemed beautiful with the fruition of God. But the moods of the soul govern our conceptions of the external world. Of all the things I have mentioned, not one gave me joy. What a life ours is! The pain of a tooth, or the pang of a sorrow can mar the fairest Paradise. George Macdonald reminds us that on one occasion "the lack of a loaf of bread hid the very God from the disciples' eyes." Truly, I know, that once the breaking of a piece of bread revealed Him. So my blistered feet and hungry feeling threw a dark shadow over all. Passing up to the door of the house, my mother timidly knocked. A stout, healthy-looking woman opened the door, and sternly inquired what we wanted. Certainly, this woman was no Martha. My mother tremblingly told her errand. She

might well be fearful. It was her first attempt at begging. "My little boy is hungry, would you, kind lady, please give him a mouthful of bread?" "You want bread?" said the woman in a loud tone. "Dear me! you don't look as though you wanted bread." As she said these words she eyed my mother's appearance from head to foot. For though poor, she always kept herself neat and clean. She looked better in a faded shawl than some women would in a queens mantle. The woman then commenced a tirade against beggars and hypocrites in general. My mother's cheeks coloured: "I am not asking bread for myself, lady, but for my boy," she interposed. "Well," said the woman, holding the door in her hand as though she was impatient for us to be gone. "if your boy is as hungry as you say he is, he will be glad of anything. There are some crusts in that bowl" - pointing to an earthenware vessel on the low wall opposite the door - "which we have laid aside for the pigs; you can give him a few of them if you like. That is all we can spare." So saying, she closed the door, and my mother and I were left standing together.

Poor mother, I can see her face now as with speechless sorrow she turned towards the bowl in which lay all that this woman's charity could afford.

Selecting a few of the cleanest pieces of bread, she wiped the dirt from some of them and placing them in my hand, we came away.

Since that dark hour the bright sun of hospitality has shone upon my life. I have been privileged to sit at the tables of the great. I have partaken of the richest and costliest viands, and satisfied my taste with the daintiest morsels; but the sweetest "tit-bit " of food I ever tasted was when, as a poor boy, I dined off pigs' crusts. But if at the last day there is to be a resurrection of deeds as well as of bodies, I think I have seen one cheek at least which will blush for shame.

*(To be continued.)*

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## **References**

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1901/219