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THE DEEPER LIFE

Old Memories

By Rev. S. G. Bland, D.D.

I HAVE been wandering the last few days amid the homes and haunts of boyhood and youth. The mingled sweetness and pain of re-visiting such scenes after many years of separation has been, or probably will be, known to most dwellers on the prairie. In these old eastern towns and cities much remains unchanged. The houses are, perhaps, a little shabby; the neighborhood may have gone down in the world. The trees are taller and more umbrageous. Otherwise, the old street looks much the same after 40 years and more. And how vividly the old days come back and memories that had been forgotten! "And clothed with what unearthly beauty! One feels as if one could picture no heaven that would be so delightful as just to go back to the old days again."

I remember that after my father's death I was turning over the pages of the diary which he had kept up to the very day on which he was stricken, and I found among the last entries one that told of a dream he had had the night before in which he thought he had met with one of his oldest and most valued friends, one whose friendship went back to his earliest days on a mission station in Canada, and it seemed to him in his dream that he and my mother (dead two years before) and the children, with this old friend, were all going back to the old St. Andrew's mission, north of Montreal, where his ministerial life had begun. And, as I read, I thought what heavenly future would be so sweet as just to go back again and be all together and begin life again.

It is when one looks on the old house and walks in the old fields that one feels most the losses of the years. If only the old friends could have stayed on in the old places! There is a lovely little poem by Sarah Doudney that haunts me when I visit old homes. I quote it from memory only:—

"Return, return," the voices cried,
"To your old valley far away;
For softly on the river-side

The tender lights and shadows play;
And all the fields are gay with flowers
And all the hills are sweet with thyme.
You cannot find such bloom as ours
In yon bright foreign clime."

And still, "Return, return," they sang,
"With us abide eternal calm;

In these old fields where you were young
We cull the heart's ease and the balm,
For us the flocks and herds increase,
The children play about our feet,
At eve the sun goes down in peace,
Return, for rest is sweet."

"For me," I thought, the olives grow;
The sun lies warm upon the vines;
And yet I will arise and go
To that dear valley dim with pines.

"Old loves are dwelling there," I said,
"Untouched by years of change and pain.
Old faiths that I have counted dead
Will rise and live again."

So I arose and crossed the sea
And sought that home of earlier days.
No love of old was left to me

For love has wings and seldom stays.
But there were graves upon the hill,
And sunlight sleeping on the sod,
And low wings breathing "Peace, be still,
Lost things are found in God."

One must take refuge in God. Otherwise there is a hopelessness of sadness in memories of the past. It seems to have gone so irrevocably. But who can set bounds to the resourcefulness of God? And so, like Abt Vogler in one of Browning's most inspired poems we cast ourselves on the Infinite one:—

"Therefore to whom turn I but to thee,
The ineffable home?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not
made with hands!

What, have fear of change from thee
who art ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart
that the power expands!

There shall never be one lost good;
what was shall live as before;

The evil is null, is naught, is silence in
plying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with
for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken axes; in the
heaven, a perfect round."

There is a great sense today among men of the value and potency of human goodwill, never, perhaps, in all the history of our race have men thought so highly of what human love and goodwill can do for human happiness. And they cannot think too highly of the power of these precious and beautiful things. But outside the circle in which human loyalty and affection count for so much (and it is a great circle) is a still vaster circle in which we must be sure of the love of God or be desolate.

"O God," cried St. Augustine, "Thou madest man for Thyself, and

our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

And so, in the hours of most keen and wistful yearning for a vanished past, we say, "Lost things are found in God."

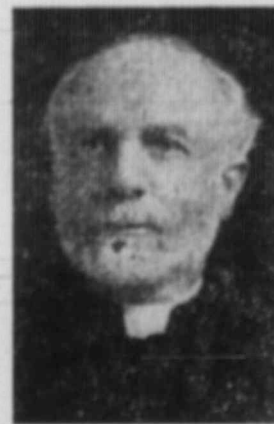
I made a discovery during the last few days in an old grey city where I have twice lived. The first stay was when I was between 15 and 18 years of age, dreamy and romantic years, I suppose, to all boys and girls, but, perhaps, in rather a peculiar way to me, who lived during those years in many respects in a solitary way, not mingling much with young people of my own age and feeding with passion on books of imagination. And I can remember how, when the time came to leave the old city, dearly loved as it was, the thought of change and the entrance into a new and larger and unknown world thrilled me with vague but most delicious imaginings of the mysterious life before me.

"Eager hearted as a boy, when first he leaves his father's field,
And at night alone the dusky highway near and nearer drawn,
Sees in heaven the light of London flaring like a dreary dawn;
And his spirit leaps within him to be gone before him then,
Underneath the light he looks at, in among the throngs of men."

Twelve years afterwards I came back to the same old city and lived there again three years. But when the time came to leave once more there was no delicious stir of vague but beautiful anticipations. The sadness of parting was there in its nakedness, unsoftened by any mysterious hopes. The thought of the future was very sober and very definite. One could imagine, of course, if one would, all sorts of new and unknown pains and sorrows, but as far as joys and achievements were concerned one felt at 33 that one had got into one's groove and that the future years, even if kindly, held no lovely surprises, no unexpected delights.

And now coming back after a quarter of a century, it was rather delightful to find that the rainbow tints had come back again. Life was once more an enchanting mystery. The future had become again fascinating in its very indefiniteness. Not in a personal sense to any great extent. It would be unreasonable to expect for oneself many years or wonderful and surprising ones. But the time is so wonderful, pregnant with great and beautiful changes. Life has become heroic again for so many, sad but infinitely nobler and higher and deeper. And it is so much easier than it was to forget one's own personal hopes and ambitions in the great world movements, the shakings, the strugglings and the strivings that mean the coming of the Kingdom of God.

After a sordid and selfish and materialistic age, life has become great and romantic and heroic, a time for dreams and visions and high passion and love-liest hopes.



Dr. BLAND.

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