



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

W. E. BOARDMAN

In His own way did the Lord now send us out into a far greater wilderness than our former abode. Either my husband or his partner had to go where there was a market for the produce taken from the farmers in exchange for goods at their store.

Mr. Boardman’s attention was drawn to a large lead mining district in the north of Illinois, to a place called Potosi, not far from Galena. Originally Potosi was called “Snake Hollow,” from the fact that a colony of rattle snakes had taken possession of a cavern in a rock at the head of a ravine. The old name might well have been retained, so completely was the place under the dominion of “the old Serpent, the devil,” for wickedness did so abound here -gambling, drinking, and lotteries were the order of the day. The employment was in itself most exciting, for a man might one day be without a cent, and the next day, if he struck a lead (vein), as it was called, his fortune was made, for these leads usually led on to extensive beds of ore that seemed sometimes to be endless.

In the year 1842, we settled in this place, which had but one street running up a ravine from the river for a mile and a half; a second street would have been an impossibility, as there were high cliffs on either side. Sometimes the valley widened out to almost a quarter of a mile, and then again it became so narrow as barely to admit of the road and houses, which were built up almost against the hillside.

The back of our house was thus situated, and when there was a heavy rain, the mud came sweeping down the banks in a channel that found a passage way into the house, leaving our only carpeted room in a sad plight. The house could not boast much of architectural beauty. In one respect it was like the Venetian buildings, having various styles of architecture! It had formerly been a warehouse, with one very large room below and one above. By adding a small kitchen, and partitioning off rooms with calico, we could boast of five rooms.

We little knew when we pitched our tent in this far off valley of Potosi, what the dear Lord had in store for us here, among the rugged hills and the still rougher miners. The appearance of these men as they came out of the mines, covered as they were with the yellow earth, put terror into the hearts of those unaccustomed to seeing them, for it was really difficult to tell whether they were human. But many a noble, generous heart, for whom a mother’s prayers had been daily ascending, was hidden under this earthy garb. Many here were brought out to shine as jewels in the kingdom of our Lord.

Yes, it was here in our little rough home that the Lord Jesus became to us nearer and dearer than ever before. As regarded justification, He could not of course be nearer. But here we learnt the preciousness of Jesus’ indwelling; here we received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and Jesus was seen and known as a risen, living Saviour. We were brought to understand the truth of those words, “He” (the Holy Spirit) “shall not speak of Himself;” “He shall testify of Me.” “He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.” Yes, “He shall reveal to you what I am, so that you may learn My power to keep you, and sin shall not have dominion over you.” And these promises proved true, for our Lord was as near to us here as He was to the disciples when they trod together the streets of Jerusalem.

It was a memorable day when, on looking over our books, I took up the Memoir of James Brainerd Taylor. In the course of my reading I came to a very remarkable letter, in which he gave an experience

that was most attractive. He told how very precious Christ had become; how He was revealed to him, as not only with him but in him,

CHRIST, A PRESENT SAVIOUR, KEEPING HIM in perfect peace all the day long, and making life one song of praise. Coming to the end of this beautiful letter, I went at once to find my husband, in order to read to him the delightful bit I had found. "Taylor had sunshine in his heart all the time," I exclaimed, as I finished reading. "How much he knew of Christ! It is lovely to hear this!"

"It is exceedingly beautiful, Mary, and that shall be my experience."

"O no, that is impossible; it is too great an experience for us common Christians. It is just the same as the Apostles taught and lived, but for us it would be presumption to think of such a thing."

"But why not? Taylor was a man in the usual walk of life like myself, and God is no respecter of persons. I can see no reason why I should not know Jesus in the same way he did, and by His grace this experience shall be mine."

"Yes, and then when you have it you will die; Taylor died when quite young, and it is given on purpose to prepare one for death. You never see one living on this earth who has such a wonderful knowledge of the presence of Jesus as always with him, keeping sunshine always in the heart; and I am sure if you get this you will die; and so I hope you will not get it, for I am not prepared to part with you."

"I shall never rest, my child, until I have just such a sense of the presence of God as is here described by Taylor. I need it, O so much! More than words can tell, and I believe God will give it to me, unworthy as I am."

"I cannot see how it is that you can feel such a need, such a child of God as you are, so true to Him and to your own convictions in every way."

