**BROOKS BY THE TRAVELLER'S WAY - ADDRESSES BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**15. UNFULFILLED IMPULSE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Lord, I will follow Thee--but--"*

*Luke 9:61*

"Lord, I will follow Thee--but--." Then he perceived the beauty of the Christ. He acknowledged His authority. He recognised His duty. An impulse had been created within, which, being interpreted, said unto him, "Follow," and he now replied, "I will follow--but--." Let us apprehend very clearly the stage at which he had arrived. It had come to this. There was the Lord, Son of Man, King of the race, beckoning into discipleship. Conscience had said, "Follow Him, for He is thy supreme Lord." The heart had said, "Follow Him, for He is the ideal loveliness." Conscience and heart had combined to the creation of an impulse which urged the life to immediate decision. The impulse was aroused and active. The imperative sounded in the very depths of his soul, "Follow Him." "I will follow--but--." Obedience to the impulse is delayed. Impulse is kept waiting while attention is diverted elsewhere. Precedence must be given to another interest. "I will follow Thee, but suffer me first to go and bury my father." "At thy peril, no!" "Lord, I will follow Thee, but suffer me first to go and bid farewell." "At thy peril, no!" Does that wear the appearance of harshness? Does it seem inconsiderate and severe? The harshness is only apparent. It is the harshness of the man who violently grasps another who is drowning. It is the severity of kindness. It is the emphasis of love.

Let us look at it. What is the essence of the narrative? The essence is this--that nothing must be allowed to take precedence over a divine impulse, that a divine impulse is of royal and imperial descent, and must ever be given the first rank. Man's relationship to Christ is the primary relationship, and to that relationship all other associations must bow. That is the pith and marrow of the story. My first and immediate attention must be given to any impulse which concerns my relationship to Christ. Nothing on earth must be permitted to thrust it into a second place. "Let me first bury my father." "First, the impulse," replied the Lord. "Let me first bid farewell." "First the impulse!" "Seek ye first the kingdom."

Now why this pre-eminence to a divine impulse? Christ had looked at the two men, and had gazed into their souls. Perhaps they had been men of the world, living on the mere superficies of things, absorbed in affairs that are belittling and transient, and having no large bracing intercourse with the things of the Eternal. And now the Master saw that the divine spark was kindling. He saw that a faint, fitful and trembling inclination was aspiring after a higher life. He saw that the men felt the impulse, and were half inclined to heed, and half inclined to seek postponement. He saw the precariousness of the heavenly babe-life that in the heart was newly born. He knew just how long it would live if it were treated with neglect. He knew that if attention were denied until after the father was buried, the impulse also would be dead and buried. He knew that postponement meant destruction, that if obedience to a good impulse be deferred until the third day, on the third day there might be no impulse to obey. And so underneath the Master's reply there runs this current of awful warning: "With thee, the postponement of a day may mean eternal death; the spark of divinity may be extinguished; the spirit may be quenched; and if thou seekest postponement until after the burial of thy father's body, or to bid thy friends farewell, the heavenly impulse is imperilled. Even these must not be given pre-eminence, but must be sternly set aside. This is thy pre-eminent concern: First, the divine impulse, Follow thou Me.'"

This is Christ's way of emphasising for all time the infinite and transcendent preciousness of a divine impulse. No life is utterly without good impulse. No life is consistently and increasingly bad. There are softer seasons among the years, times when the springs in the life are unsealed, and lovely purposes come to birth. We have a beautiful phrase by which we describe the gracious season. We speak of being in a "softer mood," as though the rain had fallen, as indeed it has, and turned the hard unfertile ground into forcing-beds of beauteous growth. "I will come down like rain," says the gracious God, and like rain He comes, creating these "softer moods" in the life, and causing it to be fragrant with budding things of the kingdom. This rainy season is known to all.

Now we cannot tell in what circumstances the rainy seasons will come, and the consequent softer mood. No one can foretell the coming of the Lord, or anticipate His ways. Sometimes the vision of infirmity will cause the rain to fall, and soften the heart in gracious sympathies. It was my lot only a little while ago to have daily intercourse with a man in the prime of life, over whose body creeping paralysis was stealing with slow but irresistible tread. Little by little the disease was claiming the flesh, but it had no proprietary rights over the spirit, and the cheery faith and hopefulness of his soul remained intact. He crawled about, a minister of light. And I have seen a group of men, watching him as he crept like light about the grounds, and their voices sunk into a whisper as one voiced the common feeling, and said, "That ought to make us better men." "Yes," I thought, "the Lord's rain is falling on this group. The vision of infirmity is bringing the heavenly shower, and giving men a softer mood, a spiritual impulse, a more sensitive aspiration after a better life." I wondered if the physical paralysis of one is to glorify God by the spiritual emancipation of many. Infirmity created a softer heavenly impulse, which said, "Follow Me."

