

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS.

BY PEARSE.

In the life of Duncan Matheson there is a story told of his native parish in Scotland, where the religious life was "orthodox without earnestness, having the form without the life, the Gospel without the grace." The minister was one day catechising the people according to the old Scotch custom when he came to a woman who was noted for the rare qualities of zeal and earnestness, and he asked her, "How many Persons are there in the Deity?" To the astonishment of all she answered, "There are two Persons in the Deity—the Father and the Son." The people looked at her in wonder. The minister cautioned her, and put the question again. But again she said, "Two."

"There!" cried the minister, angrily. "You see what comes of hypocritical pretences. What gross ignorance! Woman, don't you know that the answer is, 'There are three Persons in the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?'"

"Yes, sir," said she; "I know it says so in the Catechism. But which am I to believe—the Catechism or yourself? We hear you name the Father, and sometimes the Son; but who ever heard you so much as speak of the Holy Ghost? Indeed, sir, you have never so much as told us whether there be any Holy Ghost, let alone our need of His grace."

Religion without earnestness; a form without the life; the Gospel without grace—so it must ever be when the Holy Spirit is not honored and sought and served. What the breath is to the body, that is the Holy Spirit in our religious life. Let us try and realize our utter dependence upon this gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is no hing in all the world so utterly hopeless, so helpless, we may boldly say so absurd, as the Christian religion, apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. No wonder that it should have been branded by the Greeks as foolishness and by the Jews as a scandal. No wonder that the moment the Church declines in spiritual power she must fetch in all kinds of human additions and adornments of which the early Church knew nothing, and which do but encumber her for her true work. Architecture, music, splendor, mysterious pretensions, blasphemous exalting of human authority, eloquence, intellectualism the bewildered Church turns to any of these for help the moment she ceases to depend upon the power of the Holy Ghost. It has always been so, and it always will be. Take away from Christianity the presence of the Holy Spirit, and never was any religion more certainly doomed to failure. She is Divine, or she is nothing; of God, or else a thing destined only to ridicule and speedy extinction. Look at it in every aspect you will, and see how true this is.

See how at the outset it meets a man with the plain stern summons to stop and surrender—he is a rebel, a sinner. Cultured it may be, proud of his goodness or intellect; yet he is told that he has no faculty with which he can see into the kingdom of God—much less any power to rise up and enter into it. His case is so desperate that it is not possible for him to be educated into any spiritual life. He must be born again, and born of God. It brings a man to the law and passes upon him sentence of death. It knows no respect of persons—king and peasant, fool and philosopher—all alike are undone, helpless, hopeless, ruined, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Such a system cannot fail to provoke resentment. It outrages men's natural and proper pride; it quenches hope. A Gospel that proclaims that all are so bad and powerless to make themselves better has from the human standpoint no single element of a Gospel in it—"a glad tidings of great joy."

Then, if possible—the next step is more fatal. Having thus arrayed against itself the prejudices of human nature, it tells men that their only hope of salvation is in one Jesus of Nazareth—a poor child of miraculous birth, born in a stable, and lain in a manger—who lived a singularly holy life, who left many wise sayings, and wrought many deeds of mercy; who was put to death by the very people amongst whom He lived, and condemned before one tribunal as a blasphemer before another as a traitor, and then died a death so accursed that the Jew and the Roman held it a disgrace so much as to name it. Then the poor followers of this Jesus go forth claiming that this crucified One rose from the dead; that He ascended into heaven;

that His death is to be the means of our salvation; and that He is to come again in great glory to judge the world! Is it any wonder that they who have looked at this system of religion apart from the Holy Spirit of God have held it in derision, and for nearly two thousand years have been predicting its speedy decease?

Further, as if to seal its fate, Christianity began its career by rejecting as needless, and worse than needless, all the splendid ritual and solemnities of worship by which men had set forth the presence and glory of the Most High God. At a stroke it severed itself from the glories of the Temple and the imposing ceremonies of the priesthood. Unless Christianity has some Divine, living power in it, what an utterly stupendous blunder! To lose that great centre of national life—awful by its Divine presence, bringing the unseen into the midst of the people, by means of altars and sacrifice solemnly impressing the sense of sin and of cleansing. Christianity begins by declaring that the holy ground is everywhere—on lonely hillside, in dusty highway, in lonely home, amidst the commonest things of life—wherever any man sincerely seeks God there assuredly shall He be found. It declares that religion is in the life—not in any form; in the heart, not in any creed or ceremony; in simple love to God and our neighbor, not in any pompous show or splendour.

Another aspect of its helplessness appears if we think of those to whom it is entrusted. They are not men of great learning or of splendid genius; for the most part simple fishermen—"ignorant and unlearned," the people called them. Neither endowed with any splendid gifts nor with any awful authority; their lives not free from jealousy and division; guilty even of deserting their Leader. Their Master has to upbraid them and sometimes severely to reprove them. They are very slow to perceive the great work which He has come to accomplish. Well may the world laugh them to scorn as they go forth, "What do these feeble Jews? Are they going to try and turn the world upside down?"

And yet if ever Christianity could hope to find any success from its human side it must have been in these first disciples. They had seen the Saviour face to face. They had dwelt with him, had heard the gracious words which fell from his lips, had seen the wonders of which we only read, Surely the memory of their gracious Lord must have been an inspiration, a constant compulsion. They had felt His authority throughout those hallowed days, and must have caught something of His Spirit. They were bound as nothing else could bind them, to His memory and service by that awful death, and by the vision of the risen Saviour. With us how pitiful is the contrast—so dimly perceiving Him; with but a scanty record of His works and words. What have we to carry on the work they began?

Turn for a moment and look at the world in which Christianity seeks to gain its victories. Look at the man himself with a nature that hungers for the pride of life, eager for self-indulgence, either laughing at the unseen as a superstition, or dismissing it as unknowable; or else turning from it with a dread that is happy only in forgetting it. Look at our own land to-day, with its horrid blasphemies, its appalling drunkenness. Look at the masses of misery which neither legislation or philanthropy seem able to touch. Look at the curse of gambling; the feverish haste to be rich the thousand fascinations of sin. With every one of these mighty forces Christianity comes into direct collision and must either sweep them away or be sweep away by them. What has she got to do the work with? If there is nothing more than sermons, services, preachers, theories, theologics—then let us join in the scorn, and laugh a terrible laugh of despair.

Think, too, of the work which Christianity sets itself to accomplish. In the midst of such a world it sets up an ideal of goodness far more lofty than any ever before dreamed of. It makes a demand reaching to the innermost heart of the man and extending to the outermost relationship. It requires a service not occasional but constant; in everything and everywhere. It claims the whole life in every relationship. Its demand means the setting aside of self and setting another will in the very centre of our being, controlling every aim and thought of our life with a supreme control to which there is a complete surrender. Shut in by the present, yet the man is to live seeing Him who is invisible; mixed up with the thousand concerns of earth yet he is to set his affections on things above. Now what power does Christianity bring to accomplish results like these?

Look again at the three great purposes of the Christian