

THE SECOND BLESSING.

(Rev. Andrew Murray.)

In the life of the believer there sometimes comes a crisis, as clearly marked as his conversion, in which he passes out of a life of continual feebleness and failure to one of strength and victory and abiding rest. The transition has been called the Second Blessing. Many have objected to the phrase as being unscriptural, or as tending to make a rule for all, what was only a mode of experience in some. Others have used it as helping to express clearly in human words what ought to be taught to believers as a possible deliverance from the ordinary life of a Christian to one of abiding fellowship with God and entire devotion to his service. In introducing it into the title of this book, I have indicated my belief that, rightly understood, the words express a Scriptural truth, and may be a help to believers in putting clearly before them what they may expect of God. Let me try and make clear how I think we ought to understand it.

I have connected the expression with the two Covenants. Why was it that God made two Covenants—not one, and not three? Because there were two parties concerned. In the First Covenant man was to prove what he could do, and what he was. In the Second, God would show what He would do. The former was the time of needed preparation; the latter, the time of Divine fulfillment. The same necessity as there was for this in the race, exists in the individual too. Conversion makes of a sinner a child of God, full of ignorance and weakness, without any conception of what the whole-hearted devotion is that God asks of him, or the full possession God is ready to take of him. In some cases the transition from the elementary stage is by gradual growth and enlightenment. But experience teaches, that in the great majority of cases the growth is not found. To those who have never found the secret of a healthy growth, of victory over sin and perfect rest in God, and have possibly despaired of ever finding it, because all of their efforts have been failures, it has often been a wonderful help to learn that it is possible by a single decisive step, bringing them into right relation with Christ, His Spirit, and His strength, to enter upon an entirely new life.

What is needed to help a man to take that step is very simple. He must see and confess the wrongness, the sin, of the life he is living, not in harmony with God's will. He must see and believe in the life which the Scripture holds out, which Christ Jesus promises to work and maintain in him. As he sees that his failure has been owing to his striving in his own strength, and believes that our Lord Jesus will actually work all in him in Divine power, he takes courage, and dares surrender himself to Christ anew. Confessing and giving up all that is of self and sin, yielding himself wholly to Christ and His service, he believes and receives new power to live his life by the faith of the Son of God. The change is in many cases as clear and as marked, as wonderful, as conversion. For lack of a better name, that of a Second Blessing came most naturally.

When once it is seen how greatly this change is needed in the life of most Christians, and how entirely it rests on faith in Christ and His power as revealed in the Word, all doubt as to its Scripturalness will be removed. And when once its truth is seen, we shall be surprised to find how, in history and teaching, we discover what illustrates and confirms it.

Take the two-fold passage of Israel through water, first out of Egypt, then into Canaan.

The wilderness journey was the result of unbelief and disobedience, allowed by God to humble them, and show what was in their heart. When this purpose had been accomplished, a second blessing led them through Jordan, as mightily into Canaan as the first had brought them through the Red Sea out of Egypt.

Or take the Holy Place and the Holiest of All as types of the life in the two covenants, and equally in the two stages of Christian experience. In the former, very real access to God and fellowship with Him, but always with a veil between. In the latter, full access into the immediate presence of God, and the full experience of the power of the heavenly life. As the eyes are opened to see how terribly the average Christian life comes short of God's purpose, and how truly the mingled life can be expelled by the power of a new revelation of what God waits to do, the types of Scripture will shine with a new meaning.

A look to the teachings of the New Testament. In Romans, Paul contrasts the life of the Christian under the law with that under grace, the spirit of bondage with the Spirit of adoption. What does this mean but that Christians may still live under the law and its bondage, that they need to come out of this into the full life of grace and liberty through the Holy Spirit, and that, when they see the difference, nothing is needed but the surrender of faith, to accept and experience what grace will do by the Holy Spirit.

