

Sunday Reading

JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

From the solitude of the hills and the isolation of the boundless sea come the two men who have witnessed most fully and deeply to the reality of spiritual things: David from Judea, John from Patmos. The one gained these experiences from the 'precious things of the lasting hills,' and the other from 'the voice of many waters.'

For the deepest heart and life experiences of God and eternal things we turn to the shepherd of the hilltops and to the seer of the waves. David opens the human heart, John reveals the divine heart. In David we find our own hopes and joys and fears, in John we see the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ.

From the narratives which the other evangelists give us, we see that John not only became a disciple, one of the twelve, but was admitted to that inner circle of the four: Jesus, Peter, James and John. These were the four who were together in the sick chamber when the ruler's daughter was raised, together on the Mount of Transfiguration, and these were the chosen ones for that night in the garden. Of these three, it was John who leaned on the Master's bosom and thrilled at his very heart throbs. John it was who followed Jesus to the court of Caiaphas, and he alone of all the disciples braved the fury which broke on Calvary as the angry waves on the rock, and with Mary looked upon the crucifixion of her son. There at the cross Jesus made a new relationship between the Mater Dolorosa and the beloved disciple.

'When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, 'Woman, behold thy son!'

Then saith he to the disciple, 'Behold thy mother!'

And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. Let us pause and think what it meant to John in that hour, and all the days that followed, to be placed in that filial position to the Lord's own earthly mother. To my mother it was the beginning of a new and rich experience. Philip Schaff says of that scene:

'It furnishes the type of those heaven born spiritual relationships which are deeper and stronger than those of blood and interest.'

At the cross John remained the last; at the tomb, excepting Mary Magdalene, he was the first, and he with keenest vision, that of love, was the first to recognize the Lord when, after his resurrection, he appeared on the shore of Galilee to the disciples. It was concerning John that Peter, still impulsive, asks the question, 'What will this man do?' The testimony of the Gospel, then, is that during the days of discipleship John enjoyed the closest intimacy and friendship with Jesus. We find that more than all others he was given the opportunity of seeing, knowing and understanding the mind of Christ. Our knowledge of the man prepares us to expect the results of such opportunities to be deep and rich spiritual experiences. In some way we come to look for those things which only the heart can reveal.

But we are interested to look further to see what the apostleship developed for John. That inner circle, Jesus, Peter, James and John, has been broken by the departure of Jesus, but the three remain as pillars of the Church of the Circumcision, just as Paul and Barnabas were of the Gentile Church. But from any and all of that strife between the two, he stood apart. The contemplation so characteristic of him when he was privileged to be with the Lord, he has given way to active ministration. With Peter he heals the lame man at the Temple Gate, the gate called Beautiful; with Peter he testifies of Christ before the Sanhedrim: 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

Then John goes back to Samaria to aid and confirm the Christians there; it is back to that Samaria where this 'Son of Thunder' one time would call down the fire of heaven. But this is that John baptized with the Holy Ghost and with love. But John never seems in the apostolic age to take as prominent a part as Peter. As one has said, 'John follows in mysterious silence, and makes the impression of a reserved force which will manifest itself at some future time.'

John's life extended through nearly the entire first century. The youngest of disciples, he remained the last of the apostles to go to his reward. Of that life nearly a century long, there exist great periods of it of which we know nothing. When the destruction of Jerusalem came he was in Asia Minor; by Nero he was banished to

Why is it that nearly all aged persons are thin?

And yet, when you think of it, what could you expect?

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Patmos. That deep, contemplative nature which had opened it at the Master's touch, and received his life, became richer and more fruitful during all the years from Calvary to Patmos, and when at last given a return to the Church, John did the great work of his life in the writing of those five immortal, life-giving books, the Revelation, the Gospel, or his life of Christ, and the Epistles.

Christian art has well understood that rare combination in John's character, in representing him with a face of womanly purity and tenderness, and giving him for his symbol a bold eagle soaring with outspread wings above the clouds.

