A Tree Planted by the Rivers of Water.

An Address by

John Edgar,

M.A., B.Sc., M.B., C.M., F.R.E.P.S.G.

by Thousand

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An Address delivered in many of the towns of Great Britain and Ireland

By

JOHN EDGAR

M.A., B.Sc., M.B., C.M.;
Fellow of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow;
Professor of Midwifery and Diseases of Women, Anderson's College Medical School; Senior Surgeon, Royal Samaritan Hospital for Women, Glasgow.

Author of "Where are the Dead?" "Socialism and the Bible," "The Preservation of Identity in the Resurrection," and Joint-Author of "Great Pyramid Passages."

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"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he [this man of God of whom the Psalmist speaks] shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."—First Psalm, 1-3.

THE more we enquire into the laws which govern the natural and spiritual worlds, the more we find them in harmony with each other. Hence we conclude that they owe their existence to the same author. The natural man is apt to place the laws of nature first, but the man of God knows that the spiritual laws are the more important. In fact, it would seem as if God actually arranged every thing in nature so as to make clear to our understanding the great spiritual truths which otherwise might be beyond our comprehension.

We find many examples of this in the Scriptures. For instance, the nation of Israel is repeatedly symbolized as a vine tree, a tree which is quite useless except for one purpose, fruit-bearing. Turn to the 15th chapter of Ezekiel, and see what the Prophet says: "And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work?" Who would think of taking the wood of a vine tree to do any work? —"or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?—Behold, when it was

whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned? Therefore thus saith the Lord God: as the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem." The Lord could have made the vine a great tree like the fir or the cedar, but he did not choose to do so, doubtless because he wished to illustrate his purpose with regard to the nation of Israel, namely, that the sole primary object for which he had chosen them was that they might bear the fruits of holiness: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" (Deut. 10: 12, 13)

Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled in the year 70 A.D., when the nation of Israel was cast into the fire of trouble and destroyed. Our Lord Jesus explains the reason in the 21st chapter of Matthew, 43rd verse: "Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof,"—the fruits of holiness.

Christendom has made the same mistake in this respect as did natural Israel. Like the nation of Israel, the Christian nations have depended on their own strength and their own wisdom instead of on the Lord's, and they have become great in the eyes of the world. They have failed to see that the sole primary object for which the Lord has chosen them is that they should bear the fruits of holiness, as the Apostle explains: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4: 3). For this reason, the Lord is casting them off and is giving the Kingdom to a nation bearing the fruits thereof, the holy nation, redeemed out of every kindred and tongue and

people, despised and rejected by men, but chosen of God. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1: 26-29).

To be God's people, we must not only believe in the Lord, but we must also suffer for his sake (Phil. 1: 29); we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow him. Those who do this are the true Israel, the true vine. They are the nation who will inherit the Kingdom of heaven. Why? Because they have recognised that they must not depend upon worldly wisdom, worldly strength, worldly position, or upon anything else that this world can offer, but that their dependence is to be entirely upon the Lord; and they are striving with his help to cultivate the fruits of holiness. It was because Jesus with his disciples followed this course that he could say: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman," "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15: 1, 5).

A Tree Planted by Rivers of Water.

The tree described in the first Psalm, unlike the vine mentioned by Jesus and Ezekiel, does not refer however, to the nation of Israel but to the individual man of God. It may at first seem strange that God should compare a man to a tree; but it is evident from the Psalmist's use of the illustration that there must be some truth underlying it, and if we can only find out what this truth is, doubtless we shall be enriched by it spiritually.

A tree planted by rivers of water has, as a rule, plenty

of life, because it has access to and absorbs plenty of water. The same tree if transplanted to a desert, would soon die from lack of water. So it is with the man of God. It is only when he has access to the rivers of the water of truth, the Books of the Bible, that he can grow spiritually, and the more of the truth he absorbs and uses, the more vitality he gets.

Before there can be a tree there must first be a seed, and that seed must be sown in prepared ground. If the ground is hard, it will require to be broken up, but it does not always require such energetic treatment. In the parable of the sower, our Lord spoke of the different kinds of ground, and said that the good ground was the pure and honest heart. The preparation of the ground means the process by which we come to a realisation that we cannot of ourselves be pleasing to the Lord, and that, therefore, we need a Saviour. If, while in this attitude of mind and heart, we turn to have faith toward God through Jesus Christ, and being justified by faith, have peace with God, we are then ready to receive the seed, the word of the Kingdom, into our heart and become New Creatures in Jesus Christ. Thus the ground in which the seed is sown is the justified mind and heart.

The seed, as Jesus explained (Matt. 13 : 19), is the word of the Kingdom, the glad message that Christ's Kingdom is to be set up on earth, and that, if only we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Christ, we shall be joint-heirs with him in that Kingdom for the grand purpose of blessing all the families of the earth to the glory of God the Father, and of his Son, Jesus Christ. If the seed is properly received into the pure and honest heart, it at once begins to take root and sprout. The root represents the faith of the New Creature.

