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THE DEEPER LIFE

The Fading Leaf

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

A ZONE of fading leaves now belts the world. Through Asia, Europe and North America, the trees are disrobing themselves of their summer beauty as a bride divests herself of her jewels and gay

attire in the day of her widowhood. Leaves are falling, crimson, purple, orange, brown and gold. On calm breathless days when not a twig quivers you can hear their patter as they lingeringly release their hold and sailly flutter down to the parent clay. When the sky is shrouded in rain-clouds and the wind roars through the woods, the leaves are torn away in armfuls from the tossing, writhing limbs.

One week the woods glow like the embers of a vast conflagration; the next they stand like skeletons, bare and black; and the dead leaves are thickly strewn on the waters, heaped on the side-walks, trampled into the mud on the roads. Their rich pungent smell fills the air, and to few men and women does not come the thought "The leaves fade and so do we; we, too, have our autumn and our winter." The Master drew lessons from lilies and sparrows and the mustard plant. The fading leaf, too, must have its message.

Perhaps louder than any thing else it says, this is the world of the fading leaf. Youth, beauty, wealth, earthly pride and glory all fade as the leaf. Nature, perhaps, teaches nothing so impressively as that, and so it may well be that there is no idea that He who fashioned nature meant us to have more in mind.

Why do many men pursue wealth and honor so frantically, jostle and fight each other, knock down and trample on the weaker, but because they forget that they live in the world of the fading leaf? Why do not all seek to possess and enjoy God? Because they think they can win something better. But what is there but God? Only the fleeting shadows of time. And so after the shadows they rush and scramble and the shadows pass and elude their grasp.

As a great preacher has said:—

"Religious satisfaction and joy in God is one of the few things—almost the only thing—that, having possessed, all can readily keep. As the years pass all part first with one friend, then with another. Life becomes more and more solitary and desolate. There are many acquaintances, but if we live on there are fewer and fewer friends. The store in Paradise we trust, grows, but earth becomes more and more a desert for the heart. The heart cannot place its resources at the disposal of every new claimant. The heart as the years go on, withdraws more and more into itself, and at the grave it must part with all that is earthly that is yet left." "He shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth; neither shall his pomp follow him," said the Psalmist of the wealthy three thousand years ago. All is left at the gate of death, except, EXCEPT—that knowledge and love of the everlasting Being who binds us to Himself, which is our true outfit for eternity. It is something in a world of shadows to come into contact with the real; it is something when all is passing away from us to lay firm hold on the eternal, on the indestructible."

There is a legend of an Eastern king who had a ring made with this inscription, "Even this shall pass away." This ring he always wore. Surveying his treasures, amid the incense of his courtiers' praises, in the flush of victory, he looked at the ring and was humbled.

That legend might be inscribed over the doors of our houses, on the wall of the big barn, over the crowded store

or the office desk. For "All flesh is grass and the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field"; "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth;... surely the people is grass."

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

And in the eternal God all things of real worth shall find eternal life. Friendships, joys, hopes built on Him shall be eternal. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

In this world of the fading leaf, is it not the joys and the honors and the successes that pass? So also do the failures, the disappointments, the defeats and the sorrows. The hour came when the king's army was broken, his kingdom lost, his treasure and his life in

the power of his enemies. Then in that bitter hour he looked on the ring and was comforted. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Weeping is of the earth and with the earth shall pass away. We look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

There is another parable in the fading leaf. The leaves fade but the tree lives. Year after year the leaves peep out in the spring, grow large in the summer, turn crimson or gold, fade and die in the autumn, but year after year the tree steadily grows. And it grows through the leaves. They are the hands, the mouth, the lungs of the tree. Thus the leaf lives on in the tree. It did not live for itself but for the tree. It sought to glorify the tree, not itself. Therefore in the glory of the mighty tree the leaf is glorified, in the enduring strength of the tree the little short-lived leaf endures.

And so God's workers die. The preachers pass away. New faces appear in the Sunday school, in the social service club. But the great Kingdom of God abides and grows. Generation after generation of the workers fade and die like leaves of a summer; but like a great tree, ring around ring, branch beyond branch, broader, taller, statelier, the great Kingdom grows.

Here is the secret of true greatness. The man who lives for himself lives in a dungeon. "Cribb'd, cabin'd and confined." He who lives for God dwells on the breezy prairie, encircled with broad horizons and under an infinite sky. The ordinary thoughts of the humblest Christian whose death would not be noticed by a single line in the press, are grander far than any selfish schemes however vast. Dignity of soul depends not on wealth or intellect, but on loftiness of purpose and belongs to the lowliest man or child who seeks not to do his own will but the will of God. No millions can purchase the incorruptible honor and glory reserved for servants of Jesus Christ.

Selfishness is essentially petty, whatever noise and dust it may make in the world, abjectly, pitifully, irredeemably petty.

"Unless above himself he can

Erect himself, how poor a thing is man."

In some way then the supreme thing is that the life be lifted above selfish aims, be linked up with the Kingdom of God.

What will it matter to any of us one hundred years hence whether we collected one hundred thousand dollars or one hundred thousand brass buttons, whether we left a fine house and a great



Dr. BLAND

business or one old a shack, whether on granite obelisk or but what will matter whether all lived? God or not.

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