We have almost the completed and perfect picture thus given of John in the Gospels, in Christian art, recounted by the legends of the church and uttered by the memories clinging yet to Patmos, where he saw the things which are to be, and this is the picture it gives us. A man of rare silence, who speaks not of himself and asks but few questions. He listened more with his heart than with his ears; not a word uttered by Jesus escaped him, and like the other loving one, 'he kept all these sayings in his heart.' McLaren says, 'What are mysteries to other men who had only sight were revelations to him who had vision.' Once he used the friend's privilege and asked a question, but not for himself. Peter was anxious to know the betrayer of the Master, and John, sitting a little below, leans back until his head rests on Jesus' bosom, and asks, 'Who is it, Lord?' For himself he had no interests, he was content to learn and listen. 'As the plant absorbs the light, in silence and without effort, so John gathered truth.'

John not only listened, he observed. How keen his faculties were; he noted the exact posture of Christ as he sat resting by Jacob's well. That morning, after a weary night of fruitless toil on the sea, it is John who cries out with glad recognition, 'It is the Lord,' as Jesus stood on the shore with the dawn breaking about him. Years afterward John saw him again, and described him: 'His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow. And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.'

Among the plans submitted for that splendid cathedral to be in New York, St. John the Divine, was one, the most beautiful of all, named by the architect who submitted it, 'Jerusalem the Golden.' Though the most beautiful and magnificent, it could not be adopted, for there could not be laid for it suitable foundations. Beautiful, yet unattainable.

'The high that proved too high; the heroic for earth too hard; The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky.'

John reveals a life temple for every one, to be reared after the power of an endless life, splendid and grand. But there are on earth no worthy foundations for it, they must be laid yonder; for this which God means your life to be must, like that Holy City, New Jerusalem, come down from God out of heaven.

Preaching to Backsliders.

A recent remark made by Mr. Moody that 'where the modern pulpit especially seems to fail is in the matter of preaching to backsliding Christians,' opens up a significant and interesting topic for reflection and discussion. There can scarcely be a doubt that Mr. Moody is right. It is a fact that the failure to address the body of believers are those who are exposed to temptation and constantly prone to give way, is a failing of very many pulpits. It is noted by the late Canon Liddon that in every one of his epistles St. Paul had those in mind who had backslidden or 'erred' from the faith. He of all men realized the fact, to which he made confession in his own personal experience, that with conversion temptation does not leave a man. On the contrary, fleshly appetites are con-

stantly warring against the soul, and the inclination to yield often increases as the years go by. So it is, life becomes a constant struggle, a continued warfare. None understood this better than our earlier hymn-writers, with their injunction to

Fight on, my soul, till death.

The church attendant sinks into his pew on a Sunday. He has long held a membership in that body of believers. Yet, unknown to his fellow Christians, he has been led to adopt business methods which could not bear to have cast upon them the full light of the day. He has not constantly asked himself, 'What would Christ say? what would be Jesus' way—where does Duty point? He hears sermons addressed to the impenitent to come out and confess Christ; but he waits in vain for the word of admonition, of loving reproof, of entreaty to forsake a known sin. We are not writing of all churches—far from it—but of some, whose name we fear is Legion. It is indeed the building up of the church membership that is wanted;—not merely that building up which means greater activity in the church, but the building up which shall lead to an old-fashioned confession and repentance and endeavor to forsake sin. More and more the Christian needs to be told that he has wandered from His ways—not 'like lost sheep,' knowing no better, but as a conscious human, voluntarily, of his own perverted will, wantonly, wickedly, defiantly, till it is a sad and sorrowful truth that 'there is no health' in him. It is the church membership that ever needs preaching to, that ever needs to be warned, entreated, admonished, rebuked. Always stumbling and falling, it is the believer in Christ no less than the poor lost sheep who needs to be sought out and led back to the Father's home.

The Gift of Power.

