

'The Value of a Thought'

Andrew Bonar:

The value of a 'thought' may be very great. Everybody knows this. It may be the seed of a great harvest. But it is not the thought merely in itself, but the thought carried out and used.

It is like what in the mechanical department has been found to be the value of a small piece of metal, if turned to use by a little skill and application. A late writer shows that 'a farthing's worth of iron may be converted into an ounce of steel, by labour worth 4,5d. That, again, might be converted by labour into 2250 yards of spring wire, worth £13,4s.6d. By putting it through yet another process, that wire might be made into 7650 spring balances, worth 2/6d each, which, in the aggregate, could give £960 odds.'

Starting with this illustration from mechanics, let me now show how in practical spiritual work a simple thought became the means of a great amount of blessing to souls. It is now thirty-three years at least since I first used this model.

About the year 1845, while in Collace, having read all I could find on the Tabernacle, and examined all the pictures and drawings that generally illustrate such books, I went one day to the workshop of a plain good man (an Old Light elder in the village of Sachar) and told him my idea of the possibility of making out of common wood a model of the Tabernacle. He was a turner and joiner. The good man was interested, and, at my suggestion, a board about 3 feet long and 1,5 broad was got ready - the oblong shape of the Tabernacle. Then he prepared sixty wooden pillars, and set them in their place to form the enclosure. Next, boring the pillars at the top, a cord was drawn through, and a rude contrivance was thus formed for suspending linen curtains.

The first altar was boards of wood shaped into a square, and the boards covered with brass-filings. So also the laver. And then the forty boards of the Holy and Most Holy Place were got ready and covered with gold-leaf.

At this juncture, a kind friend in Perth, hearing of my attempt, sent me a large ram's skin dyed red, to form one of the four coverings. Next, a 'wise-hearted' lady gave me a shawl of the Angola goat's hair to form the goat's-hair covering. The other two I supplied after a time with linen, on which were stripes of purple, blue, and scarlet, and a piece of badger-skin formed the outer covering.

It was not, however, till I had been in London, and had there seen a much more substantial model, that I found means of providing the furniture of the Sanctuary : Candlestick, Shew-bread, Incense-altar, and the Ark of the Covenant.

In about a year thereafter my wooden pillars were exchanged for metal, etc. In short, I got in London a model so far ready-made, but I was led to alter some of the articles. That model cost above £3, nothing very attractive or beautiful in the appearance.

I remember the first evening when I exhibited the model in our church in Kinrossie to about one hundred people. The sun was near his setting, and his light was pouring in at one window. I lifted up the red ram's-skin covering, and asked, 'What does this remind you of?' A solemn silence first, and then a whisper : 'Blood, blood !'

Gradually, I got familiar with the whole subject, and in my own mind had special doctrines connected with all the different parts, e.g. the Door, with its royal colours, blue, purple, scarlet, was the Gospel call by divine authority (our God and King), 'Come freely' - no bar, no bolt. The Altar, justification ; the Laver, sanctification ; the Fine Linen, righteousness.

I soon discovered that I could vary the lecture, and sometimes abridge - sometimes enlarge - according to the audience. Young and old alike, I discovered, were drawn by it. On bidding a young person tell her mother to come, the little girl replied, 'May I come myself?' 'How often have you seen it already?' 'Only five times!'

I discovered that I myself never felt it stale. There was endless variety in that setting forth of Salvation, alike, too, in occasional drawing-room gatherings or in cottages.

When I came to Glasgow I got the case made for carrying the Courts, and the box for the Holy and Most Holy Places.

I had visits from some well-known people who wanted to see the model, among others, Mr. Soltau, who wrote a book on the Tabernacle. Canon Savage came on purpose to spend an hour going over the model.

It has been shown in about one hundred places, and about two hundred times.

My cousin, an Irvingite, insisted that silver was the type of love. 'How do you find that?' 'It was so common in Solomon's days, nothing accounted of!'

Many confused Solomon's Temple with the Tabernacle. They are quite distinct. The Tabernacle showed God's way of grace ; the Temple showed the kingdom of glory.

Many good hints I have got from others. J.M. said about brass : 'Brass will crack and not stand great heat.' 'But the Hebrew is properly copper.' 'Ah, that will do ; that stands any heat.' Another said : 'Copper, not brass, is the right word for the material for the altar.' 'Why?' 'Brass is a mixed metal, and there was to be no mixture in the things of God ; no linen and woollen.'

