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

**17. BRUISED REEDS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

THE Scriptures speak of some people under the figure of "bruised reeds." What is the significance of the figure? Think of it, first of all, as a broken musical reed. The shepherd boy cut a reed and turned it into a flute; and sweet music was reed music, mingling with the sound of the breeze on the uplands of the hills, and with the murmur of the pines! But if the reed were bruised and broken, if some beast had stepped upon it with heavy, heedless foot, and it lay there splintered and riven, how worthless the instrument! What shall the shepherd boy do with the reed that has lost its power to make a musical note? He will snap it and fling it away! He will "break the bruised reed."

Now, there are men and women who are just like these broken natural flutes. They have lost the simple music of a sweet and human life. When their souls are breathed upon by the breath of God they are like a splintered reed, and they give no musical response. The breath wakes no bird-note of faith or hope or love. When their souls are breathed upon by the breath of human fellowship they are like a bruised reed, and there is no fraternal answer. They have lost their humanness, their rich, full sympathy with God and man.

How do the reeds become broken? There are many ways in which the fracture may be made. The reed may be broken by the brutal tread of personal sin. A beast going down to the river to slake his thirst may crush a reed into the mire, and an appetite going out to drink may destroy the music of the soul. But the reed can also be broken by the heavy burden of grief and sorrow. We speak of a broken heart, a heart in which the singing spirit is bruised and silent. It is not uncommon, when some heavy calamity of woe has fallen upon a woman, to hear it said of her, "No one ever heard her sing again." The fragile reed was bruised and splintered.

And again, the reed can be fractured by the nipping pressure of anxiety and care. The frost can crack a lute, and freezing care can chill "the genial currents of the soul," and break its music. "How can we sing the Lord's song in the land of the stranger," in a cold climate, where the soul-instrument becomes mute? In all these ways and in many others the fragile reeds can be bruised, and "the daughters of music are brought low."

And what can we do with these "bruised reeds"? I will ask a larger question, in order to obtain a more heartening reply. What will the Saviour do with these "bruised lutes"? Well, He will not break them and finish their destruction. He will not discard and abandon them. He will not fling them away. He will restore the bruised reed. May we not say that He is the Physician of Broken Reeds, going about to restore the lost power of music and song? Unlike the shepherd boy, the Great Shepherd can mend the broken lutes. He can restore unto us "the joy of His salvation." Here is a familiar example. There is a lad with a life yielding a note like the mellow music of a fine, strong, musical reeds His life is whole and melodious, and no beast strides across his sacred place. And then some alien impulse lays hold of him, and he goes forth to "spend his substance in riotous living." The lute is sorely bruised. "He began to be in want." And how was he regarded by his fellows? "No man gave unto him." He was broken and rejected, broken and flung away! But let me hasten to the end of the narrative. "When the elder son came near the house he heard music." And what was that music? It was the restored music of the repaired lute, the love-song sounding again through the mended reed. "He hath put a new song in my mouth." It was the recovery of the lost chord. Thus our gracious Lord can deal with bruised reeds when they have been riven by sorrow or care or sin. "I will seek again that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

But we may look again at the figure of the reed in the interpreting light of our Lord. Let us drop the suggestion of the musical reed, and regard it as just the swaying, pliable reed of .the desert. I think there may have been some proverbial phrase associated with the reed of the wilderness, and I think we catch a suggestion of it in the speech of our Lord. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" The reed of the wilderness was used to describe a certain type and quality of life. The desert reed yielded before the wind; it was swayed, anyhow, any way, anywhere. It bent before the wind, from whatever quarter it blew, and became the type of frailty, fragility, pliability. But we are to add another characteristic even to this vivid symbol of impotence. It is not only a swaying, desert reed, but a "bruised reed," broken on its stem and withering at the fracture! Can we find an image more extraordinarily expressive of concentrated weakness?

Well, now, there are people just like those desert reeds. They are the opportunists, yielding and bruised. They change their opinion every hour, until the very power of conviction is gone. They change their movements with the movements of the hour, until the very power of self-initiative is lost. They become bruised in the wind. What can we do with them? What do we do with them? In our folly we discard them. We despise them. We count them as worthless. We fling them away. But what will the Saviour do with human reeds, these playthings of the wind, the sport of caprice, the broken creatures of the passing hour? "He will not break the bruised reed." He will turn the bruised reed into "an iron pillar," and "out of weakness it shall be made strong."

Here is a man "driven by the wind and tossed." It was said unto him, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth," but he denied, saying, "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest." A poor bruised reed, yielding and breaking before the wind! But now listen to the risen Lord. "Go, tell My disciples and Peter." What is the significance of that word? It is the Lord at work on the bruised reed. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" It is the Lord at work on a broken heart, giving it the gracious opportunity of recovery and of once again expressing itself in adoration and service. Look further on in the narrative. "When they saw the boldness of Peter." And what is the significance of that? It is the old, trembling, shaking reed converted into an iron pillar; it is discipleship made "faithful unto death."