



Personal Consecration.

Then said He, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O GOD.—Heb. 10: 9.
Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?
... it shall be told thee what thou must do.—Acts 9: 6.

Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee. . . . And although we be unworthy through our manifold sins, to offer unto Thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech Thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—(From "The Oblation" in the Communion Service.)

Without in the least intending it, I find myself embarked on a series of three papers, this being the last of the three when it should have been the first, for without a foundation of "personal consecration" no life can be either "holy" or "splendid." I have been asked my reason for persistently holding up impossible ideals before people who have hardly time to indulge in an ideal at all. But I have no choice in this matter: "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord put in my mouth?" and surely we are set an impossible ideal when we are commanded to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. Besides, a high ideal is always inspiring—if we are really trying to reach it—while to aspire only after a low level of holiness is to take all the spring out of endeavor. Our business in this world, or in any other, must be the same as our Leader's—the doing of God's will, at any cost—and the only possible attitude for a loyal disciple is that which St. Paul instantly assumed when his eyes were opened to the truth. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" must be our question from moment to moment, all our life long. He does not give us a week's orders in advance, so our eyes must be constantly upon Him or we shall make mistakes about our duty. Personal consecration simply means holding ourselves "always waiting, day and night, at His command." Then every interruption of our work will be simply an indication of His every cross—large or small—will be accepted without question as His will for us, and we shall be busy about His business from Sunday morning to Saturday night.

Consecration is a personal matter, a secret between each soul and its God. The busy attendant at missionary meetings and sewing societies may brand as "frivolous" a sister who is making the home bright for father, mother and "the boys," and spending money on little niceties of personal adornment when thousands of people in India are starving. But in God's sight the offering of the first may be tarnished and stained with self-conscious vanity and wilfulness, while the heart of the second may be continually lifted up, in the midst of merry games and songs. It is never safe to judge another man's servant. Many a subscription list may look very different after it has passed through a searching examination before the Judge. Some of the large sums, which looked so imposing before, may be blotted out altogether, others may have shrunk a great deal, according to the amount of love they express, while some of the smaller gifts, which have been lumped together at the end with no name attached, may shine out in letters of gold. Not all, however, for very often a great deal of love to God and man makes the large donations beautiful, while many of the smaller subscriptions are "collections"—given only because it would seem stingy to refuse. In spite of the fact that charity should begin at home, no child of the great Family has any right to narrow his interests and sympathies to a single household or town. Most people are too little interested in missions instead of too much.

Personal consecration must be an offering of the whole person, and it is a truism to say that only a whole-hearted service can result in an ever-

fresh spring of joy. Those who are like Amasai, the son of Zichri, who "willingly offered himself unto the Lord," will find that He does not add to their burdens, but gives a soul-rest, which is a continual help in bearing the old burdens. Even an earthly joy can lift one with "eagles' wings" over the jars and frets of life, which gall unbearably when the heart is out of tune. What a joy, then, it must be to walk always shod with sandals of peace, only taking them off at night to be carried like a weary child in the Father's arms. This is the glad portion of one whose eyes are always waiting on the Lord, and whose whole personality is laid freely at His disposal: "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

But we must never deceive ourselves with the idea that high ideals are all that we need. Balaam stands out in history as a terrible example of the down-dragging power of covetousness—and yet he had magnificent ideals. We must love God with all our heart and with all our strength, as well as with mind and soul. Balaam's mind owned that Balak's rewards could not compare for an instant with God's, his soul-sight was clear, for he saw the vision of the Almighty, and aspired to die the death of the righteous, but—he did not press on after his ideals with all his strength, because his heart and will were fixed on earthly gain. And so he fell, and the fall of such a high nature must always be a very terrible one. Consecration does not mean simply having a high ideal and noble aspirations—though, of course, it includes that. It does not mean only being profoundly moved by sermons or devotional books—that may only be the natural feeling of an emotional temperament. Love must be translated into obedience or it is worthless. Obedience pleased God and uplifts the soul better than any number of magnificent sacrifices—and obedience is possible to all. "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them," says our Lord, "he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." It is sadly possible, as St. Paul knew, to preach to others, eloquently and forcibly, and yet to be one's self rejected. Personal consecration does not mean only having one's eyes open to the grand beauty of our faith—that may co-exist with utter selfishness. It means love translated into service—the willing service of God and man. That is very easy to talk or write about, but "living it" is a far harder matter. The people who are living grand lives are often unconscious of their glory, but it would surely make their beautiful service more glad and sweet if they knew that their daily strife was "an Angel's theme."

"Or that the rod they take so calm
Shall prove in Heaven a martyr's palm."

Then there are people whose lives seem to run always in the sunshine of earthly happiness. If that be your case don't fancy that God has made a mistake and that you have no opportunity to glorify Him because the offering of your life—so far—has cost you very little. He understands your character, and when he wants you to have a cross He will let you know, in the meantime your special mission ought surely to be the carrying of joy everywhere you go, remembering Keble's words:

"And there are souls that seem to dwell
Above this earth—so rich a spell
Floats round their steps, where'er they move,

From hopes fulfill'd and mutual love.
Such, if on high their thoughts are set,
Nor in the stream the source forget,
If prompt to quit the bliss they know,
Following the Lamb where'er He go,
By purest pleasures unbeguiled
To idolize or wife or child;
Such wedded souls our God shall own
For faultless virgins round His throne."



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