To the Corinthians Paul writes of some being carnal and still babes, walking as men after the flesh; others being spiritual, with spiritual discernment and character; to the Galatians he speaks of the liberty with which Christ by the Spirit, makes free from the law, in contrast to those who sought to perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit, and who gloried in the flesh;—all to call them to recognize the danger of the carnal, divided life, and to come at once to the life of faith, the life of the Spirit, which alone is according to God's will.

Everywhere we see in Scripture, what the state of the Church at the present day confesses, that conversion is only the gate that leads into the path of life, that within that gate there is still great danger of mistaking the path, of turning aside, or turning back, and that where this has taken place we are called at once, and with our whole heart to turn and give ourselves to nothing less than all that Christ is willing to work in us. Just as there are many who have always thought that conversion must be slow and gradual and uncertain, because they only take man's powers into account, and cannot understand how it can be sudden and final, so many cannot see how the revelation of the true life of holiness, and the entrance on it by faith out of a life of self-effort and failure, may be immediate and permanent. They look too much to man's efforts, and know not how the second blessing is nothing more nor less than a new vision of what Christ is willing to work in us, and the surrender of faith that yields all.

I would fain hope that what I have written in this book may help some one to see that the Second Blessing is just what they need, is what God by His Spirit will work in them, is nothing but the acceptance of Christ in all His saving power as our strength and life, and is what will bring them into, and fit them for that full life in the New Covenant, in which God works all in all.

In the life of George Muller of Bristol, there was such an epoch four years after his

conversion to which he ever after looked back, and of which he often spoke as his entrance into the true Christian life.

In an address given to ministers and workers after his ninetieth birthday, he spoke thus of it himself: "That leads to another thought—the full surrender of the heart to God. I was converted in November, 1825, but I only came into the full surrender of the heart four years later, in July, 1829. The love of money was gone, the love of place was gone, the love of position was gone, the love of worldly pleasures and engagements was gone. God, God, alone became my portion. I found my all in Him; I wanted nothing else. And by the grace of God this has remained, and has made me a happy man, an exceedingly happy man, and it led me to care only about the things of God. I ask affectionately, my beloved brethren, have you fully surrendered the heart to God, or is there this thing or that thing with which you are taken up irrespective of God? I read a little of the Scriptures before, but preferred other books; but since that time the revelation He has made of Himself has become unspeakably blessed to me, and I can say from my heart, God is an infinitely lovely Being. Oh, be not satisfied until in your own inmost soul you can say, God is an infinitely lovely Being!"

It is impossible to speak too strongly of the need there is to know that, as wonderful and free and alone sufficient as is the grace that pardons, is the grace that sanctifies; we are just as absolutely dependent upon the latter as the former. We can do as little to the one as to the other. The grace that works in us must as exclusively do all in us and through us as the grace that pardons does for us. In the one case as the other, everything is by faith alone. Not to apprehend this brings a double danger. On the one hand, people think that grace cannot be more exalted than in the bestowal of pardon on the vile and unworthy; and a secret feeling rises that if God is so magnified by our sins more than anything else, we must not expect to be freed from them in this life. With many, this cuts at the root of the life of true holiness. On the other hand, from not knowing that grace is always and alone to do all the work in our sanctification and fruit-bearing, men are thrown upon their own efforts, their life remains one of feebleness and bondage under the law, and they never yield themselves to let grace do all it would.

Let us listen to what God's word says: "By grace have ye been saved, through faith; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, erected in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." As we see that grace is to do all, literally and absolutely, in us, so that all our actings are the showing forth grace in us, we shall consent to live the life of faith—a life in which every moment everything is expected from God. It is only then that we shall experience that sin shall not, never, not for a moment, have dominion over us.

"Ye are not under the law but under grace." There are three possible lives. One entirely under the law; one entirely under grace; one a mixed life, partly law, partly grace. It is this last against which Paul warned the Romans. It is this which is so common, and works such ruin among the Christians. Let us find whether this is not our position, and the cause of our low state. Let us beseech God to open our eyes by the Holy Spirit to see that in the New Covenant everything, every movement, every moment of our Christian life, is