There are two acts of faith, the faith of justification and the faith of consecration. Our Lord Jesus did not require to take the first step because he was never any-

thing but just or righteous, but he consecrated himself by faith. He had such faith in his Father in heaven that he delighted to do his will, even though he knew that this meant the surrender of all his life-rights as a human being, that he would be blotted out of existence, and that the mighty power of God would be required to raise him from the dead to a new nature, the Divine Nature (Eph. 1 : 19, 20). This does not require so much faith on our part, because Christ was the first to rise from the dead (Acts 26 : 23). He led the way, and we know that what our Heavenly Father has done for him, he is abundantly able and willing to do for us.

The two acts of faith are shown in the 5th chapter of Romans. In the first verse, we are told that it is *by faith* that we are justified and so have peace with God; and then in the next verse we are told further that it is *by faith* also that we have access into this grace wherein we stand, the grace or favour of sanctification, and so have hope of the glory of God. The first act of faith, by which we are justified, is the preparation of the ground, the heart. If the seed, the word or glad tidings of the Kingdom, is properly received into such a heart and takes root there, the New Creature is begotten. The root is the faith of the New Creature, the second act of faith, the faith of consecration. It is the small beginning which eventually, if permitted to grow, will develop into the mature fruit-tree, the man of God, the New Creature in Christ Jesus.

When the seed of the fruit-tree is sown it sends out little root-tendrils to absorb water and the various minerals or earthly elements which have been dissolved by the water. Soon a little stem sprouts and shows itself above ground. This little stem then sends out little branches, which, with the root and the stem grow thicker and longer and stronger year by year. When the branches put forth leaves and eventually buds, flowers and fruit, we have the mature fruit-tree.

The New Creature Compared to a Tree.

Let us now consider the various parts of the tree in detail, and compare these with the various stages in the development of the New Creature as outlined in 2 Pet. 1: 5-7; and we shall be struck with the wonderful aptness of the illustration, which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist uses in our text.

The Apostle's words are: "Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity."

The Root of Faith.

The first of the graces is the root of faith. As with the root of a tree, its tendrils are at first small and delicate, but they grow and spread in all directions with the continued growth of the New Creature.

The root of a tree has two functions:

(1) It is the part of the tree which *takes hold of the ground.* At first the hold is very feeble, so that even a child could pluck it up; but by and by, when the tree is large, it would defy the united strength of many strong men to uproot it. It is the same with our faith as New Creatures. Faith is the part which takes hold of the ground, the justified heart or will. At first, when our faith is small, we should be easily uprooted, were it not that the Lord is caring for us at this as at every stage. Gradually with our spiritual development, the various branches of our faith grow and spread out so as to take a firmer hold of our hearts. Some of them take hold of that part of our heart or will which regulates our thoughts, so that we come more and more to think as Jesus thought; others take hold of those parts of our heart or will which regulate our speech and general conduct, so that we

gradually come to talk as Jesus talked, and walk as he walked. The more our faith grows and the firmer the hold it takes of our heart, the better we are able to withstand the assaults of the enemy. Faith is the great foundation grace, the one without which it would be impossible for us to grow. "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

(2) The other function of the root of a tree is *the absorption of water from the ground, and of the various earthly or mineral elements in the ground, which can be dissolved by the water and are useful for the growth of the tree.* Water forms three-fourths of the weight of most plants. Accordingly it is indispensable. If the tree were deprived of it for even a day, it would begin to wither. Coming from the "rivers of water," beside which the tree is planted, it percolates through the ground, searches out the various earthly elements which are there, dissolves them little by little, and is then absorbed by the root. All the water that enters into the structure of the tree comes by the root; none of it enters by any other part, not even through the leaves.

The rivers of water by which the New Creature is planted are the different Books of the Bible, and the water of truth from them percolates into our hearts, through the channels of our eyes and our ears. When it enters our hearts, it searches out the different natural elements which it finds there, and gradually dissolves them. One of these elements is ambition, which leads the natural man to strive to be great in this world, to make a name for himself, to accumulate riches, etc. However desirable this may be from the worldly point of view, it is a wrong principle so far as the man of God is concerned; but when the truth gets into the heart, the natural element of ambition is gradually dissolved, and as it becomes absorbed along with the water of truth, it is transformed from an earthly ambition into a spiritual ambition, a heavenly ambition.

This spiritual ambition leads the New Creature to strive to please God, whatever men may think of him; it leads him to lay up in store for himself treasure in heaven, and makes him "covet earnestly the best gifts," in order that he may be counted worthy of becoming a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, and so be enabled to satisfy the desires of his heart in glorifying God and helping to bless all the families of the earth.

Another natural element is that of combativeness which many of us possess to a greater or less extent. The natural man who has the quality of combativeness is apt to be very objectionable, but when such a man becomes a New Creature in Christ, the truth searches out the natural combativeness in his heart and gradually dissolves it, and as it becomes absorbed by the faith of the New Creature, it is transformed into a spiritual combativeness. This quality is one of the finest which can be possessed by the man of God, because, properly directed, it enables him to carry on a warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and so to fight the good fight of faith. The natural man uses his combativeness to fight others for the sake of himself; the man of God uses his combativeness to fight himself for the sake of others. We must all have this quality, to some extent at least. If we do not possess it naturally, we shall require to pray to our Heavenly Father to assist us. You know how the skilful gardener adds to the ground whatever elements may be lacking, if they are necessary to the growth of the tree. I am sure the Lord will give us whatever elements are needful to our spiritual growth.