A minister of the Free Church, now gone, was first awakened to interest in spiritual things by seeing the model exhibited in Cathcart Free Church.

About the year 1862 I had shown the model in the hall of Free St.Enoch's. At the close, Mr. Nichol, colleague to Dr. Henderson, rose and said he would like to tell a story connected with the model. When he was a student at home in Dundee, he heard I was to show it one day (a holiday of some kind) in the schoolhouse of Tealing, where Mr. Mellis was minister. Among those who flocked in was a boy - a schoolboy. he had recently played the truant for a week. He had got a shilling from his father to buy a new book, had spent it, and kept away from school, but came home every day at the regular time, pretending all was right. He was miserable under this system of deceit. In this state he came into the schoolroom, and when hearing of the Altar and its blood, and the Laver purifying, saw how he could be forgiven, found rest, went home, and confessed all.

At Bishopbriggs an elder said, 'It was the Blood that was the best of it.' A little girl, telling all about the model, dwelt on the Blood, - 'And the Blood was shown every day, every day !'

In Moray Free Church, Edinburgh, a young man reminded me that I had shown the model in a meeting in Carrick Street, and said, 'That was the night J.F. was brought in.'

Dr. Robert Burns of Toronto saw it in 1850, and said at the close, 'It is true, "faith cometh by hearing," but, friends, may we not say also to-night, faith cometh by seeing, for we have seen the Gospel ?'

Dr. Bannerman remarked, 'I noticed you sometimes said, "This suggests such a truth." That's the right way to put it, for, while we have authority for some things as meant to be types, there are others we cannot say more than that "they suggest this."

Mr. Pinkerton of Kilwinning remarked, after seeing the model, 'I never heard a better sermon.'

A lady met me, and said, 'Thanks for the sermon last Tuesday, the sermon you did not preach.' 'What was it?' 'I came into the church, and the sight of the furniture of the Tabernacle was a great sermon to me - the best sermon I ever heard - a flood of light.'

Mr. John Smith, our missionary, was conscious to himself of a new hold of truth from the day he saw the model, and always took delight afterwards in seeing it again and again.

M. W. got more sure rest to his soul the night he first saw the Tabernacle.

The wife of a minister in the country, and her niece, had been awakened, and came to call. She sat for an hour asking questions about the truth suggested by the model which providentially was on my study-table. I had been showing it to a student.

The account of the High Priest's dress on the Day of Atonement, - all white linen, - while he carried in the charger of blood, was blessed to a young woman, who never till then entertained the thought of every day looking at the blood again, and going to God.

Mr. L., at Alloa, asked me what I thought about this : 'If the Most Holy Place was shut all the year till the Day of Atonement, the dust would be thick, and the air anything but fresh. Would the Glory hinder the dust falling? and would it not give a constant freshness to the room?'

A minister's wife said it was on occasion of a lecture at Dundee on the Tabernacle, that she first felt the holiness of God, and a strong wish to speak to some one about her soul.

Mrs. S. (Balbeggie, near Collace) never so felt the holiness of God's presence as in looking in when the light was put into the Holy of Holies, and we were asked to think of going alone into God's presence there.

The Gate - no bar, and so easily opened. Many spoke of that. Young people saw at once how young Samuel could 'open the gate of the house of the Lord.'

In the Court the pillars had a 'fillet' each, as well as a 'hook', made of Ransom-money. Dr. Lorimer stopped me when showing it at the Shelter in Glasgow, and asked the girls to notice, 'Even the ornaments of God's people must be in connection with ransom,' - not to please ourselves.

The Altar with its daily lamb. One came to me and said, 'I've been thinking if it took fifteen hundred years to set

out a picture of the Lamb of God, O what is He Himself !' The Altar was carried by the staves. God taught the priests to be very reverent. The four horns are the emblem of power. The blood on the horns was to show the power there was in the blood. A worthy elder in Perth used to speak of his conversion as 'the day when I first knew the power of the blood.'

The Laver, filled with pure water to the brim. Water represents the Spirit. The Spirit will stay wherever the blood is. First the Altar, then the Laver. The Altar says, 'the blood of Jesus delivers from the guilt of sin.' The Laver says, 'the Spirit of Jesus delivers from the power of sin.'