If you would seek an object lesson in power, you have only to go out into the street to find it. On almost every side you will see heavy, ponderous cars running smoothly and rapidly over the tracks without any visible means of locomotion. Yet you know that somewhere there is a current of electricity which connects with the wires overhead and pushes them along. At certain locations along the route are situated the power houses in which are stored the mighty batteries which furnish the force to move the cars. How great this power is, is in evidence in the easily moving vehicles. Occasionally the supply is cut off in some way, and then the cars which before moved so rapidly are stopped, and until the power is again applied they are helpless.

Thus it is all through the universe. Mighty forces are behind and controlling all the great industries and activities of the earth—adjusting and directing everything which goes to make the world wiser and better. Talent, learning, eloquence, money, and a host of such like incidental agencies, all work together to supply the power to move forward the plans and purposes of life. Science has turned many leaves in her wonderful book, and the wonder grows that such marvelous things are so close at hand. The nineteenth century may well be proud of its grand achievements, and these are but the beginning—the Alpha, as it were, of what is yet to come in the fullness of time.

And so it is with the power from on high. Though unseen, it is real, and we have but to reach out and grasp it by the hand of faith, just as the electric lever which moves the car stretches out its long finger and touches the trolley wire. The power house of the Christian is so high, and the energy which controls and moves him emanates from the Holy Spirit. While he is under this divine power he is active and earnest in all good works, moved and

guided as the Spirit directs. He is eager to do, to be, to preach, to teach, to practice, to serve any way and every way, in high places or in low, to be humiliated, even to be persecuted; but once let the connection be broken, and the activity and earnestness weaken, there comes a standstill and though he still may profess, and be faithful enough in all the forms and observances of Christian service, he can never be a successful, acceptable Christian until he has again sought and found the power which will fill him with readiness and willingness for any service. The Christian of to day has greater need than ever to lay hold of this power; there is so much to draw him aside, to lead him off in devious and doubtful paths, that it takes a strong grip to keep his faith unwavering and his conscience steady.

A Gospel to be Used.

When we preach the Fatherhood of God we preach his divinity; when we point to Christ the perfect Saviour, it is a Divine Redeemer we declare; and when we plead with men to hear the voice and yield to the persuasions of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter into whose comfort we invite them is Divine. The divinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, this is our Gospel. By this Gospel we look for salvation. It is a gospel to be used, to be believed in, and to be lived by: not merely to be kept and admired and discussed and explained—Brooks.

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BILL STERETT'S GHOST RACE.

It Came After a Trying Experience With a Kitten in a Haunted House.

'I'll bet you \$10 you won't go out to that haunted house and stay there all night alone.' The speaker was Judge Ed Bower who for many years was the County Judge of Dallas county, Texas. His remark was addressed to Col. William Green Sterett, better known as plain 'Bill' Sterett, who for ten years was a well-known correspondent at Washington, and is now a picturesque personality of wide reputation. The banter was made to 'Bill' away back in the winter of 1886 before he went to Washington. A party of convivial friends sat around a comfortable fire in a restaurant in Dallas, Texas, discussing politics, spinning yarns, sipping from the cup that cheers, and incidentally keeping out of the storm that was raging outside.

The storm was what is known in Texas as a 'wet norther' and a 'wet norther' is to Texas and the Southwest what a blizzard is to the Dakotas and the Northwest. While a blizzard kills people a 'wet norther' of the Southwest is simply the tail end of a blizzard, and it depends upon the amount of moisture in a blizzard whether the 'norther' is wet or dry. A dry norther is bad but a wet norther is something awful. It blows and drizzles and freezes. A man caught out in one of them on a bald prairie with light clothing on and no stimulants 'to speak of' is in for the roughest experience of his life.

The norther of this night was fully up to the sample and it caused the friends in the

restaurant to tarry longer than usual. The conversation finally turned to ghosts, spooks, haunted houses, and uncanny things. Judge Bower told a story of a haunted house about a mile from the city limits of Dallas. He said the ghost that infested that house was known to assume many different shapes and to appear at any and all times, and that no one had ever been able to stay at the house all night, much less live in it, and consequently it had been tenanted for more than a year. 'Bill' Sterett announced his utter disbelief in anything of the nature of ghosts, and denounced Judge Bower's story as superstitious 'rot.' It was then the Judge made the banter in the opening sentence of this story. Bill took his wager at once and his friends set to work to help him prepare to win the money.