"I know my need," replied my husband, "and there is a craving within me that cannot be satisfied without being filled with God. And He who has implanted this longing of soul will meet it, I am sure of it."

From that hour the whole energy of Mr. Boardman's being was bent on this one thing, and all his powers concentrated on becoming filled with the presence of God. And then followed months of misdirected effort, and, therefore, of fruitless struggles. Sometimes he would prostrate himself flat on his face before God, and cry out: "Just now, O Lord, just this very minute, come and fill me with Thyself." At other times he would fast, and was continually going through with all manner of processes of consecration. Our scanty household furniture, even the little old carpeting we had, was thought unnecessary, and a thing to be dispensed with. Anything and everything which could be done to obtain this desired blessing was done. And constant failure did not quench his ardour, neither did remonstrances prove of the least use. His heart was fixed, and he was not to be tuned aside.

How mysterious this seemed to me in one, who was considered by all who knew him at that time, to be a most consistent Christian, upright in all his dealings with others, full of zeal for the salvation of souls, and far ahead of most Christians in his consistent daily walk. What else could such a man need, and why should he spend month after month in this useless search for something far beyond his reach in this life?

But he not only persevered in seeking for light himself, but he took every opportunity of urging others to seek for the same blessing, and very often in the little prayer meeting he would so earnestly say, "I tell you, brethren, there is an experience that we should all be seeking. We all need something. Can you not see how very necessary it is to have more life in Christ, and more of the presence of God?"

With silent lips my wicked heart would answer, "And can you not see that your efforts are all fruitless,

and that you were much happier before you ever thought about this experience, and would you not be better off to let it all alone?" I did not seem to myself to be resisting the Lord, for I had no light on the subject, the Spirit had not revealed to me the possibility of anything better than the experience we had at conversion. I knew we must grow in grace, and regretted that my growth was not at all apparent. It was a great mystery to me how anyone was to grow, as I thought growth meant getting better, and doing better, and having more work for the Lord; and that this growth was attained by cultivating whatever gifts one had, and spending time in fasting and prayer. And as mine was a very busy life, and on the whole happy, I seemed never to get time for the necessary work attending growth in grace.

The time came, God's time, for bringing me down out of all my own ideas, and letting me see His way of filling the heart with Himself. It was a lovely Sabbath morning in the month of May, when, not feeling well, I was left alone, my husband having gone to the only place of worship in the valley, where services were held in a log meeting house. I was looking over our books, and my eye chanced to light on one left by a Methodist minister when on one of his circuit visits to us. As he was our guest, and had charged me to read this book before his return, which would be in a few days' time, I took it to run over its pages, so as to be able to say I knew what it was about. It was upon the doctrine of Christian Perfection, and as I had not the slightest interest in this subject, I was about to put it down, when, on turning to the last pages of the book, I saw some experiences. I read these with intense interest.

To my great astonishment, here I found living witnesses to the fact of being filled with the presence of God, and kept filled by the power of the Holy Ghost. They had found out the great secret of the power of God to save them from their sins, and this to my mind was something very practical and most desirable. It was an actual fact that just as they were delivered from condemnation and eternal death by the Lord Jesus Christ, so they were delivered from reigning sin,--they who had been troubled with the same sins that beset me, sins that I sought most earnestly to put down, such as anxiety, ambition, pride, a man-fearing spirit, impatience and love of the good opinion of others.

How often during my past life had I written down resolutions, and placed them on a chair, then kneeling before them, asked the Lord to see how solemn a vow I was making, would He help me to keep it? To think of asking God's help as if I were the head, and He a helper in doing that which I afterwards saw was wholly His work to do! And now what light burst in upon me as to Who was to do all! I saw that it was as much God's work to save me from my sins, as it was to convert my soul in the first place.