A friend asked, 'Where did they get the water for the Laver the first time? From the stream that flowed from the Smitten Rock !' The Holy spirit from a Smitten Christ !

The Badger-skin and the Goat-hair coverings. In the R.V. 'badger-skin' is 'seal-skin,' and in the margin, 'porpoise-skin.' One said about these, 'I used to be content with the Badger-skin (mere shelter), but now I'm under the Goat's-hair - delighting in the beauty put upon the justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed.' Mr. T.B., from Holland, was particularly interested in the four coverings. 'That's my spiritual history. I first learned Christ as a covert from the storm, then His blood as a Substitute - the Ram-skin ; then His righteousness on me - the Goat's-hair ; and then the royal dress - blue, purple, and scarlet ; our being made kings to God.'

The Candlestick with its shaft of gold and branches : Christ and His people. The branches of equal length, proved by the Arch of Titus. God's people all alike before Him.

The Shew-bread. Few know why it is called 'shew-bread.' It is 'presence-bread,' - bread handed out to us from God's own table. Curious to find most vague ideas, and those who have them very unwilling to let them be known. Thus about the Shew-bread, just as about the size and shape of the Ark. A Jew pointed out to me that I should have had the staves of the Ark in another position, protruding through the curtain a little, to show that the Ark was always there. We spoke of the twelve loaves, should they be piled one on the other, or laid along like tents pitched? He held the former way. 'But the Hebrews do not require that.' 'No.' 'Why then?' 'Our Rabbis say so.' 'But there is an objection to that, very strong. I was showing this model in a cottage, and put the question to a row of shrewd old women, whether the loaves should be piled up, or put the other way? At once one of them said, 'Not piled one on another.' 'Why?' 'They would mould before the end of the week.' 'What do you say to the old woman's difficulty?' 'Oh,' replied the Jew, 'she is a wise woman. She is so far right, but our Rabbis get over that by telling us that silver forks were put between each loaf, so that there was a current of air !' 'Then you are as bad as the Papists, you add to the written Word?' He had no reply but 'Our Rabbis think they have authority for it.'

The Incense-Altar. A type, not of prayer, but of what makes prayer acceptable (Rev. 8). Christ is the Angel-messenger. His fragrant incense, the merit of His blood, on the four horns. Put on this altar your praises, your prayers, all your cups of cold water.

The Veil, a door, a curtain-door. God's way out to us, and our way in to God. Christ, the Door, after being rent. When He died, the Veil was rent 'from top to bottom,' - God's work, not man's.

The Cherubim, a whole history in itself. The word, 'carved form'=symbolic form. A type of the redeemed. (1) They stand on the Ark, and their feet on the blood. They cannot be angels. No angel needs the blood. (2) They are united to the Mercy-seat. No angel is so. Their eye is partly on the blood, and partly on each other.

The copy of the Two Tables in the Ark. The Cherubim stand on righteousness, for the blood vindicates the broken law. The Two Tables=Christ's obedience. The Cherubim at the gate of Eden say, 'You, Adam and Eve, may get in again.' Grace at the very moment of their expulsion.

The Shittim-wood boards fixed in the ransom-money by two tenons. A firm hold, both hands.

The Corner-boards, like the Corner-stone, on which one may stumble, but meant for far other ends. Perhaps not overlapping, but one of them projecting.

The Rings ; (Exod.26:24) a difficulty. 'They shall be doubled beneath (coupled together), and doubled at the head of it (coupled together above) into the one ring. It shall be alike for both of them. They shall be thus for the two corners ;' or rather, I think, 'they shall be twins below. Its top shall be twins fitting in to the one ring,' 'Its top' is the board in two leaves.

The forty-eight Boards. If forty-nine, that would have been seven times seven, a complete number. But the Church is not complete without its Head ; He makes it forty-nine, seven times seven.

The Pillar-Cloud over all, day and night. At any hour might the Priest or Levite have light enough to go to any

'The Value of a Thought'

part of the courts, and the Pillar-Cloud would seem to point down to yon Altar!

Such are some of the results of a 'thought', but it was carried out, not left unused. Besides, to take one subject like this and master all the details is (1) Good discipline to the mind. (2) It gives one's-self confidence in teaching and applying. (3) It makes others trust you and receive your teaching more readily.

And once more, - if the 'thought' has been for the glory of God, and not merely a pleasant exercise of mind, then it comes under the blessing : 'Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart' (2 Chron. 6:8).