The root, then, represents our faith, and just as the root is the only part of the tree which absorbs water, so the man of God receives the truth only by the one means, namely, his faith. If a man lacks faith, he will not be able to receive the truth. That explains the reason why so many tell us that the *Divine Plan of the Ages* is the most difficult

book they ever read. They have not the root of faith in their hearts. But the New Creature by his faith can, and must drink in the water of truth. If he is deprived of it for even a day, he begins to wither.

What is in the root which enables it to absorb the water with the dissolved earthly elements? It is the sap, and the process of absorption is called endosmose. By endosmose is meant the natural law by which, when a thin fluid is separated by a porous wall from a more concentrated fluid, the latter absorbs the former. The sap is thicker than the water in the ground and therefore absorbs it with its dissolved earthly elements through the medium of the root. Similarly, the Holy Spirit (which, I understand, is represented by the sap), by a spiritual process corresponding to endosmose, absorbs the water of truth together with the natural elements which have been dissolved by the truth; and the medium through which this absorption is effected is our faith, the root of the New Creature. In this way the measure of the Holy Spirit is gradually increased in the New Creature, and just as the sap not only nourishes the root but ascends to the other parts of the tree, the trunk, branches, leaves, etc., and nourishes them also, so the Holy Spirit thus increased in measure and strength, develops not only the faith of the New Creature, but also the other graces which we have still to consider.

Add to your Faith, Virtue.

If a seed is sown and takes root, no one is at first aware of the fact. It is not until the little root adds to itself a stem and the stem appears above the ground that we can say: "Ah! A seed has been planted there, and it has *taken root*." *The stem is the first visible manifestation.* This brings us to our second point. The Apostle Peter says: "Add to your faith virtue." The word translated "virtue" properly means "fortitude" (see Wilson's

Emphatic Diaglott). When we present our bodies a living sacrifice to the Lord, the root of faith, the first step in the development of the New Creature, is in our hearts, but at first no one knows it except ourselves. It is not until we add to our faith fortitude that others come to know that the Word of Truth has taken root. Fortitude is the first visible manifestation of the New Creature. If we do not develop fortitude, our faith will die; just as in the case of the natural seed, if a stem fails to appear, the root will die.

What does this quality of fortitude mean? It means the courage of our faith. When we add to our faith fortitude, we not only believe in our heart, but we also confess with our mouth that Jesus is our Lord, and it is when we begin to tell this to people and to show it in our daily life and conduct that others learn that we are Christians. We must not be ashamed of Christ. If we are, he will be ashamed of us when he comes to reckon with us. I remember one day, when sitting in a train, I had some tracts in my pocket. My faith told me to hand them to my fellow passengers, but the flesh rebelled. I was very nearly yielding when the thought came to me, "Be not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." I pulled the tracts out of my pocket and looked at them. There on the cover of the uppermost one I saw the very words which had come to my mind: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Then faith had the victory. Having now the courage of my convictions, I handed round the tracts and found it not so dreadful after all.

Why should we be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? It is such good news! Poor groaning humanity is waiting for it. Even though men may sneer or jeer at you, or persecute you for believing it and proclaiming it, by and by in the day of visitation, they will remember your good works which they behold, and will glorify God on your behalf (1 Pet. 2:12).

Virtue or fortitude is that grace which enables us to give the truth to others and to model our own lives by it, and to persevere in both in spite of opposition, and also in spite of repeated failures. At first, when we are only young plants, we bend at every blast of adversity, but by and by when we grow more mature, we are able to withstand any storm which may assail our faith in God and his truth.

Add to your Virtue, Knowledge.

When you begin to speak of the truth to others, you find very soon that you cannot explain it as clearly as you would wish, and questions are put to you, which you find you cannot answer. For instance, you will be asked: "Is not that a second chance?" and "Would that not lead to sin?" The effect is to send you again and again to the rivers of truth to refresh your memory, and add to your fortitude knowledge; and while refreshing your memory, you will find your heart refreshed also. The more you impart the truth to others, the more you add to your own knowledge, the clearer and more precious the truth becomes to you. Again, when you begin to mould your life in accordance with the will of God, the various experiences through which you pass, the opposition you receive, the failures you make, and all the many trials and difficulties which you are bound to encounter on the narrow way, send you again and again to the Word of God for instruction as well as for comfort and exhortation.

Just as there are many branches in a good tree, so many branches of knowledge require to be cultivated by the true Christian who desires to be conformed to the image of Christ. Seeking to know God, his glorious character and his wonderful plan, and Christ, the express image of the Father, the true Christian develops branches of knowledge in the heavenly direction. Alongside these he finds it necessary and pleasant to develop branches of knowledge

concerning the Prophets and the Apostles and the other Old Testament and New Testament Saints, and still other branches concerning the graces of the spirit and the exceeding great and precious promises of God. Besides these there are many more [illegible] including, lower down, branches of knowledge concerning the wiles of the devil, and also the various temptations (troubles and allurements) which come to us from the world and from our flesh. We must see to it that we can say with the Apostle Paul: "We are not ignorant of Satan's devices." If you think it is unnecessary to know about the wiles of the devil you will fail to be forewarned, and not being forewarned you will not be forearmed, with the probable result that sooner or later you will be overthrown by the adversary.