Bill wrote his wife a note saying that he had been sent to Fort Worth on an assignment, bought a quart of good whiskey, borrowed a six-shooter and 'hiked' out for the haunted house. It was a terrible night and Bill had not gone two blocks from the comfortable restaurant before he regretted making the bet, not because he was afraid of ghosts, but on account of the weather. The fine rain hit his face and stung like yellow jackets. The pavements were slippery and outside of a radius of ten feet from an electric light, which looked this night like the spirit photograph of a pumpkin it was as dark as the inside of a tunnel at night. At the city limits Bill hit the 'black waxy' mud. A man who has never tried to walk in the 'black waxy' mud of central Texas doesn't know what human locomotion under difficulties is. It is to human pedal extremities what sticky fly paper is to the feet of the fly.

Bill persevered, however, and finally reached the haunted house blowing like a porpoise. He pushed open the rickety old door, like a pit of candle, with which he provided himself, struck it on the mantle in some of its own grease, and proceeded to take an inventory of his surroundings. There was nothing in the room except an empty cracker box. There were a few dry chunks of half burnt wood in the fire place, and, kicking an end out of the box and whittling a few slivers from it, Bill started a chunk fire. He took a long pull from his quart bottle, sat down in front of the fire on the cracker box and soon began to feel quite comfortable.

In a few minutes Bill heard an unearthly noise at one of the windows. He pulled his six shooter, raised the window, threw open the shutter, but found nothing but dampness and darkness. He again 'hit' the bottle and resumed his seat with the exclamation that it 'was nothing but the wind.' In less than two minutes the same sound occurred at another window. It took Bill a little longer to reach that window than it had the other though it was no further from him. He found nothing. He resumed his seat and took another drink. He was beginning to feel a little queer and to wish he had not left the comfortable restaurant. In a few minutes the same hair-raising noise seemed to come from the door. That door was only fifteen feet from him, but it took Bill almost fifteen minutes to reach it and summon the courage to open it. He threw it wide open and then jumped back six feet with his six-shooter cocked and ready for instant use.

In through the door ran a little kitten, thin and poor, wet and bedraggled. It did not stop until it reached the fire, and then curled upon the warm hearth. Bill said that never before was he so glad to see a living breathing thing as he was that little kitten. He petted it and talked to it as though it were human. Then feeling that he had company, he took two drinks. The warmth of the fire and the whiskey made him so comfortable that he soon fell into a doze. The same noise that had before startled him came this time almost from his feet. He jumped up frozen with fear. Not three feet from him stood this kitten grown to the size of a young calf, with eyes as large as saucers; unnaturally visible and shining in the middle of each was an incandescent electric light. As Bill's hat began slowly to rise this thing said plainly and distinctly as a man could say it:

'There isn't anyone here but you and me-e-e.'

'That's so,' said Bill, as he made a dive for the door, 'and in about a second there won't be anybody here but you.'

Bill leaped ten feet from the door and made a running motion before he hit the ground. That 'black waxy' mud was no impediment to his speed. He made as good time on it as he would have done on cinder path. Bill's pudgy little stomach stuck out until it resembled a little boy tugging a big drum at a muster. He kept up the gait for about half a mile, when from sheer exhaustion he was compelled to sit down on a stump to get his wind. He had been sitting there the worst scared man in Dallas county, for about one minute, when a slight tap on his shoulder caused him to jump three feet in the air. There was the horrible object again. It stared at him and then said:

'That was a nice race we had.'

'Yes,' said Bill with a bound, as he again hit the black waxy, 'and we're going to have another.'

This time Bill held out until he felt exhausted in his own dooryard. He hid out from his friends for a week, and to this day Bill Sterett will shy at a ghost story like a moon-eyed horse at a stump.



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