CHRIST MUST DO ALL

And could it be possible that this experience was just what my husband had been seeking, without knowing exactly what it was he so longed after? To my mind it now assumed such a definite form as to be within reach. It was a tangible thing, this being saved from besetting sins. I needed this very deliverance of which the brethren wrote, and to which they testified, and I too made up my mind that, cost what it might, this experience should be mine. The first question that arose was, "How long would it take to get hold of this new life?" I feared I could not hold out in any lengthened effort, as I still was happy in my first love, never having backslidden, but always delighting in service for the Master. But I went down before the Lord, and made, that seemed to me to be a very complete surrender to Him of all that I had, and of myself as well. I then asked the Lord to show me what else I had to do, and He assured me that no further process was necessary, He would do the rest. It was His work to cleanse and keep me from sin. I trusted Him to do all, and peace filled my soul. My spirit was restful and serene as I let myself go into His hands, believing in His power and willingness to do everything I needed. Jesus was now enthroned within as King, to reign and govern His own dominion.

Precious moments these, but alas! Scarce twenty minutes passed ere a question arose in my mind. "Have you given your lips to the Lord? Are you willing to tell what He is to you now?"

“How can I do more than I have done in the way of giving my lips, dear Lord? Surely it cannot be that Thou dost want me to speak in any public way, when the Word says women are to keep silence in the churches! I talk to individuals; I do pray in small circles; and what else can I do?” It sounded in my heart, “You must tell what I am to you wherever I wish; your lips are Mine, and must be fully surrendered.”

“But there is no opportunity,” I argued. This objection was very quickly overruled, as the answer came that the Methodist class was open to me.

“I can never go there,” was my thought. “What will such and such a one think and say? I can never go there, and it cannot be that the Lord wishes it.” The pressure increased; my peace had taken wings, and I was in greater darkness than I had been at any time since my conversion. I tried to think this pressure was from Satan, but I could not get away from it. Darker became my mind, and heavier as my spirit, until at last I said, “Lord, what can I do? I am not willing, and I cannot make myself willing to speak in any public way, it is all so against what seems right and proper. But, Lord, I give my unwillingness to Thee.”

HOW LIGHT CAME

It seemed but a moment ere I was more than willing to tell out the story of what Jesus was, and what He could do for all who would consecrate themselves, and trust fully in Him. Only an hour before I had been in a spirit of opposition, not knowing what I was resisting. I did it in ignorance, as thousands do.

When my husband returned home, I hastened to tell him of my newfound rest of soul, and how the Lord had been dealing with me during his absence. He, never thinking it possible that I could so quickly have come into the experience he was seeking, said, “The Lord be praised for this; that you may get hold of it before I do.”

“Get hold of it? Why there’s nothing to get hold of, it is letting go all hold of everything but Jesus.” He was indeed mystified, and scarcely knew what to say, but he was very glad to see me so full of delight in Jesus. I was greatly disappointed, because I thought my dear husband would see that Jesus would do all for him, as soon as I told him what He had become to me. And now to find that he did not see it at all, and could have no sympathy with me, when he had been six months seeking, was as great a surprise to me as my newfound joy was to him. But I was comforted to know that the time was near at hand when he would see the simplicity of trusting Jesus for everything, by letting all go, and leaving all efforts and struggles. And I said to him, “What you lack is faith.”

“Yes, that must be so,” he quickly replied, “for I have tried everything else; so now I will try to get faith.” And at once, his thoughts being directed to faith as the object rather than the Lord Jesus, he was in as great difficulty as before. But he kept on struggling after the necessary faith, forgetting that faith must be centered on the Object--Jesus Christ.

THE HOUR ARRIVED FOR THE METHODIST CLASS MEETING,

and I found my feet more than willing, for with joy did I go forward to tell the blessedness of what Jesus could do. I did not wish to speak of myself, for I saw how the Lord Jesus had come to take up His abode in my heart, on purpose to reign as King over all its affections and desires.

My testimony in the class meeting stirred the people, and I don’t know how much good might have been done, had not a brother said, “Sister Boardman, you will not shrink back from professing the whole truth, and calling things by their right names. You’ll have to profess perfection, or you’ll not keep the blessing.”

“But I have no perfection to profess, I never before felt my imperfection as I now do. I always thought myself somebody, but now I see I am nothing and nobody.”

“Yes,” replied the brother, “but all that need not prevent your professing perfection, for it is not absolute perfection we mean, but Christian perfection. And I am sure you’ll lose the blessing, if you do not come out boldly on the subject, and declare the whole truth.” “But, brother, I cannot tell an untruth, and I am not perfect, but Jesus is my perfect Saviour, and I cannot lose Him. He has taken up His abode in my heart, and I do not think He will go away while I trust Him to stay and keep me. It is His presence that is my joy and happiness.”

