

GOD'S SCHOOL, AND ITS LESSONS

Theodore L. Cuyler

A certain gray-haired pupil in the school of his Heavenly Father once said, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." His experience in that school had been very remarkable, from his early beginnings among the sheepcotes of Bethlehem. Constantly seeking instruction, he had prayed, "Teach me Thy statutes," "Teach me Thy way," "Teach me to do Thy will." Sharp schooling had he received in those days of humiliation when a traitor-son drove him out of Jerusalem. Terrible punishment did he bring upon himself once when "lust brought forth sin, and sin brought forth death," in the crime against Uriah. But had David not been under the instruction and discipline of the Holy Spirit, we never would have had many of the richest, profoundest, and most majestic Psalms,—many of their most piercing wails and of their most jubilant thanksgivings.

That same school, in which David was a pupil nearly thirty centuries ago is open yet. The term-time is as long as life lasts. It has its recreations and its rewards and its medals of honor, but no vacations. School is never "out" until death comes to the door and beckons the pupil away. And oh! how happy many a scholar has been when the messenger has said to his heart, "Now, my child, you have learned the hard lessons, and have finished your course; now you may come home."

Of this wonderful school God Himself is the Principal or Superintendent. The supreme purpose of it is to form character and to fit the immortal soul for the after-life of eternity. If there is no immortality of being, and if "death ends all" then this world is an utter failure, and what we call Providence becomes an unintelligible jargon. The moment we recognize the fact that this life is only a training-school to fit us for a coming world, that the Bible is its infallible text-book and the Holy Spirit its instructor and the Lord of glory its all-wise and all-loving Head, then dark things become light, seemingly crooked things become straight, and mysteries become plain. If I am only a scholar, I must submit to the rod for my own correction, and remember Who hath appointed it. If I am only a scholar, I must spell out the hard lessons and submit to the sharp tasks, even though the pages of my diary be often blotted with tears; the things that I understand not now, I "shall know hereafter," when I have graduated into heaven.

My Divine Teacher seems to have two great methods in this earthly school of His,—instruction and discipline. I am utterly ignorant and terribly wayward, therefore I need both; and they often blend together. Part of my instruction I get from His wondrous Word, and it is very inspiring and fascinating. A part I receive from the Holy Spirit's work, and it is very sanctifying. But no part of our schooling costs so dearly or yields such gracious fruits as the process of chastisement. The most famous teacher in Philadelphia, in his day, once said to a rich, indulgent father, "You must take your boy out of my school if you are not willing to have me chastise him; he and the school too will be ruined if I have no discipline."

Our Heavenly Father conducts His training-school for the very salvation of His scholars, and thus for His own honor and glory. The very word "disciple" (discipulus) signifies a

little scholar. The first essential to discipleship of the Lord Jesus was the willingness to deny self and to bear a cross at His bidding. That principle runs through all the deepest, richest Christian experience, and will do so, I suppose, to the end of time. Often when the hard lesson starts the tears, and the aching heart cries out in anguish, the hand of the dear Master points up to the words: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth . . . No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." It is the "afterward" that justifies the rod and reconciles us to the stroke. Grand old Richard Baxter exclaimed after a life of hard toil and constant suffering, "O God, I thank Thee for a bodily discipline of eight and fifty years." Paul was indulging in no hypocritical cant when he said, "I rejoice in tribulation." God's richest and most loyal scholars are made such by an expensive education. His brightest gold comes out of the hottest furnace.

In this school of grace He employs many tutors. Sometimes He employs Poverty, which does for the soul what it did for the minds of such hard-faring youths as Hugh Miller and James A. Garfield; it sinews the strength and develops force. More than one Christian who was getting too prosperous for his spiritual good has been turned over to this severe tutor, and he has sent him down to an humbler bench. As the purse was emptied, the soul grew richer in humility, and began to bear the fruits of the Spirit.