Still lower down, and tending to grow earthwards are many branches of secular knowledge which are not so important as the others. Yet they are necessary in some degree to the proper understanding of the Bible. For instance, we ought to know something about grammar and the meaning of words. It is helpful also to know a little of the Greek, and possibly also of the Hebrew language, as [illegible] a few words for the better understanding of the truth, a knowledge of geography, history, botany, etc., is often helpful in grasping the meaning of many of the illustrations and historical and geographical allusions so frequently met with in the Scriptures.

But while adding to our fortitude knowledge, it is essential that we should attend also to the next of the Apostle's injunctions:

Add to your Knowledge, Temperance (Self-Control).

If there were no branches on a tree, there would be no fruit, and small branches would bear little fruit. So it is with the New Creature in Christ Jesus. Without knowledge of God and his glorious plan of redemption he will

bear no fruit, and if his knowledge be small, his fruitage will also be small. It is evident then, that we must cultivate many branches of knowledge. But a fruit-tree does not grow simply for the purpose of having branches. However fine these branches may be, it must develop fruit in order to justify its existence. This will necessitate judicious pruning. A tree that is not pruned simply runs to wood. Similarly, the purpose for which the man of God must develop the various branches of knowledge is that he may in due time bear an abundant fruitage of love, and for this purpose careful pruning and training will be necessary.

In the case of the New Creature, however—and here the analogy between the tree and the New Creature fails—much is left to the freedom of his will. He is treated as a reasoning being, and is expected to do much of his own pruning. Paul says: "For if we judge ourselves we shall not be judged, but if we are judged we are chastened of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world" (I Cor. 11: 31, 32). In other words, we ought daily to examine ourselves and exercise self-control. If we do not, we are not using the spirit of a sound mind, and the Lord will require to prune or chasten us, just as the skilful gardener requires to prune the tree which has no reasoning power to guide it.

The sole object of our studies should be to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed. The development of the different branches of knowledge should be so controlled that we may grow on them the fruit of love. That is what the branches are for; and the reason why there are so many branches, is that there may be the more fruit.

We require to exercise control, especially in regard to the branches of secular knowledge. In the natural fruit-tree the lowest branches tend to grow towards the earth. After the same fashion the branches of secular knowledge

are prone to grow earthwards. We should remember not to cultivate these branches simply for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, nor for earthly purposes other than our daily vocation (and then to as restricted an extent as possible), but only in order to understand God's Word, and so help our spiritual growth. It is best to be content for the most part with what secular knowledge we possessed before we became New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The more time and energy we devote to the cultivation of secular branches, the more our spiritual growth is apt to become stunted, and our fruitage of love of poor quality. The brethren can be of assistance to one another in this matter. For instance, from my former study of the secular branch of botany, I am endeavouring to explain to you the Psalmist's meaning and through this the Apostle Peter's exhortation, so that your and my own spiritual growth may be aided.

We have seen, then, that a tree which is not pruned runs to wood. It may become large and imposing, but its fruit is scanty and of poor quality. So is it with the New Creature if he does not exercise self-control. "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up."

Self-control must be exercised also in order to keep the body under, so that we may not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind to prove what is the good and acceptable will of God. Self-control is needed so that we may not be unduly cast down by our failures, nor exalted by our successes. It is needed to prevent us from being turned aside from the narrow way by rebuffs or persecutions, or from becoming filled with pride because of flatteries.

Add to your Self-Control, Patience.

We cannot develop patience until we are able to exercise self-control. This quality of patience is represented by the leaves of the tree. You may say: "That is very

strange. What is there about the leaves of a tree which enables them to represent patience? Leaves will grow on a tree though it has not been pruned." That is true, and here again the analogy between the tree and the New Creature fails, but there are several points of close resemblance between the leaves of a tree and the patience of the man of God.

If you see a tree without leaves at a time when you expect them, you say at once: "I am afraid that that tree is dying," and if you have any interest in it, you water it, in order, if possible, to give it life. But if you see that it has a profusion of green leaves you say: "Ah! There is plenty of life in that tree," and if it is a fruit-tree you expect to get good fruit by and by. So it is with the New Creature. If you see a man of God who has not developed this quality of patience at a time when you should have expected it, you say: "I am afraid he is dying spiritually." Then you give him the water of truth and pray for him, and help him as much as you can, in order, if possible, to give him life (Jas. 5:20; 1 John 3:10). On the other hand, once you see patience developed, you say he has spiritual life in him, and the more patience he has the more spiritual life you think he has, and the more you expect that in due time the ripe fruit of love will make its appearance.

There are two special qualities possessed by the leaves of a tree which cause it to resemble patience. One is their mobility, and the other is the fact that they absorb Carbonic Acid gas, and split it up into Carbon and Oxygen. The Carbon is then used for the growth of the tree, and the Oxygen, that element of the atmosphere which sustains the life of man and the lower animals, is given off into the air.

