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An Answered Prayer.

YEAR by year the men who care most deeply for the things of God have been asking how the world could be roused from its careless self-complacency, its craving after new sensations and pleasure, its dallying with lighter forms of religion, its general easy-going attitude towards God's commandments. The answer has been hard to find. On the one hand there is the increasing regard for the brotherhood of man, as manifested in missionary or settlement work; but on the other the general feeling of spectatorship, the impatience of strong vital teaching either from the Church or in the school, the disregard of Sunday, the general laxity of life. Then on a sudden everything changed. The prayer and the anxiety of the watchers for God was answered, but in God's way, not in their way. His judgments went abroad, and men found themselves face to face with reality at last. Pleasure and pain receded into their lawful place, and the conflict for an ideal, for something far beyond pleasure or pain, became the absorbing influence of the universe—mercy and honour on the one side, lust of power on the other.

The struggle hinges, as all great struggles have hinged, from Cain's day even until now, upon the answer to the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Prophets, priests, and kings, by word and deed, have proclaimed the claims of God and man, and cried aloud in undaunted succession all down Old Testament times, whether men would hear or whether they would forbear. John the Baptist, in New Testament times, reopened the question, and the struggle continued until it reached its climax and its highest intensity in the sacrifice on the Cross. There for ever and for all time the answer was given in the fulness of self-sacrifice by Christ Himself; and there, in the shadow of the Cross, lies the second great question-mark of the world, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

But despite Christ's answer by word and by self-sacrifice the struggle continued, and still continues, even to the crucifixion of the nations in the Armageddon of to-day.

It is not the present crucifixion, awful as it is, which causes the gravest anxiety, so much as what is to follow so soon as the struggle is over. By God's mercy, we believe the ideals of liberty and honour will prevail as certainly in this twentieth century as on the battlefields of Belgium and the Netherlands under William the Silent three centuries ago. What is of moment is whether, as after Mount Carmel, the victory will, as it were, die away into itself, or whether, as at the Reformation time, light will spring forth, and a new dayspring from on high visit us.

Our anxiety is justified because the men who are dying on the battlefields are the very men who are most needed in the crisis. They are the men of the new generation, the men who would have worked out in practice the ideal of mercy and honour which they cared enough for to be willing to give their lives for it. Moreover, it is not only they themselves, the finest of their race, who perish in the trenches, but the generations never to be born who are perishing with them, the children to whom they would have given birth, and whom they would have inspired with the same lofty ideals, the same tone of self-sacrifice and honour.

Whilst they perish, the shirkers, the men who turn upon their heels at the question of enlisting, remain, and will remain, to hand down their tone of idle spectatorship to the children to whom they are giving and will give birth. How can the moral issue of the victory be carried into effect if the men who hold it strongly enough to die for it are taken from us, whilst the onlookers, the men who talk and criticize, continue in fullest measure in our midst?

This forecast would be heavy enough were it not for three considerations. We know and have proved to all time that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. We know that the lifting up of the honour of a plighted truth, of the brother-

hood of man, of the joy of self-sacrifice, cries out from generation to generation—cries out the more forcibly as the confusion of the conflict dies away, and appeals year by year more and more to the judgment and imagination of the men and women of the hereafter than to that of the men and women of to-day.

In the second place, we know that the world-agony is calling forth a rebirth of prayer, and will, we believe, in turn call forth a rebirth of repentance. In silent waiting upon the intensity of Christ's love, such prayer and such repentance cannot wait in vain. An agony of suffering, followed by an agony of prayer, must be answered by a spiritual revival in which, if we do not hear the very footsteps of the Master Himself, we yet hear the footsteps of men who love and follow Him—the footsteps, above all, of men like St. Paul, equal to the present strategical moment, capable of directing and seizing the newly opened world-centres for Christ.

But there is a third thought. Whilst the flower of our youth and manhood passes from us, the flower and youth of our womanhood remains. By God's unparalleled gift to women the spiritual impulse of the future generation lies far more in the tone of the women than in that of the men. It is the atmosphere of the nursery and of the home, the influence which a child breathes during the first formative years of its life, which forms his character and determines his outlook on the future. Looked at from this point of view, we ask what will be the impress upon the coming generation given by the womanhood of our race to-day.

The answer from the world of womanhood might have read darkly enough a few months ago. It seems only yesterday that the walls of St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey were moaning with the refrain of the Suffragette Litany, and the world from end to end was asking what it all meant. Was it a sex war, a rebellion, a breaking of home ties and influence, a craving for sex aggrandizement and power?

But whilst some read darkest augury, others read still farther—saw, beyond the zeal run riot, a golden thread of

unselfish devotion to a cause, a golden thread of responsibility towards the white slave and the oppressed, and believed that by God's mercy the movement might at last turn to the glory of God and the glory of the race.

The women's prayer for recognition and power has been answered, but, like the former prayer, in God's way, not their way. It has been answered by a crucifixion, by a carrying away of their dearest and best, and it is at long last, through streaming tears, that they see the vision of a wider outlook of work and power opening before them. Countless pathways of service hitherto rendered by men are now thrown open to them in trust. God only knows, if the war lasts longer, how much more work, how much more responsibility, will be thrown upon them.

Taking these three factors into consideration, what is the outlook for the future? The war is still too heavy upon us for any definite answer to be given, but we know that there is opportunity and that there is hope ahead of us. Unhesitatingly, the fire of self-sacrifice among men has kindled as fierce a fire of self-sacrifice among women—nay, even fiercer, because so far comparatively little outlet has been found for it. And wherever there is self-sacrifice there is a first element of the following of Christ, and, through the following of Christ, of finding gain through loss. It is eternally true that "he that loseth his life shall find it," and "except a grain of corn falls into the ground it bears no fruit." Our danger is lest, in our zeal for self-sacrifice, we should forget the one essential element, "for My sake," the element which alone burns with the intensity of eternal life.

Thank God, we see on all sides writ large evidence not only of self-sacrifice, but of a depth of devotion, a reaching out of longing hands from the world of women into the very presence of God Himself!

With this one thing needful, the sense of sin forgiven, working itself out in self-sacrificing following of Christ, may we not lift up heart and soul, and believe that there is light and

hope ahead of us? As the generation of the women of our Empire purifies and strengthens, as their already manifested craving for purity, honour, suppression of white slavery, defence of the poor and the oppressed, finds its lawful level and takes its lawful place, may we not hope that it will receive a further inspiration, and that the mantle of the martyred soldiers which is falling will be taken as a sacred trust, and that our women will go forth with renewed spirit, not only into the well-worn pathways of life which have always been theirs, but also into the pathways now for the first time opening before them?

Such new pathways cannot be entered lightly, such new responsibilities cannot be shouldered without a sacred consciousness of those who have gone before—still more, not without a consciousness of the responsibility all too soon descending upon the children in the nursery to-day. Who can look upon the little lads of the preparatory school without a feeling of the deepest responsibility and seriousness? Children as they are, we know that long before their time they must step out into the world, must take their places in the ranks left empty. Facing these facts, the materialism, the affectation, the spectatorship, the shrinking from pain, and frivolity, of the past generation, will be lost in the longing that the life-giving power, the life-giving wisdom of God may descend upon us and upon our children. Let us, therefore, instead of fixing our eyes upon the darkness of to-day and the apprehension of to-morrow, remember that “in quietness and in confidence will be our strength.” Let us joyfully lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees, say to the women who are of a fearful heart: “Be strong and of a good courage: behold, your God cometh, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you.”

E. M. KNOX.