The words of the brother might have troubled me more had not my mind been taken up with the thought of my husband. I so longed to have him know this glorious Saviour as I knew Him. But there seemed no prospect of his ceasing all effort, for he was most intently seeking faith.

Just at this time, the Lord, knowing our ignorance and seeing our need, sent a dear sister in the Lord to stay with us. She had a rich experience, and had seen something of the error of those professing to be sanctified, but had passed safely through the Scylla and Charybdis of perfectionism on the one hand, and of indifference or opposition on the other.

The bulk of professing Christians were then as now, indifferent, or opposed to the glorious truth that Jesus can deliver from the dominion of sin, and keep those who trust Him from yielding to temptation. She had been a member of Dr. Kirk’s Church, in Albany, and fifteen years before this, she was one of thirty members who had been turned out, as having embraced great error.

Half of the thirty had gone into antinomian perfectionism, (does not believe in entire sanctification) which led them into many very exotic ideas, all the while under the impression that they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Because they prayed without ceasing, therefore they followed the suggestion of the adversary, that secret prayer was unnecessary. On the same ground they gave up family worship. So they imagined that the Lord told them they need not observe the Sabbath, as they kept a holy Sabbath every day in their souls. Therefore the wives and daughters did the same on Sunday as on weekdays, and while professing holiness, were not ashamed to be seen seated at the window, engaged in sewing, on the Lord’s day. Thus Satan, as an angel of light, led them into many errors, and brought into great disrepute the cause of Christ.

But this dear old lady, who had been dismissed from the church with the others, but without sharing in their errors, was God’s special gift to us. She taught us many things, and strengthened me in the belief that Jesus would keep me in this blessed peace, if I never allowed anything to come between my soul and Christ, but would take everything to Him, just as a loving child would take all its little wants to its mother. All this was a wonderful help for had she put me upon the ground of what I must do, or what I must be, she would have brought me into bondage, instead of helping me to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had set me free. As the days went on, we were continually before the Lord in prayer for my dear husband, and the time came when, in a little prayer meeting, he was brought out.

Once a week we gathered together at the house of Mrs. Galapsie for prayer and to give testimony. She was an earnest Christian, living further up the ravine, and had a large commodious room for this purpose. As we were going to this meeting, I was feeling very desirous of telling what the Lord had done for me, as I had promised Him I would do, but the fear of being called a perfectionist was on my mind. And I said to my husband that I should so delight to tell them at the meeting what Jesus had become to me, but if they were going to call it “perfection,” as they did at the class meeting, I could not speak of it, because I felt my imperfection as never before. “What shall I do?”

“You need not trouble yourself about this,” he replied, “I have never found it of the least profit to dwell on doctrines, and why should you? Just tell out in a simple way what Jesus has done for you, and what He is to you, and let the rest alone. Trying, to settle your experience to suit the opinions of others, will only confuse you, and you are nowhere told in the Word of God to profess perfection.”

“Sure enough,” I exclaimed, and at once my soul was set at liberty on this point; then instantly my whole thoughts were absorbed in my husband’s state of mind, for it seemed so very strange that he who had always been as my teacher, leading me on, should now be in such distress of mind and so oppressed.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PRAYER MEETING

For some time past there had been much interest in this little prayer meeting. But on this most memorable occasion one was leading who was not spiritually minded. He was fond of hearing himself talk, and had consumed nearly half the time allotted to the meeting in this sort of self-entertainment. It was most trying thus to see the precious moments frittered away, and my dear husband, pressed as he was in spirit, felt like giving the man a sound thrashing. And he fully determined, when he had finished talking, to reprove him with great severity. He would tell him to stay at home another time, and get his own cold heart warmed up, and not come to a meeting like this, and spread out his own views, thus taking all the life out of the meeting.