(1) You know how mobile are the leaves of a tree. When a puff of wind comes, the leaves all bend under it, and then, when it has passed, they recover themselves

immediately as if nothing had happened. In this respect the leaves differ markedly from the trunk of a well-developed tree. The trunk represents our fortitude, our firmness to principles; the leaves, on the other hand, represent our patience, our yielding to troubles and trials where no principle is at stake.

Just as in the case of the well developed natural tree the strong trunk, together with the firm hold which the root has in the ground, prevents the tree from being uprooted by any strong wind or other cause so the mature man of God, because of his deep faith and strong courage in the Lord (not in himself), is able to stand firm against the wind of any false doctrine or anything else intended by the Adversary to cause him to swerve from his duty to the Lord. We are told that the servant of the Lord must not strive, but we are told also that he must "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, R.V.). Very different from this is the quality of patience. There are plenty of trials which come to us from without which do not affect matters of principle. In such cases we must yield, we must exercise patience.

Remember the example of our Lord Jesus. When the truth was at stake, when he was tempted to turn aside from the will of God, nothing could make him swerve. Knowing that the Lord would help him, he set his face like a flint; and he knew that he would not be confounded (Isa. 50:7). He had strong fortitude, but at the same time he had infinite patience. His persecutions and adversities he bore meekly, patiently. When he was reviled, he reviled not again, and he allowed himself to be scourged, spat upon and sneered at, without retaliating.

(2) The other quality possessed by the leaves is the power of absorbing Carbonic Acid gas, splitting it up into Carbon and Oxygen, assimilating the former and returning the latter to the atmosphere. All the Carbon (Charcoal)

in the tree is extracted from the atmosphere, and it is the leaves alone which do this wonderful and laborious work. Yet Carbon forms one half the dry weight of a tree. It is represented chiefly in the woody fibre which gives strength to its various parts. This reminds us that it is only when we have the quality of patience that we can add moral fibre to our spiritual being, and so develop strength of character. That is why the Apostle James urges us to let patience have her perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.

On the under surface of leaves there are a great many little pores called stomata (mouths), through which the Carbonic Acid gas is absorbed into the leaves and the Oxygen is liberated into the atmosphere. Little particles, called Chlorophyll granules, which give the green colour to the leaves, seize hold of the Carbonic Acid gas the moment it enters, and split it up into its component parts, one part of Carbon and two of Oxygen. The Carbon is assimilated to give strength to the various parts of the tree. The two parts of Oxygen, on the other hand, escape into the air. Thus plants absorb Carbonic Acid gas, and give off Oxygen.

In the case of human beings and the lower animals, the process is exactly reversed. Through their lungs they absorb Oxygen and exhale Carbonic Acid gas. Oxygen is life-giving to man and animals, and Carbonic Acid gas is poisonous to them, and if there were no plants the atmosphere would soon become exhausted of Oxygen and surcharged with Carbonic Acid gas, and all flesh would die. How wonderful is the wisdom of God in this interchange and balance of nature.

There is the same relationship between natural and spiritual men as there is between animals and plants. The atmosphere in which trees and animals live, represents our environment, the circumstances amidst which our lives are spent. The Oxygen would fitly represent those

circumstances which conduce to material prosperity, and the Carbonic Acid gas those which lead to material adversity. The natural man thrives on material prosperity, just as he thrives on Oxygen. It is life-giving to him. Just see the effect produced on a man by giving him an increase of salary and a better position. Doesn't he thrive! Doesn't he enjoy himself! The more prosperous he is in a natural sense, the more he comes to think that the evil in this world has been over-rated. But suppose earthly adversity comes, he is at once cast down. Should his adversity increase, so does his depression, and with its continuance he becomes more and more dejected and despondent, till in extreme cases he falls into such a state of despair that he may finally commit suicide. Thus, material adversity, like Carbonic Acid gas, is poisonous to the natural man. "The sorrow of the world worketh death."

With the spiritual man, the New Creature in Christ Jesus, the reverse condition obtains. If the New Creature received no physical, financial, or social adversity, he would wither away spiritually. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." He requires adversity for his spiritual growth. By means of his patience, he splits it up, takes the good out of it in order to add moral fibre to his being, and gives off the double portion of prosperity to others.

There is thus the same interchange and balance between the man of God and the man of the world as there is between plants and animals. Just as men and animals absorb Oxygen and exhale Carbonic Acid gas, and trees on the contrary, absorb Carbonic Acid gas and emit Oxygen, just so worldly men, while themselves thriving on material prosperity, inflict adversity on those who are endeavouring to live godly in Christ Jesus, and the latter, instead of being injured by the experience, make use of every earthly adversity which comes to them to do good

to the world as they have opportunity, while at the same time they add to their own spiritual strength and sustain their own spiritual life. Jesus, speaking to his disciples, said: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15: 18-25). But by returning good for evil, blessing those that curse them, doing good to those that hate them, and praying for those who despitefully use them, the foot-step followers of the gentle Jesus reprove the world of sin, and exercise a preservative influence over the world, preventing it from going rapidly into deeper moral degradation and death.

