



The King's Highway

An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness

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Box 188
Aug. 51

VOL. XXXVIII.

MONCTON, N. B., JANUARY 31ST, 1952

No. 290

"But If Not"

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Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King—BUT IF NOT—be it known unto thee, O king that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.—Daniel 3:16-18.

Here we have the story of the magnificent courage of three young Hebrews, a story which is always full of interest, however constantly we may read it, because of all that it illustrates of eternal principle of all true, and godly, and worthy lives. It illustrates as vividly as does any record in the whole of the Bible, that devotion to God which refuses even formal homage to a popular idol. It is an illustration of the faith which creates courage and fearlessness in those who are inspired by it. It reveals the calmness of a God-committed life—surely a lesson which needs to be learned, and re-learned in these days when there is so much that is analogous, although in lesser degree, to the issue with which these three Hebrew children were confronted. It clearly reveals to us the righteousness which makes a man as bold as a lion, even when standing before kings; and it also reveals the saving presence of God in the midst of the fires of persecution. "Lo," says the king, "I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

It is a wonderful subject. Oh, that we had a living painter who could depict it for all generations. What a subject for a picture! The great idol—the prostrate crowds—the three young men with stiff backs, upon whose faces something of the very glory of God can be seen, and who stands up in bold and noble refusal to bow the knee to the image which has been set up—and away in the background, the lurid flames of the furnace which await their decision.

Let these things, however, but serve as an introduction to my main message. Have you noticed the significant proviso with which these three young men concluded their protest to the king? "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter, O king," they say. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king; **but if not**"—what then? If God does not work the miracle, what alternative is there open to

disappointed faith? It is about that that I want to speak.

There is nothing more important in the whole realm of our Christian lives than just this—that faith, when it is disappointed of its expectations is able to say, "but if not." Let me illustrate what I mean. Prayer is not always answered in our own way. The promises of God do not always fulfill themselves according to our conception. The hopes with which life is at one time or another full, are not always realized, even though they seem to be most legitimate. Success is not always the result of fidelity and faithfulness. Progress in the work of extending the Kingdom of God is not always rapid and recognizable. If our prayers do not seem to be answered, if the promises of God do not materialize, if our hopes do not eventuate in experience, if

GOD IS ABLE . . .

I know my God is able to deliver;
Able to save from direst human ill;
Able, as when He saved the Hebrew children,
Almighty still.

But if, perchance, His plans are not as my plans.

If hid in darkness should my pathway be;
If when I plead He does not seem to answer,
Nor care for me—

Then, though men scoff and bitterly deride me—

Listen! I fling my challenge to the sky!
God can deliver—but IF NOT, I'll trust Him,
And trusting DIE.

M. M. Dexter

success seems to be permanently delayed, and progress in the work of the Kingdom seems to be for ever halting—what then? What has faith to say? For upon the answer to this question depends everything that is worthwhile in life. Is there one who has not prayed as to a closed heaven, and a silent God?

"But if not." It is not doubt which is expressed in this proviso, but faith. This is the faith which recognizes God's will as supreme above all other considerations of self-desire; and accepts it, not with equanimity, but with enthusiasm. This is the faith which relates itself to the contradictions of God, as well as to the commands of God. If the sky continues cloudless, if the schemes of life come out on the victory side—we will follow; we will serve; we will continue as servants of the Most High. "But if not"—what then? These three young men affords us an illustration

and an example. It is as if they said: "If not"—we will not abate one jot or tittle of our testimony. "If not"—we will still believe in the governing will of God. "If not"—we will still refuse to bow down to the idol. "But if not—be it known unto thee, O king, we stand where we do, and where we did." "We can yield our lives, but e cannot sacrifice our consciences."

The alternative of a man's faith attests the quality of his character. For instance, here is a man who, because he is disappointed becomes self-pitying; he nurses his grief, until the babe grows into the giant, and that which he nourished becomes tyrannical and despotic. We know the man to whom self-consequence is the supreme consideration. We know the man who is satisfied with a shallow answer to a great question. We know the man in whom disappointment is apt to breed disbelief. God meant, by means of this isolated experience of disappointment, to woo him into a closer fellowship with Himself. This is the man in whom the subtle interactions of conscience and courage lead to loss of integrity, and hence, to loss of vision, for it is the man who is pure in heart who sees God. This is the man whose character becomes deteriorated because his disappointed faith has no alternative, because his lips have never learned to frame the noble words of these three Hebrew children, "But if not." In the light of these words look over the whole programme of your life, not only over that which has gone, but over that which is yet to come, and write over it: "This is my faith. This is my hope. This is my expectation. **But if not**—then the programme is unchanged; I go on with Him who loved me, and gave Himself for me. I trust Him and not my own poor mis-interpretation of the greatness of His promises, and of His grace."

"But if not." Let me point out to you the true significance, not on the negative, but on the positive side. There will be no deviation from duty, however great the disappointment. There will be cessation of hostility to evil, however long delayed success may be. There will be no lowering of aim. The man of God is as firm and unmovable as the very rock. For instance, there is the statesman who is defeated at the poles on a moral issue; the fluctuating and unstable emotions and suffrages of the crowd are against him. Does he give up the struggle? Does he say: "This is not politic; I will cast aside my faith?" No, if he is a worthy man, he will say, "If I win, this is carried. If not, it carries me!" Or again, there is the business man who applies consecration to commerce; who applies the ethics

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