Then came into his mind a far different thought, a gentle suggestion from the Master of this meeting. “What would Jesus do were He here, He, in all His compassion and love; what would He say? Jesus would not lose patience with the individual. He would call attention to Himself, and in some way He would draw all to look to Him as the Saviour, and fill them with joy, as He did the woman at the well, and make them rejoice in Himself by revealing His own love.” “If He were here, yes, if He were only here!” thought my husband. Then came another word, so full, so clear, “Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. “And faith, receiving what was said as a real fact, brought the presence of Christ Himself, a risen Saviour, alive from the dead, with him for evermore. Soon came another word quite as clear, “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” That moment he rolled over upon Christ, as his present Saviour from sin, the whole responsibility of keeping him.

A wonderful change was this after all the toiling and struggling of the past half year! It was in many respects a glad surprise, a glorious disappointment. It was not entirely different from what he had expected, but a great deal better. He had been looking to be made holy in himself, instead of which his eyes were opened to see, and his heart to accept, his own utter bankruptcy in himself, and his solvency in Christ alone. And this was unspeakable joy, because it bound him indissolubly to Christ forever by the bond of an absolutely necessary dependence for everything pertaining to life and godliness. He now saw where had been his great mistake. He had been toiling and trying to believe for a completed work wrought in himself, a state of sanctification, in which all would be completed, so that he might take satisfaction in his own holiness, instead of in Jesus and His Sanctification.

My husband rose from his knees to his feet in the little meeting to tell others what had been revealed to him. And he had now something to say which he thought would thrill every heart as it had done his own. He was greatly disappointed that all present did not quickly respond. But even the two who had already become somewhat convinced and anxious for a fuller life in Christ did not meet his expectations. In his joy he had well nigh forgotten the wanderings of the wilderness life in which he had spent half a year before reaching the Land. But now fairly in the Land, and seeing that it was but to step over Jordan and he was there, he thought he could quickly point out the way to others. But, alas! He found that souls were puzzled and perplexed here in this little meeting, and this calls to mind what he afterwards wrote concerning his own journeyings from Egypt to Canaan.

We quote his own words: “In all the wanderings of the children of Israel I see my own experience wonderfully fore-shown. Looking back over all the way in which the Lord has led me, I see at every step two things--

MY OWN SHAME AND GOD’S GLORY

“When I look at my own part in it I see murmurs, and fears, and rebellions; but, when I look at God’s part, I see the whole route ablaze with His glory, His patience, forbearance, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, and love. Yes, and in the Land He is all the glory of it. Oh! How my heart melts at the thought!”

Again we take up his own expression of the heart-felt satisfaction experienced this very hour of the revelation of God to him: “But, oh, when the Lord led me into rest of heart in Jesus for sanctification, how sweet it was! What an hour was that, and what a place! If ten years before the open vision of Christ on the cross had made the little school-house, where forgiveness was shown me, the gate of heaven--this place where now I saw Jesus in His invincible presence with me, face to face, though it was only a plain widow’s cottage on earth, seemed within the walls of heaven. O what a revelation was that to me, when in the very name of Jesus--so called because He should ‘save His people from their sins’--His office as my Emancipator from sin was embodied! O how my soul was gladdened with the assurance that the work would be done, that I should be purified unto God, and made zealous of good works, and should be kept by the power of God, and presented faultless before the throne in the great day, when I say that it was the work and the delight of the Saviour to do this for me! Henceforth, in this matter, my soul was at rest; and, oh, what a peace flowed in upon me and overflowed me! Then I could realize the preciousness of the words of Christ, ‘My peace I give unto you,’ and of the prophet’s wonderful words, ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.’ Henceforth, the Bible, precious as it had been to me before, received a double illumination to my apprehension. A mighty gold vein, before hidden, now unfolded itself, insomuch that the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, was again new book to me. Here, again, for this new necessity my heart had found its rest, and every want was satisfied”

However, the experience of the six months of mistaken efforts, before coming into the light, were of great benefit to him all through life. It enabled him to teach others to avoid these self-imposed processes, and to lead them to come directly to Jesus, to find in Him every need of the soul met. Yes, fully met. To him it was not the end of sanctification, but the beginning of a life of full, abiding union with Jesus. It as a new and better starting point or full and real progress in all time to come, all the springs of which were in Christ, not in himself. And this gave him unbounded satisfaction, because it bound him to Christ for all future progress, and gave him the precious assurance that there would be no end of growth, and also no stint of fruitage. Glory be to God!

Source: Not Recorded

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