

# Living Water

*"Call unto me and I will answer Thee and shew Thee great and mighty things, which Thou knowest not." Jer. 33:3*

VOL. XXXIV

NASHVILLE, TENN., APRIL 1, 1915

NUMBER 13

## Under the Gourd Vine

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ELIJAH under the Juniper tree has been the object of frequent comment, but seldom is anything said about Jonah under the gourd vine. That solitary figure sitting out there by a decaying vine, or palm twist, as the marginal puts it, vividly illustrates human nature in its varying shadows. Full of the racial exclusiveness in which his nation excelled, he is a good illustration of the selfish saint—if such a term is admissible. He wanted the city destroyed, pouted and wanted to die because it was not, then lost his temper because the gourd vine died and again wanted to quit this mortal flesh. The whole incident, as recorded, is full of interest.

### AND MUCH CATTLE.

One reason assigned for not destroying the city was the presence of much cattle. If there were more consideration given to God's care for the inferior animals we would be more merciful, for "the righteous man regardeth the life of his beast?" Does God care for oxen? Yes, the tiniest creature that floats in the air or sea is the object of His care. There is not a sparrow that falleth to the ground without his notice. Hunting for fun involves such a needless sacrifice of life. Is it not a relic of the old barbarism that still clings to us? Why should we delight simply in killing things, some of them at least harmless? Sport, you say. Yes, mixed with it is there not something of a semi-savage instinct? Life of any sort should be sacrificed only when the common good requires it. The cattle of Nineveh had not sinned. They were in no sense responsible for the depraved condition of that great city, and would have been innocent sufferers should the curse have fallen. We are glad that the Father in heaven cares for cattle, and the more we become like Him the more tender and considerate will we be toward all of His creatures. More important still, there were one hundred and twenty thousand unoffending children, who did not even know their right hand from their left hand. Why should they be punished? And thus we are reminded that many judgments are averted because of the unoffending in the midst. Many storms never break because some saint is in the midst, and many Ninevahs are not destroyed on account of the fact that the innocent would suffer with the guilty.

### LITTLE THINGS PIVOTAL.

How long and varied had been the experience of the prophet we know not, but of this we are sure: he had traveled on a storm-tossed sea, he had lain three days in a fish's stomach, he had stood in the heart of the great pagan city, and pronounced the judgment of the Lord God Almighty, yet a little thing like the withering of a vine upset him. The old colored man called the besetting sin the upsetting sin. The story goes of a preacher expounding on the grace of God when his wife interrupted him by saying, "But you know, husband, it is not sufficient to keep

you when your collar button is lost. You remember how vexed you became this morning when you could not find it?" People have lost their temper over little things. It is said that in olden times war was declared between two nations over a bucket.

Who would have thought that a prophet would have been so depressed at so trivial a thing as a vine dying and the sun shining on him, but such is the case. We dropped in one day at a religious conference. The subject of ministerial support was among the things being discussed, and one prominent minister spoke of having to come down to his office early in the morning, eat cold lunch, and stay away from his family all day, adding with considerable emphasis that no church had the right to expect such self-denial on the part of the pastor without paying him for it. There was truth in the remark, but also the ludicrousness of such seriousness of so small a sacrifice was there. Then there are those who will stand like a rock in midocean in the midst of great trials, who become impatient over small worries. Remember that a prophet was upset on account of a withering vine, and beware of the blighting effect of little things.

### LACK OF HUMILITY.

"I do well to be angry, even unto death," is the reply that Jonah made to the Lord. What self-assertiveness! What an utter lack of trembling before the Lord! Contrast this reply with the exclamation of Eli when notified that both of his sons had been slain in battle, see the old man as with bowed head he replied, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth good unto him." A proud spirit strikes back. There is a sorrow so devastating, so overwhelming that people cry out in the wilderness of despair without any thought of resentment. But this record indicates that Jonah had a resentment against his loss even beyond what it merited from the natural standpoint. Perhaps it was a lack of meekness as well as humility. Both of these Christian graces are far more rare than they should be.

We believe it was Rabbi Simeon who said that if there were only thirty good people in the world, he and his son were two of them; and then if there were only fifteen, he and his son were two of them, and if there were only five, he and his son were two of the five; and if there were only two, he and his son were the two; and then if there were but one, he was the one.

History tells us of a certain duke so proud that he would never allow his servants to speak to him. They could only make their wants known by signs, and when he slept a daughter stood on each side to guard his slumbers. Flowers that grow on mountain heights when transplanted to the valleys do not thrive near so well as those taken from the valleys to the higher altitudes. Even nature testifies to the fact that whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

How prone we are to be puffed up, and yet what have we that was not given us? Are we wiser than our fellowmen, whence this wisdom? Is it not from God? Have we a stronger and more prepossessing physique, who gave it to us? Have we earthly treasures, to whom do they belong? Is not the earth with the fullness thereof the Lord's? Who are we that we should strut like peacocks? Much of the suffering of the world is for lack of humility. People are continually resenting things that they would never pay attention to if they had a meek and lowly spirit. They are pining under fancied neglects, fretting about slights never intended for them, and galling under some imaginary bondage that ought to be borne as a yoke of love. The vine withered, the prophet fancied himself greatly injured and lost his temper. Intending to do a family a kindness we failed to ask one of them to sing. The result was there was a wholesale rebellion on their part that could only be quelled by the expenditure of hours of valuable time. - People who are demanding more than they deserve are people who will sit under many a decaying vine.