But there are softening seasons other than those caused by the visions of infirmity. I have known God's rain fall in copious showers the morning after a great sin. The night before the shower I was hard, rebellious, obstinate! I shut the gates of my calmer reason, and opened the gates of fiery passion, and I sinned. But, next morning, on to the hard passion-burnt heart, the gracious long-suffering Lord came down like rain. He brought me into a softer mood. He re-sensitised my sympathy. He created a drift heavenward. Reflection was the occasion of a rainy season, giving birth to a heavenly impulse, which said, "Follow Me."

Who does not know that the hour of bereavement is sometimes the season of the falling rain? Many a divine impulse has had its birth by an open grave. Here and now I could not pray that God would do away with infirmity and death. If it were in my power now, by the lifting up of my hand, to rid this land of infirmity and death, I think I should hardly dare to lift it. I know not what would become of us if in our present condition there were no more pain and no more death. Life would become a mass of selfish isolations. We should become hard as the nether millstone, and the softer mood and the heavenly impulses would be unknown. So God keeps it possible for us to grow into His image by keeping two dark angels in our midst, the angel of pain and the angel of death, whose visits to our homes keep us from becoming callous, and call us from the thraldom of the senses by the creation of a heaven-directing impulse which says to us, "Follow thou Me."

Well, then, God creates these softer moods. He begets this impulse within us, this spiritual emotion. Now proceed a step further. What is the purpose of impulse? Let this in the first place be said, impulse is not to be a resting place. Emotion is not the goal. Is that altogether a needless warning? It is possible to cultivate a spurious emotionalism, a luxury of emotions, which may come to be regarded as the marrow and essence of true religion. True religion is not merely the enjoyment of certain feelings; it is the translation of them. There is a wide difference between good impulse and good life, and the work of true religion is to translate the one into the other. Yes, let me repeat that the work of the truly religious is the work of translation. I have to take the impulse, given me by God, and translate it first into resolution and then into action. That is religion, to take divine impulse, and, by the process of living, translate it into finished and eternal achievement. "Follow Me," must not only be translated into "I will follow Thee," but "I do follow Thee." The impulse must be converted into a perfected act.

But now, suppose I don't translate this impulse. Suppose I just rest and luxuriate in the divine emotion. What then? Then the impulse will translate itself, and will become a corrupting power in the life it was proposed to soften and redeem. Divinely given impulse is like the divinely given manna of the days of old; if it is not immediately used, it will become the nourisher of corruption; it will "breed worms and stink." The only way to keep an impulse sweet is to change it into an act, and it will then remain a sweet and gracious influence throughout eternity.

Let me assume, then, that you have a divine impulse. You have been brought into a softer mood. You feel the stirrings of the heavenly citizenship. You feel the hand of the Lord. You are inclined to obey the impulse. I pray you, let your first inclinations have the leadership. In all matters affecting your relationship to Christ, your first thoughts are ever the best. Second thoughts are usually suggestions of compromise, postponement and doubt. The first thought is this--"I will follow Thee." The second thought is this--"I will follow Thee, but--" and thus there creeps in perilous postponement and destructive doubt. The intrusion of a traitorous compromise can spoil the music of a life. You know the story of the great bell of Moscow, the largest bell in the world. It was cast more than two hundred years ago, and has never been raised, not because it is too heavy, but because it is cracked. All was going well at the foundry, when a fire broke out in Moscow. Streams of water were dashed in upon the houses and factories, and a tiny little stream found its way into the bell-metal at the very moment when it was rushing in a state of fusion into the colossal bell-mould, and so the big bell came out cracked, and all its capacity of music was destroyed. The historic incident presented itself to me as a symbol of the thought I am endeavouring to lay before you now. Here is a divinely-given impulse, like soft and molten metal, just flowing into the mould of my first thought, and hardening into noble and steadfast decision. And an insidious doubt or compromise is allowed to have its way, and trickle in at the vital moment when impulse is just shaping into the image of the divine likeness, and all is spoilt, and the bell of heavenly impulse does not ring out the music of a redeemed and sanctified life.

It is this intrusion of the compromise that works such destruction in our spiritual life. Life would abound in heavenly bell-music if we took every divine impulse and offered it the mould of a ready and willing decision. "Teach me to do Thy will."

"Take my feet, and let them be

Swift and beautiful for Thee."