

THE AVERAGE MAN

Wilmot Eardley

In worldly affairs, as a rule, it is only the clever and the strong and those with originality who succeed. Is there a place in the kingdom of God for those who are just ordinary, average kind of people? Can those who possess no special gifts, and have no striking personality, can such ever hope to make any great headway in the spiritual life; or must they be content to be very ordinary Christians, with only a limited experience of God's mighty power? St. Paul tells us that "God has chosen the things that are not"—are not clever, are not out of the ordinary, are not above the average—yes, thank God, though only average, or even below the average naturally, this is no hindrance on God's side. He can do wonders for us all, whether gifted or otherwise. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet riches to men of understanding" (Ecclesiastes 0:11).

After all, in an army, while a limited few occupy positions of high authority, it is the "rank and file" who go a long way to win the battle.

Mrs. Carpenter of the Salvation Army has said, "Mediocrity, plus God, can do wonders."

Oswald Chambers said, "For the lowliest least promising, and most insignificant person, the Great Life is possible. The mightiest things are made available for ordinary persons in and through Christ."

Spurgeon, one of the greatest of preachers, was pointed to the Saviour by an unknown, illiterate local preacher, with a very simple message.

Moody, the greatest evangelist of modern times, was led to seek and to receive the anointing of the Spirit through two simple women whose names are not known; and with what results!

Hudson Taylor, that apostolic missionary, though we consider him a great man, and one marvelously used by God, thus states the case himself, "It is remarkable how the Lord Himself has chosen his instruments, so that even the most insignificant, in His hand, are able to be to the praise of His glory. I myself, for instance, am not specially gifted. I am shy by nature, but my gracious and merciful God and Father inclined Himself to me and strengthened me while I was still young."

We must not, of course, make the mistake of thinking that if we receive fullness of blessing, this will at once transform us into striking characters with attractive personality. This surely is not the case—for God does not undertake to reconstruct our temperament or our make up—He settled that before He created us and sent us into the world. "In thy book all my members were written when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:6). "God has made us what we are" (Ephesians 2:10, Moffatt). We may still be very ordinary folk in ourselves, but have extraordinary grace.

The Bible has many instances of men whom God blessed and used, though probably not specially striking characters in themselves, in fact, just average people.

Isaac was not in himself anything special. He was chiefly remarkable for being the son of a remarkable father, having had a remarkable God-given birth, and a remarkable experience on Mount Moriah, which was, in effect, a death and resurrection. Yet we are

distinctly told "The Lord blessed him, and he grew great and went forward" (Genesis 26:12-13).

Then Gideon was certainly not made of heroic stuff. He was timid and retiring. He said truly, "My family is poor, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). He was almost you might say, below the average, but when "The Spirit of the Lord clothed himself with Gideon" (Judges 6:34, R. V., marg.) a mighty deliverance was granted through this weak man.

Then, in the New Testament, think of Andrew. He was apparently a quiet unobtrusive man who took no leading part among the disciples, in fact is generally spoken of merely as "Simon Peter's brother." Peter, however, the greatest of the twelve apostles, owed his introduction to Christ entirely to his less conspicuous brother.

Again, in Acts 18, we have the case of Aquilla and Priscilla, devoted to the Lord, and deeply taught, yet probably but a simple pair; yet chosen by God to lead the gifted, eloquent preacher into a fuller experience. St. Paul thought the world of them, and God used them wherever they went (Romans 16:3-4).

Those who in worldly matters would never make their mark, and are very ordinary, may yet live a life that pleases God, and do "good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

So then, bearing in mind Jeremiah 45:5, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not . . .," let us not envy the gifts of others, but rather yield ourselves unreservedly to God that He may work in us "to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). "Content to fill a little space if Thou be glorified."—Living Words.

A GREAT WORK

Nehemiah was leading his countrymen in rebuilding the walls of their beloved city, Jerusalem. Their enemies sought by ridicule and cunning to stop the work. They called Nehemiah to come to a conference, thinking to do him mischief. But Nehemiah replied, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease whilst I leave it and come down to you?"

There are reasons why Nehemiah was right in thinking that he was doing a great work. First, it was work of construction. He was not tearing down property and destroying human lives, he was building. Then it was a work which God was well pleased. He had promised that if Israel would turn from her sins to Him, He would restore her to her former place of abode. Nehemiah was leading his people in the way of repentance and helping to make the fulfillment of God's promise a reality.

Any work that these two features of constructiveness and of helping God to fulfill His good purposes for men is truly a great work. A mother who is training her children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, a teacher who is moulding her students after the example of Jesus Christ, a workman who is doing something that is a help to his fellow men all are doing a great work.

It gives one a sense of delight and satisfaction to be doing a great work. To know that you are working with God in furthering His purpose for men gives vision for the task. If you are doing a great work, stay at it. Don't come down. Though the world may not ap-

plaud, you will have God's smile. Say in the words of the song:

"I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than world wide fame,
I'd rather be true to His holy name."

—R. Barclay Warren

OBEDIENCE IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

By J. B. Chapman

Away back in the days when the stories in the school readers had morals attached, there was a story about a son whose father taught him obedience, and by the learning of his lesson, the son's life was saved. The family home was in the country. The son, a lad of eight or ten years, was sent on horseback on an errand to a neighbor whose house was on the opposite side of a river. While the boy was at the neighbor's house a terrific storm arose which made it advisable for the boy to spend the night at the neighbor's house. But the lad insisted that his father would expect him to come home in the morning as soon as it was light. The father suspecting this would be the reasoning of his son, arose early and took up his post on his own side of the river just as the gray dawn appeared. The father was scarcely more than in his place when the son was observed entering the river on the opposite side. The river was swollen from the floods of the night before, and was even deeper and swifter than at first appeared. The noble horse was tossed in the swift flood, and the small boy was scarcely able to keep his perch upon the animal's back. And to add to the danger, as the horse floundered the lad became frightened. Finally, looking toward the bank which he had hoped to reach, he spied his father, and called out in anguish, "O father, I shall drown." But keeping his presence of mind, in spite of his own misgivings, the father answered sternly, "If you do, I shall punish you severely." Accustomed to obedience, the lad clung to the mane of the horse and was brought safely to the shore. Then the father took his son in his arms and said, "Obedience, my son, has saved your life today, even as the Scripture promise that his days shall be long upon earth who honors his father and mother."

I thought of this story yesterday when I saw a sick child who was so spoiled and pampered that he would neither rest nor take medicine, no matter how much the parents begged and threatened. Now the little thing's life pretty much demanded upon its ability to obey, and it had never been taught obedience. That weakness which denied the child the chance to learn obedience is really wickedness.

But it is not children alone who need to know obedience. We all need to learn this lesson well. I need it just now myself. Now when deep sorrow has become my lot, I find my best consolation in obedience. For no matter who sends or what comes, as an obedient child of God nothing can get to me except it come through God's active or permissive will, and so by the time it reaches me, it is His will, and it is mine but to obey. If active duty is involved, I must obey. If passive longsuffering is the demand, then too I must obey. And I am realizing anew the truth of Samuel's words that God prefers obedience to sacrifice, and to hearken rather than to receive the richest gift at our hands.