Another of God's tutors is Disappointment; and some of the best lessons in life are taught us by that stern-visaged schoolmaster. One of his lessons is that this world was not made solely for us, and our loss is often another man's gain. A second lesson is that our losses are often the very richest blessings. We had "devised a way" for ourselves, and it would have led to certain danger. God could not have sent a severer judgment on us than to let us have our own way; so He sent disappointment to drive us back. We cried out bitterly at first, but by and by we saw what we had escaped, and blessed the Hand that had smitten us in the face. If I ever reach heaven, I shall feel like rearing a monument there of gratitude to the stern-visaged old tutor who so often helped me on by putting me back, and stripped me that I might travel heavenward the lighter and the freer.

Ah, brethren, this is a marvellous school which Divine Wisdom has opened, and a Father's love is superintending! He never spares the rod when the child is in danger of being spoiled. His pruning-knife cuts deep, but the clusters of grapes are all the larger and the sweeter. When Michael Angelo saw a block of marble lying in the dirt, he said, "There is an angel in that marble, and I will bring it out." His hammer and chisel struck hard and deep, till the angel came forth. God's hammer of trial, blow on blow, brings out such angels as Faith, and sweet-visaged Peace, and strong-limbed Patience, and Sympathy, and the Love that has the likeness of Jesus Christ.

This school of God will soon close for us; the term-time is shortening every hour. Let us not shirk a lesson, however hard, or wince under a rod of chastisement, however sore and heavy. The richer will be the crown if we endure to the end and graduate into glory.

What a promotion will that be for hearts that so often ached, and for eyes that so often wept, and for the faith that so often bled under the blow—to be lifted into the magnificent inheritance of the saints in light!

TOO BUSY TO DO HIS WORK

J. B. Chapman

In the twentieth chapter of I Kings is the story of a soldier who was left in charge of a prisoner taken in battle. His superior told the soldier that he must keep this prisoner safely, and that if he escaped, then the soldier must pay a large sum of money or forfeit his own life in penalty. No other special duty seems to have been assigned the soldier—he was just to keep his prisoner securely. But the prisoner escaped, and when the soldier reported to his superior, his shallow explanation was, "I was busy here and there and he was gone." The soldier was so occupied with secondary matters that he let his important service pass. This is one of the easiest things in the world to do. To the average Christian there is more danger that he shall become occupied with the insignificant than that he shall be swamped with outbroken wickedness.

We have been told that "an idle brain is the devil's workshop," and we do know that leisure of itself is no handmaiden of faith and spirituality. One should be employed, if possible, and he should not be just triflingly employed. And yet one can get so busy with his secular affairs that he will not have time for prayer meeting and the services of the church. A parent can be so occupied with the effort to furnish food and clothing and housing and education for his children that he will forget to have family prayer and look after spiritual welfare of those who have been committed to his care. A man can become so occupied with his friends that he has no time for communion with the Lord. He may be so taken up with newspapers and magazines that he crowds out the Bible and literature dealing with the interests of the soul. When a man is so busy he cannot look after the very things for which he was created and redeemed, he is just too busy.

It is even possible for one to become so busy with the work of the Lord that he does not have time for the Lord himself. Luther found that the more work the day demanded, the more time he must have for prayer. Thus instead of allowing secondary interests to take the place of first line concerns, this man of marvelous spiritual strength made the increase of secondary duties reasons for increasing attention to the principal things.

Think of a soldier who was just "busy here and there"—at nothing in particular, and let his prisoner get away! But before you pass judgment on his carelessness and folly, think of the man who is so busy about the things of the body that he lets his soul go on unsaved. Think of the man who is so busy about preparing to meet his social, political or financial demands that he must give no time to preparing for the judgment bar of God. Do not let any of us get so busy that we cannot find time to do our work.

WEDDING

Russell-Wade

At the Reformed Baptist parsonage, 1A Carleton St., Saint John, N. B., Stephen Russell and Marie C. Wade, both of Saint John, were united in marriage by Rev. P. H. Green, on March 22nd, 1950.