Jesus declared this truth when, after telling his followers that God's true prophets had always been persecuted for righteousness' sake, and bidding them rejoice and be exceeding glad when they were reviled and persecuted for his sake, he added: "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5: 10-13). Just as salt exercises a preservative influence on flesh, and as plants exercise a preservative influence on animals, so the saints of God have all along exercised a preservative influence on the world, for the few righteous men in the world have preserved it from destruction. That is what Paul meant when he quoted Isaiah: "Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah" (Rom. 9: 29). It was because there were not even ten righteous men in Sodom that the Lord destroyed it (Gen. 18: 16-32).

Before leaving this part of our subject, I should like to draw your attention to two other points of importance. The first is that the proportion of Carbonic Acid gas in the atmosphere is very small, only one five-hundredth that of Oxygen. So is it also in the spiritual atmosphere of

the New Creature. The proportion of adversity is, as a rule, much less than that of prosperity. Consequently we must be careful not to waste any of it.

The other point is that the Carbonic Acid gas is absorbed and split up only under the influence of the light and warmth which comes from the sun. During the nighttime this action entirely ceases. In the same way, it is only when the New Creature is under the influence of God's light and warmth, his wisdom and love emanating from the Gospel, that he can get the good out of every adversity by means of his patience. "Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 20, 21).

Add to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Love of the Brethren; and to Love of the Brethren, Love.

The tree is now well-grown, root, trunk, and branches, it has been pruned and trained, and it has produced a profusion of fresh, green leaves. We can picture before our minds just such a strong beautiful character, full of spiritual life and energy, giving grateful shelter to man and beast. Full of faith, and with a strong courage in the Lord, he is not afraid to speak about Christ, and model his life according to his conception of Christ. Not only does he know the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, but he can expound it to others and make plain to them the mysteries of God. Indeed, so numerous and extensive may be the branches of knowledge which he has cultivated that he may have been called to be the pastor of a large and wealthy congregation, or the occupant of a chair in some theological college. Such a character as this would surely be the admiration of all who know him, but even this may not be the sum of all his virtues. His self-control may be such that he is able to keep calm in all circumstances, to keep his body under, and to so arrange his

reading and observation that he studies only such subjects and those in such a way that his spiritual growth may be increased. Lastly, his patience may be so perfect that he is able to endure adversity, reviling, and persecution, be strengthened in character by the trials to which he is exposed, and return good for evil. Surely, you would say, such a beautiful character as that would be fit for the Kingdom of heaven.

No, dear brethren, something more is necessary before he can be accepted as a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. If with all these excellent qualities he has not in his due season grown love, God will cut him down as of no further use. Strange, is it? No, we never grow fruit-trees for their foliage; we grow fruit-trees for their fruit. If the good that a man does to others is at the best merely the outcome of his faith, knowledge, and patience, and in order to build up his own spiritual character, if he does not reach the stage when the good he does to others is the outcome of love for them and for God, he has not fulfilled the purpose for which God had chosen him. Love must be the motive underlying all our words and actions before God will recognise us as having cultivated the fruit of holiness. It is only to such as develop this God-like quality of love that the Lord will say in his own time: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

Paul gives this thought in the beautiful words of 1 Cor. 13:1-3: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give

my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."

Just as a fruit-tree in addition to its leaves must develop buds, blossoms, and lastly fruit, in order to justify its existence, so the man of God must add to his patience godliness, to his godliness love of the brethren, and to his love of the brethren love. The godliness is represented by the buds, the love of the brethren is represented by the blossoms, and the love by the fruit. The bud, the blossom and the fruit represent three stages, the ultimate one being the fruit, that for which the tree is grown; in the same way godliness, love of the brethren and love represent three stages, the ultimate one being love in the all-comprehensive sense, the fruit for which the New Creature is trained and developed.

Add to your Patience, Godliness.

Some claim that godliness means God-likeness. It is true that the root-meaning is God-likeness, but this is an example of the error into which one may fall by insisting too strongly on the root-meaning of words. Godliness is one of many words which have changed their meaning in the course of time. If it meant God-likeness, it would not be necessary to add to it love of the brethren and love, because God is love, and if we are like God we should have reached the mark of love in its all-comprehensive sense, the mark of perfect love. The Greek word translated "godliness" in the verse which we are considering is "*eusebeia*," which means piety, reverence for God. Our English word "godliness" in its usual meaning is, therefore, a good translation of the Greek term.

That is the bud, the first stage in the formation of the fruit of love. The man who has reached only this stage is not so attractive as one who has added to his godliness love of the brethren. The bud is a little hard, green thing. The germ of the blossom and fruit is there, but it is hidden

from sight, covered over with a hard capsule, and if you were to put the bud into your mouth, you would find it rather bitter, unpleasant to the taste.

Those who have reached the stage of godliness may be expected in due time to develop the fruit of love, but so far they have only the beginning of it.

The Scottish race of two or three generations ago formed an illustration of the effect of this grace of godliness. These men had great reverence for God, and love for righteousness. They had what we might call the duty-love, a desire to obey God's commandments. They were honest in their business and in all their affairs of life, and were very strict with their children. They were respected by everyone, but like the germ in the bud, their love, although it was there, was hidden. It was considered a sign of weakness to show their love, or to be demonstrative in any way. The features of these men, as may be noticed in their portraits, or in the faces of the few who are still alive, were hard and stern. These characteristics may to some extent be natural to the Scottish race, but I believe they were chiefly the result of their Calvinistic training. A man who is sincere always tries to be like the god whom he worships, and the Calvinistic god is stern, unlovable.

