

The Broken Pitchers

"And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled" (Judges 7:20-21).

That is the strangest battle ever fought. God had told Gideon to go down and drive out of the land the Midianites, but his army is too large; for the glory must be given to God, and not to man. And so proclamation is made that all those of the troops who are afraid and want to go home, may go; and twenty two thousand of them scampered away, leaving only ten thousand men.

But God says the army is too large yet, and so He orders these ten thousand remaining to march down to a stream, and commands Gideon to notice in what manner these men drink of the water when they come to it. If they get down on all fours and drink, then they are to be pronounced lazy and incompetent for the campaign; but if, in passing through the stream, they scoop up the water in the palm of their hands and drink, and pass on, they are to be the men selected for the battle. Well, the ten thousand men march down to the stream and most of them go down on all fours and plunge their mouths, like a horse or an ox, into the water and drink - but there are three hundred men who, instead of stooping, just dip the palm of their hands in the water and bring it to their lips, "lapping it as a dog lappeth." Those three hundred brisk, rapid, enthusiastic men are chosen for the campaign. They are each to take a trumpet in the right hand and a pitcher in the left hand, and there must be a lamp inside the pitcher, and then at a given signal they are to blow the trumpets and throw down the pitchers and hold up the lamps. So it was done.

It is night. I see a great host of Midianites, sound asleep in the valley of Jezreel. Gideon comes up with his three hundred picked men and surrounds the camp on all sides, and when everything is ready, the signal is given and they blow the trumpets and they throw down the pitchers and hold up the lamps, and the great host of Midianites, waking out of a sound sleep, take the crash of the crockery and the glare of the lamps for the coming on of an overwhelming foe; and they run and cut themselves to pieces and horribly perish.

The lessons of this subject are very spirited and impressive. This seemingly valueless lump of quartz has the pure gold in it. The smallest dew drop on the meadow at night has a star sleeping in its bosom, and the most insignificant passage of Scripture has in it a shining truth. God's mint coins no small change.

I learn in the first place from this subject, the lawfulness of Christian stratagem. You know very well that the greatest victories ever gained by Washington or Napoleon were gained through the fact that they came when and in a way they were not expected - sometimes falling back to draw out the foe, sometimes breaking out from ambush, sometimes crossing a river on rafts; all the time keeping the opposing forces in

wonderment as to what would be done next. The northern troops beat their life out in the straightforward fight at Fredericksburg, but it was through strategy they got the victory at Lookout Mountain.

You all know what strategy is in military affairs. Now I think it is high time we had this art sanctified and spiritualized. In the Church, when we are about to make a Christian assault, we send word to the opposing force when we expect to come, how many troops we have, and how many rounds of shot, and whether we will come with artillery, infantry, or cavalry, and of course we are defeated. There are thousands of men who might be surprised into the Kingdom of God. We need more tact and ingenuity in Christian work. It is in spiritual affairs, as in military, that success depends in attacking that part of the castle which is not armed and entrenched.

For instance, here is a man all armed on the doctrine of Election - all his troops of argument and prejudice are at that particular gate. You may batter away at that side of the castle for fifty years and you will not take it; but just wheel your troops to the side gate of the heart's affections, and in five minutes you capture him. I never knew a man to be saved through a brilliant argument. You cannot hook men into the Kingdom of God by the horns of a dilemma. There is no Grace in syllogisms. Here is a man armed upon the subject of the Perseverance of the Saints; he does not believe in it. Attack him at that point, and he will persevere to the very last in not believing it. Here is a man armed on the subject of Baptism; he believes in sprinkling or immersion. All your discussion of Ecclesiastical hydropathy will not change him. I remember, when I was a boy, that with other boys I went into the river on a summer day to bathe, and we used to dash the water on each other, but never got any result except that our eyes were blinded, and all this splashing of water between Baptists and Pedobaptists never results in any thing but the blurring of the spiritual eyesight. In other words, you never can capture a man's soul at the point at which he is especially entrenched. But there is in every man's heart a bolt that can be easily withdrawn. A little child four years old may touch that bolt and it will spring back and the door will swing open and Christ will come in.

I think that the finest of all the fine arts is the art of doing good, and yet this art is the least cultivated. We have in the Kingdom of God today enough troops to conquer the whole earth for Christ if we only had skillful maneuvering. I would rather have the three hundred lamps and pitchers of Christian stratagem than one hundred thousand drawn swords of literary and Ecclesiastical combat.