#### SELFISH SORROW.

A great city with one hundred and twenty thousand children on the verge of destruction, and yet the prophet put more value upon the vine than he did upon all these. Even if they merited destruction, it should have been the occasion of profound sorrow on his part. None who wear sackcloth were allowed to enter the Persian palace; no place for tears inside those historic gates. All others bear their own burdens. The proud monarch would have nothing to do with them. Selfish sorrow. A prophet going to pieces over a petty inconvenience while in front of him were six hundred thousand people that might be blotted out. What a commentary on human littleness. The death of a pet dog, a small-priced fowl, or pig, will bring more real sorrow to most people than the benighted condition of India, China, Africa, or all the great heathen lands put together. Why? Because the people are absorbed in their own little affairs. It is like a man who said he would not give his little hillside farm, worth possibly \$600, for the whole State of Texas. He was an ignorant man, and knew nothing about the vast area of that great country. He did not know anything but the little ragged hill on which he dwelt. Alas! how many never get far beyond their own sorrow. A prophet more grieved over having to sit out in the sun than over the fall of the great world-center. Selfish sorrow. How sorry we are for things that hurt us, but alas how little grief we have for the terrible blight of sin throughout the earth. To be sure, much of this lack is due to the narrow spaces in which we live, the restricted compass of our thoughts, the narrow range of our vision, but this should not be so. The world now sits at our door and we should every day pray all around it, get underneath its burdens, share its joys and griefs, and like the old-time priest, stand between earth and heaven as a representative of its needs.

It is a hot day, central does not reply quickly and you cry out in a vexed tone, "Hello, central, why don't you wake up, I am in a hurry." Yes, you are in a hurry, but there is also trouble at the other end of the line where sits a girl in the intense heat, mopping her face ever and anon as the perspiration drips down to the floor. The butcher is late, you are troubled again, forgetting the sick wife with whom he sat up all night and the burdens then pressing on his heart. Don't be so absorbed in trouble at your own end of the line that you forget others' trouble at the other end. Selfish sorrow. Grieved because it hurts us, and sorry

because some of our plans have been interrupted. More trouble over our own petty injuries than over all the raging sea of grief in the great, big outside world. The vine died, and the preacher was left out in the open with no covering, and he broke under the test, grew angry over deprivation and wanted to die. How ridiculous and absurd to retreat from the back door of life, rather than go through the front door and bravely and gladly bear burdens. Suffering is part of the common lot of humanity. There is no honorable retreat from it. Others have gone before and suffered many an hour, traveling a sorrowful way, and others are to come whose hearts will be broken, and why should we be so self-centered as to feel more keenly a withered gourd vine experience than griefs that are crushing upon the people about us? Is it not because we are self-centered, and comparatively indifferent? And yet, as Len G. Broughton well says, "The estimate we place upon the multitudes is a correct index of our spirituality." The Ninevite multitude had no space in Jonah's opinion, but an Oriental sun beaming down upon his head crushed him. Six hundred thousand other heads might be crushed, but then they were heathen and deserved it; and besides, his head was not among the number. Exceedingly human picture, isn't it?

#### GONE WHEN NEEDED MOST.

The worm seems to have done its work in the night when the shelter was not needed, leaving no covering for the heat of the day, when most needed. It is well for us that we are not left to select the time for our bereavements. Little do we know when they should come. We would be like the story of the Irishman when sentenced to death in company with a number of other men who were all given the choice of the tree on which they were to be hung. One selected one kind, and another another until it came Pat's time, and he said, "If it please ye honor, sir, I will take the gooseberry bush." "Well," said the judge, "that is too small." "Well," replied Pat, "if it please ye honor, I will wait till it grows big enough." Most of us would wait for it to grow. It is often the case that the vine dies seemingly at the very time that we need it most. The bereavement comes when we seem the least prepared for it. Why is it? Is there any mistake on heaven's part? No, we are not judges of what we do need.

We know but little of the inside workings of God's wondrous plan. "What I do now thou knowest not, but thou shalt know hereafter." Jacob, in an excess of grief, cried out, "All these things are against me," when in fact they were all for him. There is nothing left for us but to meekly bow before God and adjust ourselves to a new order of things. Who art thou that criest against the Almighty? Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? It is not ours to set a time for our vines to die. We are to use them while they are here, and then go along without them after they are gone.

So ends this lesson, giving such a vivid contrast between the littleness of man and the greatness of God that we have reason to believe that this prophet, who so faithfully recorded even the facts against himself, profited by the lesson he had to learn, went out from this gourd vine experience a wiser, happier and more useful man, and so may we. The story is a touching exhibition of the mercy of God. His compassion fails not.

"The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom."—II. Tim. 4:18.