Add to your Godliness, Love of the Brethren.

Godliness is a good quality, but it is only the bud-stage, the first or duty-stage of love. Those who come to know God better will add to their godliness love of the brethren. This is represented by the blossom.

Just as there comes a time when the petals which are forming inside the bud become so large that one fine morning, through the kindly influence of the sun's light and warmth, they burst the hard capsule and the bud becomes a blossom, so there comes a time in the development of the New Creature, who is being conformed to the image of Christ, when, through the influence of the wisdom

and love of God which shines from the pages of the Gospel the love which is growing in his heart bursts the reserve which has hitherto restrained it, and he finds that he has added to his godliness or duty-love love of the brethren.

That which helps the Christian most is the Lord's new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you," and John's explanation of this in his first epistle, chapter 3, verse 16: "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (R.V.).

A tree in blossom is peculiarly attractive. Its beauty and its fragrant odour appeal to us. Is it not exactly the same with many dear brothers and sisters of our acquaintance? Their beauty of character and the sweet smelling savour of their many self-sacrificing acts of kindness appeal to us. We are attracted to them. Is it not the same with any company of the Lord's brethren who present the beauty and fragrant odour of brotherly love? Many have told me that the first thing which attracted them to the truth was the love manifested among the brethren.

But remember that "the [natural] heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Our hearts will sometimes tell us that we have developed this grace of brotherly love when we have not done so. So long as the germ is shut up inside a hard capsule of reserve, we have reached only the bud-stage. It is not until the petals have burst open the bud covering that we can truly say we have reached the blossom-stage. To have reached the blossom-stage of love of the brethren our love must be seen. It must not be shut up within our hearts but must be manifested by kind, loving words and many little and possibly some great self-sacrificing acts of love. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another." But how are all men to know it, unless they see us manifest this love? If they do see it, and especially if they see it in trying circumstances when

they would least expect it, then they will know that we are Jesus' disciples.

Remember to say often to yourselves: "Have I this love shut up in my heart?—If so, I have only developed the bud of godliness." Or: "Am I showing the brethren my love by my words and actions?—If so, I am glad, for that means that I have developed into the blossom stage, and soon I should expect to develop the fruit of all-comprehensive love." Remember that to love a brother means that you will tell him so; but it means also something more, as the Apostle says: "Love not in word (only), but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Dear Brethren, let us all pray to God that he will enable us not only to have thoughts and desires in the direction of loving our brethren in Christ with a pure heart fervently, but that we shall love them as Christ loved us, namely, by laying down our lives for them in the way he did, no matter whether they are kind and loving to us in return, or are speaking evil of us and are unkind toward us. Let us remember that we are all still in the flesh and liable to err.

This brings us to a special point of likeness between the blossoms of trees and this love of the brethren. The blossoms lay down their lives for one another. It so happens that God has formed them in such a way that no blossom can fertilise itself, for the pollen, the life-giving part of the flower, ripens first. It is not until the pollen has been cast off that the germ inside ripens, ready to receive and be fertilised by the pollen from other blossoms. When it has been fertilised, the petals fall off and the fruit begins to grow. How does the pollen get to the other blossoms? It is by means of insects which flit about from flower to flower, carrying the pollen with them on their legs and bodies. They do this, not for the purpose of fertilising the blossoms, but in order to suck the sweetness out of them.

That is exactly what happens to us. When we have blossomed forth into love of the brethren, we are a mark for Satan. He is not the adversary of the world, for the whole world, we are told, already lies in the wicked one (1 John 5 : 19, R.V.), but he is the adversary of those who show the spirit of Christ, the spirit of love; and the more we manifest love of the brethren, the more we are a prey for Satan. It is he who sends along the insects of trouble to suck the sweetness out of our lives and to carry away our vitality.

Insects, many of them, are beautiful to look at; frequently they appear quite insignificant; but let one of these creatures alight upon our hand or neck or other exposed part of our body, and begin to crawl over us, how disgusted we feel! Instinctively we brush them off or try to kill them. Dear brethren, these insects represent the trials which come to the New Creature. When they visit some of the other brethren, they do not look so very bad, they appear to us sometimes almost insignificant, but let them alight upon us, and at once we find how very disagreeable they are, much more so than we had expected. Instinctively we try to get rid of them, but just as with insects, the more we fight against them the worse, as a rule, they become, and the majority of them are poisonous.

In sending us trials for the purpose of sucking the sweetness out of our lives, and poisoning us, Satan succeeds so far as the body is concerned. Our pollen, our human vitality, goes with the trials. But it is just here that Satan defeats his own ends, because by these same trials the New Creature is strengthened in character, and learns how to sympathise with others who are passing through similar experiences. We are being prepared in the same way that Jesus was prepared, for "it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of

their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2 : 10). The trials with which God permitted Satan to tempt our Lord Jesus were the same as those which we endure. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4 : 15).