I learn from this subject, also, that a small part of the army of God will have to do all the hard fighting. Gideon's army was originally composed of thirty two thousand men, but they went off until there were only ten thousand left, and that was subtracted from until there were only three hundred. It is the same in all ages of the Christian Church; a few men have to do the hard fighting. Take a membership of a thousand, and you generally find that fifty people do the work. Take a membership of five hundred, and you generally find that ten people do the work. There are scores of Churches where two or three people do the work.

We have to mourn that there is so much useless lumber in the mountains of Lebanon. I think of the ten million membership of the Christian Church today, if five millions of the names were taken off the books the Church would be stronger. You know that the more cowards and drones there are in any army the weaker it is. I would rather have the three hundred picked men of Gideon than the twenty two thousand unsifted host. How many Christians there are standing in the way of all progress! I think it is the duty of the Church of God to ride over them, and the quicker it does it, the quicker it does its duty.

Do not worry, O Christian, if you have to do more than your share of the work. You had better thank God that He has called you to be one of the picked men, rather than to belong to the host of stragglers. Would not you rather be one of the three hundred that fight, than the twenty-two thousand that desert? I suppose those cowardly Gideonites who went off congratulated themselves. They said, "We got rid of all that fighting, did not we? How lucky we have been; that battle costs us nothing at all." But they got none of the spoils of the victory. After the battle the three hundred men went down and took the wealth of the Midianites, and out of the cups and platters of their enemies they feasted. And the time will come, my dear brethren, when the hosts of darkness will be routed, and Christ will say to his troops, "Well done, my brave men, go up and take the spoils! Be more than conquerors forever!" And in that day all deserters will be shot!

Again: I learn from this subject, that God's way is different from man's, but is always the best way. If we had the planning of that battle, we would have taken those thirty two thousand men that originally belonged to the army, and we would have drilled them, and marched them up and down by the day and week and month, and we would have them equipped with swords or spears, according to the way of arming in those times; and then we would have marched them down in solid column upon the foe. But that is not the way. God depletes the army, and takes away all their weapons, and gives them a lamp and a pitcher and a trumpet, and tells them to go down and drive out the Midianites. I suppose some wiseacres were there who said, "That is not military tactics. The idea of three hundred men, unarmed, conquering such a great host of Midianites!" It was the best way. What sword, spear, or cannon ever accomplished such a victory as the lamp, pitcher, and trumpet?

God's way is different from man's way, but it is always best! Take, for instance, the composition of the Bible. If we had the writing of the Bible, we would have said, "Let one man write it. If you have twenty or thirty men to write a poem or make a statute or write a history or make an argument there will be flaws and contradictions." But God says, "Let not one man do it, but forty men shall do it." And they did, differing enough to show there had been no collusion between them, but not contradicting each other on any important point, while they all wrote from their own standpoint and temperament; so that the matter of fact man has his Moses; the romantic nature his Ezekiel; the epigrammatic his Solomon, the warrior his Joshua, the sailor his Jonah; the loving his John; the logician his Paul. Instead of this Bible, which now I can lift in my hand; instead of the Bible that the child can carry to school this afternoon; instead of the little Bible the sailor can put in his jacket pocket when he goes to sea - if it had been left to men to write, it would have been a thousand volumes, judging from the amount of

Ecclesiastical controversy which has arisen. God's way is different from man's, but it is best, infinitely best.

So it is in regard to the Christian's life. If we had had the planning of a Christian's life we would have said, "Let him have eighty years of sunshine, a fine house to live in; let his surroundings all be agreeable; let him have sound health; let no chill shiver through his limbs, no pain furrow his brow, or trouble shadow his soul." I enjoy the prosperity of others so much, I would let every man have as much money as he wants, and roses for his children's cheeks, and fountains of gladness glancing in their large round eyes. But that is not God's way. It seems as if a man must be cut and hit and pounded just in proportion as he is useful. His child falls from a third story window and has its life dashed out; his most confident investment tumbles him into bankruptcy; his friends, upon whom he depended, aid the natural force of gravitation in taking him down; his life is a Bull Run defeat.

Instead of twenty two thousand advantages, he has only ten thousand - nay, only three hundred - nay, none at all. How many good people there are who are at their wits end about their livelihood, about their health, about their reputation. But they will find out it is the best way after a while; God will show them that He depletes their advantages just for the same reason He depleted the army of Gideon - that they may be induced to throw themselves on His mercy.

