**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**07. THE MAGIC TOUCH by JOHN H. JOWETT**

WHO does not remember the fascinating fairy who filled our childhood with wonders, and whose magic wand used to change worn-out shoes into silver slippers, and tattered, ragged garments into princely attire, and dust-heaps into gardens full of bright and perfumed flowers? How we followed the gracious fairy in her transforming ways!

But fairyland is gone, and fairy wonder is dead. Our years have passed, and life has become sombre with care, dashed with sorrow, grey with disappointment, and withered and blighted by sin and shame. If only something analogous to the romance of childhood could steal back into the sombre years of manhood! If only out of the unseen spaces some mystic spirit would appear who could transform dulled and blighted character, and transform dulled and blighted circumstances, how busy he would be! Well, here is an announcement of His coming, and this is what He claims to do! "To give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." It sounds like the evangel of some gracious magician. It will be well worth while to consider His ways.

"Beauty for ashes," and the beauty here suggested is the coronet or diadem of a bride. Some humiliated, sinful soul, soiled with self-abuse, worn and torn, wearied and ashamed, is flinging the ashes of her penitence toward heaven, and letting them fall upon her head. Those ashes are the emblems of a burnt-out and wasted day, and she is flinging them towards the heavens in open confession of her shame, if, perchance, the dead embers might be made to glow again. And what does the gentle Lord offer this depressed and tainted soul? He offers her the coronet of a bride. He will make the dejected exile the wife of the Lamb. The poor, wearied drudge of sin is to be honoured by becoming the consort of the Holy God.

What, then, is there in the figure? There is the wonderful love and devotion of the eternal, loving God. God loves the most wretched, dejected, sin-blasted soul on earth, and lie would encircle that soul with the diadem of the bride! If that be true, the love of God is the biggest thing we can think about, and the most wonderful theme in human speech. If we only realize that love on the authority of His Word, life will be illumined and glorified with a far more wonderful light than that which fills the soul of a young girl when first she hears the whispered word that tells the story of a pure and manly love.

"Oil of joy for mourning," and this is coronation oil, consecration oil, the oil significant of the endowment of regal authority and power. Who are to receive coronation? Those whose souls are filled with mourning. The mourning is the cry of defeat. It is the wail of the failure. It is the moan of the broken. It is the pathetic cry of the disordered, the men and women who have fallen, who have succumbed in moral and spiritual calamity. That is to say, the good Lord offers the crown of restored sovereignty to the children of moral disorder. He offers restored regality to those who have "gone to pieces." He offers coronation to those who have lost their crowns, sovereignty for those who are bruised and broken. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes." He will transform the slave into a monarch. "He crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

"The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and the heaviness is that of dimness and failing light, light trembling on the verge of eclipse. There are people whose lives are like that. There is no heat about them, and no radiance. They are cold, dull, cheerless, funereal, shut in by encompassing gloom. And the Magician comes, and He offers to change that gloomy, sombre attire for the garment of praise. For heaviness He will give buoyancy, the joy of the bridal feast for heavy-footed woe.

Surely this. bright, regal, bridal attire is what is lacking in the religious life of to-day. There is something wrong with our nobility when it is not crowned with radiance. There is something wrong with our goodwill when it does not bear the hall-mark of good cheer. There is something wrong with our communion when we are not "children of light." When the bridal attire is missing there is little or nothing about us to suggest that we are the brides of the Lamb. How are men and women to know that we are of the King's household if we do not wear "the garments of salvation"? How can they believe that we have gazed upon the Divine glory if we do not wear the splendours of "the garment of praise"?

I remember two significant sentences in one of Robert Louis Stevenson's letters, which express the common judgment of the world: "I do not call that by the name of religion which fills a man with bile. If a man is surly, filled with a dull and bitter disposition, if he be sombre and melancholy, how can he witness to the glories of the eternal life?" And the other sentence is this: "I will think more of his prayers when I see in him a spirit of praise." Stevenson wanted to see common gratitude before he received the witness of a clamant piety. If our religion does not clothe us in the refinements of common courtesies it will fail to win the interested attention of the men of the world. A fine spiritual grace, nobly worn, is a great witness for the Lord. The distinction between the Church and the world ought to be found in the difference of their habits. The elect ought to prove their relationship by the beauty of their moral and spiritual attire.

Do we believe that the transformation is possible? Have we full confidence in the power of the Great Magician? Do we believe that He will exchange a coronet for ashes, joyous sovereignty for sullen despair, and a garment of radiant cheerfulness for the spirit of gloom? If we do not believe it, where is our gospel? If we do not believe it, where is our life? The Almighty God can transform the most ungracious and unwelcome life. When He touches barrenness, "the wilderness and the solitary place become glad, and the desert rejoices and blossoms like the rose." And so we can in this great faith confront all the deformities of our time. Only in the Lord Jesus can these deformities be made straight. When legislation has done its utmost, when education has had its last word, the waste place will still remain, and only by the immediate personal Presence of the Great Magician can it be made beautiful as the paradise of God.