The more trials we have, if we are rightly exercised by them, the better we are enabled to sympathise with our brethren in their sufferings, not only with those of them who are rejoicing in the light of present truth, but also with souls as are still in bondage in the nominal system, or are not in the wilderness condition disgusted with all professions of religion. The more we sympathise with them, the more of our time, money, talents, influence, and energies do we surrender for their temporal and especially for their spiritual interests. We do not consider ourselves first and our brethren afterwards, but the reverse of this. We lay down our lives, our human vitality, for them, just as the blossoms lay down their lives for one another.

One very important fact to remember is that the blossoms have nothing whatever to do with sending the insects to the other blossoms. Though we know that the trials which come to us as New Creatures work together for our spiritual good, and are therefore essential for us, we have nothing to do with putting trials upon others. As Jesus said: "It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto him through whom the offence cometh!" The Lord will permit Satan and all who are willing to be his agents to place trials upon the brethren, knowing that these will act as tests for them, and, if rightly used, will enable them to become more developed spiritually, but the Lord's vengeance will surely come sooner or later upon all "through whom the offence cometh." God forbid that any of us should act as agents of Satan in this or any other way! If we should happen to be led into placing trials upon the brethren, let us confess our sins at

the throne of grace and endeavour to make amends for the wrong we have committed.

Add to your Love of the Brethren, Love.

Just as the blossom, which has given up its sweetness and vitality, is ready to be fertilised and become developed into fruit through further visits of the insects bearing the pollen from other blossoms, so the New Creature who has through trials lost much of the sweetness and vitality of his human life, and is laying down his life for the brethren is ready to develop from love of the brethren into love in its all-comprehensive sense through the visitation of still further trials, and through the sympathetic assistance of his brethren who are laying down their lives for him. In this way he learns to sympathise not only with his brethren in Christ Jesus, but also with the world of mankind, and finally with his enemies.

(1) While endeavouring to love righteousness and obey God (duty-love), he discovers how very frail he is, and how much he desires others to make allowance for his failings. (2) This teaches him to make allowance for the frailties of the brethren, and enables him to learn how to love them (brotherly-love). He finds how much good he can do himself and them by bearing patiently with them and treating them kindly, lovingly, even though to do so he requires to sacrifice what he might justly call his rights. (3) In this way, through these further trials and through the help which he himself receives from the brethren who are laying down their lives for him, he becomes, so to speak, fertilised, and develops the fruit of love (all-comprehensive love). He finds that he is now able to sympathise with both friends and enemies, to make large allowances for their many failings, and to do them good as he has opportunity, for "love covers the multitude of sins." In this way he is getting himself ready to reign with Christ and bless the world.

The best way to overcome your enemies is to be kind to them. Very few enemies can withstand persistent kindness, if your love for them is unfeigned. The fruit of love implies love for God, love for righteousness, love for the brethren, love for mankind in general, love for enemies, love for everything except evil. It is love in the all comprehensive sense of the term. When we have reached that stage, we have reached the mark of perfect love.

This does not mean, however, that there is now no more room for development. At first the fruit is small, hard, green, wrinkled, and of unpleasant odour and bitter taste. When eaten, it is apt to be rejected. That represents the quality of our love at the first. In due time, if all goes well, the unripe fruit gives place to the ripe fruit, large, soft, and velvety to the touch. It is pleasant to the eyes, the odour is fragrant, and when eaten it is delicious and good for food. That is how our love is when it is ripe.

If the fruit is left on the tree, insects attack it just as they attacked the blossoms, and by and by it falls to the ground and withers away. But there is something left; there are seeds inside, which, when sown, produce other trees. So it is with the man of God. Trials come upon him to the end; and then, when he falls in death he will in due time be associated with Christ in bringing forth other trees of righteousness. That is how it was with Jesus, as he said: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12: 24). It has been estimated that the proportion of the dead to be raised will be 144,000 to each of the members of Christ's body.

Before closing, there are two further points to which I desire to draw your attention. (1) When a seed is sown, the root does not grow and spread out in every direction and become very large before the stem begins to grow.

and the stem does not continue growing until it has reached its full development before the branches begin to appear, and so with the other parts of the tree. So, also, we do not find faith reaching its full development before fortitude becomes manifest, nor fortitude before knowledge, etc. What we do find is, as in the case of the tree, that all the graces enumerated by the Apostle Peter appear in the order mentioned by him, within a comparatively short period, varying with the individual, and that then, year by year, they continue to grow more or less quickly.

(2) The other point to be remembered is, that if you sow a seed in the ground, and nobody takes care of it, the result may be that a fruit-tree will grow there, but the fruit which grows on that wild tree will be of very poor quality, and the tree itself will be stunted, badly developed. On the other hand, if the tree be attended to by a skilful gardener, it will grow fully and symmetrically, and its fruit will be large, soft, and luscious. Compare, for instance, the crab-apple tree with the properly cultivated apple-tree. It is the same with the New Creature. However anxious we may be that we shall produce fruit in our season and that our leaf shall not wither, no anxiety or exertion on our part will give the desired result apart from the loving care of the Lord, the husbandman. Unlike a tree, we have intelligence and are left largely to the freedom of our will. If we withdraw ourselves from the Lord's care, our spiritual growth will be stunted, and our fruitage of love will be small and of poor quality. The more we surrender ourselves to him, and the less we rely upon ourselves, the better will be our spiritual growth, and the better fruit we shall be able to grow. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5: 6-7). Amen.

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