A grape vine says, in the early spring, "How glad I am to get through the winter! I shall have no more trouble now! Summer weather will come, and the garden will be very beautiful!" But the gardener comes, and cuts the vine here and there with his knife. The twigs begin to fall, and the grape vine calls out, "Murder! What are you cutting me for?" "Ali," says the gardener, "I don't mean to kill you. If I did not do this you would be the laughing stock of all the other vines before the season is over." Months go on, and one day the gardener comes under the trees, where great clusters of grapes hang, and the grape vine says, "Thank you, sir; you could not have done anything so kind as to have cut me with that knife," "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." "Every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth that it may bring forth more fruit." No pruning, no grapes; no grinding mill, no flour; no battle, no victory; no Cross, no Crown!

So God's way in the redemption of the world is different from ours. If we had our way, we would have had Jesus stand in the door of Heaven and beckon the nations up to light, or we would have had angels flying around the earth proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ. Why is it that the cause goes on so slowly? Why is it that the chains stay on, when God could knock them off? Why do thrones of despotism stand, when God could so easily demolish them? It is His way, in order that all generations may cooperate, and that all men may know they cannot do the work themselves. Just in proportion as these pyramids of sin get up in height will they come down in ghastliness of ruin.

O thou father of all iniquity! If thou canst bear my voice above the crackling of the flames, drive on thy projects, dispatch thy emissaries, build thy temples, and forge thy claims; but know that thy fall from Heaven was not greater than thy final overthrow shall

be when thou shalt be driven disarmed into thy fiery den; and for every lie thou hast framed upon earth thou shalt have an additional hell of fury poured into thine anguish by the vengeance of our God; and all Heaven shall shout at the overthrow, as from the ransomed earth the song breaks through the skies, "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Hallelujah! For the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ!" God's way in the composition of the Bible, God's way in the Christian's life, God's way in the redemption of the world, God's way in everything - different from man's way, but the best.

I learn from this subject, that the overthrow of God's enemies will be sudden and terrific. There is the army of the Midianites down in the valley of Jezreel. I suppose their mighty men are dreaming of victory. Mount Gilboa never stood sentinel for so large a host. The spears and the shields of the Midianites gleam in the moonlight, and glance on the eye of the Israelites, who hover like a battle of eagles, ready to swoop from the cliff. Sleep on, oh army of the Midianites! With the night to hide them and the mountain to guard them and strong arms to defend them let no slumbering foe man dream of disaster! Peace to the captains and the spear men!

Crash go the pitchers! Up flare the lamps! To the mountains! Fly! Fly! Troop running against troop, thousands trampling upon thousands. A wild stampede! Hark to the scream and groan of the routed foe, with the Lord God Almighty after them! How sudden the onset, how wild the consternation, how utter the defeat! I do not care so much what is against me, if God is not. You want a better sword or carbine than I have ever seen, to go out and fight against the Lord omnipotent. Give me God for my ally, and you may have all the battlements and battalions.

I saw the defrauder in his splendid house. It seemed as if he had conquered God, as he stood amidst the blaze of chandeliers and pier mirrors. In the diamonds of the wardrobe I saw the tears of the widows whom he had robbed, and in the snowy satin the pallor of the white cheeked orphans whom he had wronged. The blood of the oppressed glowed in the deep crimson of the imported chair. The music trembled with the sorrow of unrequited toil. But the wave of mirth dashed higher on reefs of coral and pearl. The days and the nights went merrily. No sick child dared pull that silver door bell. No beggar dared sit on that marble step. No voice of prayer floated amidst that tapestry. No shadow of a Judgment day darkened that fresco. No tear of human sympathy dropped upon that upholstery. Pomp strutted through the hall, and Dissipation filled her cup and all seemed safe as the Midianites in the valley of Jezreel. But God came. Calamity smote the money market. The partridge left its eggs unhatched. Crash went all the porcelain pitchers! Ruin, rout, dismay, and woe in the valley of Jezreel!

Alas for those who fight against God! Only two sides. Man immortal, which side are you on? Woman immortal, which side are you on? Do you belong to the three hundred that are going to win the day, or to the great host of Midianites asleep in the valley, only to be roused up in consternation and ruin? Suddenly the golden bowl of life will be broken, and the trumpet blown that will startle our souls into eternity. The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night, and as the God armed Israelites upon the sleeping

foe. Ha! Canst thou pluck up courage for the day when the trumpet which hath never been blown shall speak the roll call of the dead; and the earth, dashing against a lost meteor, have its mountains scattered to the stars and oceans emptied in the air? Oh, then, what will become of you? What will become of me?

If those Midianites had only given up their swords the day before the disaster, all would have been well; and if you will now surrender the sins with which you have been fighting against God, you will be safe. Oh, make peace with him now, through Jesus Christ the Lord. With the clutch of a drowning man seize the Cross. Oh, surrender! Surrender! Christ, with His hand on His pierced side, asks you to.