

The Cross and Attainment (Continued)

~Other Speakers M-R: L.E. Maxwell:

WE ARE SO LIKELY TO FAIL to relate a little thing like godly contentment to the life of Christian victory. Through complaint, or murmur, or an inward refusal of some providential place or circumstance, we can refuse the Cross. Madame Guyon, whose life of victory has lighted the way for many suffering saints, felt it necessary after a very severe sickness, to move a few miles away from the lake where she had been situated. Concerning the only house she could obtain, this lady of French society said:

It had a look of the greatest poverty, and had no chimney except in the kitchen, through which one was obliged to pass to go to the chamber. I gave up the largest chamber to my daughter and the maid. The chamber reserved to myself was a very small one; and I ascended to it by a ladder. Having no furniture of my own except some beds, quite plain and homely, I bought a few cheap chairs, and such articles of earthen and wooden ware as were necessary. I fancied everything better on wood than on plate. Never did I enjoy a greater content than in this hovel. It seemed to me entirely conformable to the littleness and simplicity which characterize the true life in Christ.

The following letter is from one of our old students who had experienced a wonderful redemption from sin and fast society. This letter was written to one of her fellow students from the sanitorium to which she had been sent 'just one year prior to her graduation. It reveals such a deep spiritual insight into the various principles of the Cross that we quote from it at some length:

Today, I have been meditating about "bearing your cross," the "thorn in the flesh," and "suffering shame for His name"--three aspects of the Christian life that are very often confused with one another, I believe. It all came to me this way: Real friends, writing or visiting, have gone sickly sweet at times with such words as, "oh, you poor, dear girl. Your cross is heavy to bear, etc., etc." Others have said: "Rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer, dear girl, for His name." It all seems so ridiculous that it makes me disgusted.

I don't count this illness as even a thorn in my flesh, for, if it were a thorn it would have to be grievous, would it not? But it hasn't been. It has been blessed. It is not "bearing my cross" because "taking up the cross" is what Christians are free to choose to do. I didn't exactly choose to come out here, or to be ill, did I? Nor is it suffering for His name, because that would mean I was being persecuted for Christ's sake, and that has no part with my illness, though it has been part of my blessed experience here at times.

Aren't Christian people careless in the way they pick up a biblical phrase and apply it to any and every situation? It is positively irritating at times. The straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak, was a drippy, "sedimental" letter from a good Christian lady the other day. She feels so sorry for me "bearing my hard, cruel cross out here alone." I wanted to shout so loud that she could hear me way up in the city, that I wasn't bearing any cross by being ill, and that I wasn't alone either.

That all started me thinking. If we feel a thorn prick, we raise our heads and wait acclaim for a sacrificial spirit; or we heave a sigh and say to ourselves, "my cross is heavy, but I will bear it." But our "cross" is not "a thorn." The cross is different, is it not? It is something far too easily shunned and gotten out from under. But a thorn God gives, and it is not escapable. I think it is health sometimes. Milton's thorn was probably his blindness. I think I will find my inability to do much even after I am dismissed from the sanitorium, my thorn, in that it will be somewhat of a handicap to the work I would do for the Lord. It is probably a thorn to you too, is it not? But we would never think of this handicap as a cross, would we? The cross is indeed obligatory to a Spirit-filled life of discipleship, but it is something we love, and rejoice to carry. We embrace it, and the cross becomes sweet to us making all bitter waters through which we pass, sweet also. Suffering shame for His name is extra; it is an added blessing after the cross, I think. Not everyone is counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. The above letter has been a blessing to many people. This young woman, seriously ill with the sentence of death in herself, so completely embraced her handicap and stretched her hands upon it, and so lost her own love of life, that she became oblivious of any bearing of the cross. The Cross became to her in measure what it was to Samuel Rutherford: "Christ's Cross is the sweetest burden that ever I bare; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my harbour." Lest some of our readers be inclined to think that this young woman had attained a degree of spirituality that would insure her success evermore, we sound this warning: The last time we saw her, apparently well, she was living an utterly worldly life. She had failed to keep the Cross between her and that "former manner of life." The Cross embraced once-for-all in full surrender must be followed by the "cross daily." We must press forward to know the fellowship of his sufferings," having as our goal nothing short of "conformity to His death." Be this my lifelong attitude!

The reader will pardon the following rather amusing exchanges. They are much to the point in connection with

this chapter: A missionary leader was about to send into service a young preacher who had but recently taken the way of shame. A friend of the writer wrote to this leader as follows: "Do you not know, have you not considered, that sending Mr. -- out in work before rigor mortis is fully established is snatching a corpse on its way to the grave?" Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. No grave, no resurrection: only resuscitation. A crape with no bier to follow.'

Later this young preacher, after experiencing some success in his ministry, wrote to the missionary leader saying, "I am sure rigor mortis is fully established." My friend wrote another letter as follows:

"Give Mr. -- my kindest regards and 'tell him that the corpse is the only one at a funeral that does not know that it (the aforesaid corpse) is a stiff. This rule is invariable. Any archaeologist will tell you that even a mummy 5,000 years old does not know it is dead. If a corpse says it is dead, it isn't. You do not need to feel its pulse; it is talking."

It is only through our life-union with the Lord Jesus Christ at the Cross, and with the eye fixed upon our death with Him, that we can safely say we are "dead indeed unto sin." The basis is never that of experience but of relationship with Him in His death. The man who is most vitally and experimentally dead unto sin is not the man who is consciously dead (a contradiction in experience as well as in nature), but rather the man who is "alive unto God" i.e., Christ-conscious. "To me to live is Christ," said the apostle. It was Andrew Murray who once said concerning the now fallen angels: "It was when they began to look upon themselves with self-complacency that they were led to disobedience." Beloved, let us go on and press on. The only attainment that is worth a fig is a growing attitude of "conformity to His death."