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

**20. CONTACT BUT NOT COMMUNION by JOHN H. JOWETT**

HERE is a field, and here is the sower sowing the seed. "And some seeds fell by the wayside." And there the seed lies, pregnant with life and fruitfulness, but it cannot get into the ground. The vitalities in the earth and in the seed do not come into fellowship. The miracle of quickening and growing is nearly happening, but it does not happen. A harvest is all but at the birth, but it is not born. So near and yet so far! The seed and the earth touch, but they do not combine. There is contact, but no communion.

And so it is, says the Master, in the field of human life. Great happenings may be exceedingly near and yet appallingly remote. Truth may be up against the soul, and yet there may be no fellowship. The human and the Divine may be in immediate neighbourhood; and there may be no acquaintance. We may brush against God and nothing more. The Divine may be as near the human as the seed to the wayside ground, and still there may be no apprehension. There may be contact, but no communion.

And so this appears to be the character suggested in the Master's words. There is a soul in touch with truth, but not free; in touch with life, but not alive; in touch with God, but not sharing the nature of God. God is near, but the soul does no business. Hands touch, but they do not clasp in holy covenant. There is contact, but no communion.

It is true in the realm of our material environment. God is immediately near in His created world. There is a mystic Immanence which touches us on every side. The desert furze-bush is inhabited by holy flame. Every common place is the home of Deity. "He rideth upon the wings of the wind." "The clouds are His chariots." We may call this poetry, if we please, but we do not banish it from the realm of reality. Men and women of sensitive spirit are aware of a ubiquitous tenant, of an august Presence lighting up the plainest road. God is very near. We are touching Him every moment. But there may be touch and no perception, no fellowship, no inter-passing of relations, no vital correspondence. Tremendous happenings may be near the birth, but nothing is born.

It is equally true in the mystic realms of conscience. The truth in conscience is immediately near to me, as near as the seed that rests upon the wayside. The Divine is in contact with the human. What may we do with it? First, we may not recognize it. It may be a, seed just like many other seeds which have been wafted to us on the wings of the wind. God's saying is mixed up with other sayings. His decree is lost amid the maxims and expediencies of the world. His truth is buried among human guesses and opinions. Or, in the second place, we may give the distinguished Presence in conscience an undistinguished name. We may use some word that will encourage us in lax familiarity and indifference. The Prince of Wales has been given a college name in Oxford, in which all Royal significance is concealed. It is a hail-fellow-well-met name, in which the coming King becomes an ordinary man of the street. Thus may we act with conscience. We may give it a trifling name, and then begin to trifle with it. We may strip it of its imperial purple, and clothe it in a common dress, and then take liberties with it. We may call it a "bogey," and laugh it to scorn. Yes, we may say "bogey," and dismiss it to the delusive shades. Or, thirdly, we may just take the truth into the vital powers of life. We may receive the heavenly Presence and entertain it. We may take the truth into the realm of judgment, to determine our decisions. We may take it into the realm of the will to determine our actions. And so we may fashion the life in the holy likeness of God. What shall we do with the truth? Shall we take it in and assure a harvest, or shall we leave it out and assure a desert The seed touches! Shall it be only contact or communion?

Mark again how the Word of the Lord applies to the secret exercises of worship. When we meet together for public communion God is near, how near we cannot express. We cannot help but touch Him. We are brushing against Him in every moment of the sacred hour. I say we cannot help the contact, but we can refuse the communion. There may be interest but no reverence. There may be graceful postures, but no sterling homage. When we bow to pray there may be touch, but no grip. In the feast of the holy sacrament we may handle the bread, and so touch the very hem of His garment, and yet there may be no sacred union. We may go away from the service in the assumption that we have had communion when we have only been in contact with the Lord. The seed touched the wayside, but it was not taken in.

Once again see how the teaching is illustrated in the realm of common circumstances. The Lord who visited the home at Bethany still comes to the homes of His people. The Lord who worked in the carpenter's shop is still in the centres of labour and business. And the Lord of the evening feast at Emmaus is still a guest at the common meal. In all our customary circumstances the holy Lord is near. We cannot help but touch Him; do we commune with Him? In the sacrament of the common meal, the Lord is with us at the table. "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising." "He was made known unto them in the breaking of bread." He may be so near and yet He may be far away. He may never be counted among the guests. His presence may be ignored. The common meal may be graceless, thankless, Godless, with no enrichment or suggestion of things which are Divine.

And so is it also in the sacrament of common labour. God moves to and fro among our common tasks. He is with us in the gift of bread, and He is with us in the processes by which we earn it. He is lovingly concerned about our daily toil, and He would hearten and enlighten the worker by the strength and comforts of His grace. And yet how truly do we know that the workshop may have nothing of the savour of the temple, and may be regarded as profane. The seed is near, but not in the ground. The Lord is near, but not in the soul. And yet the promise abides: "He shall be with you and shall be in you."

Happily, thrice happily, this alienation can be ended by the exercise of our own choice of will. The very desire to receive the truth draws the seed into the secret place of the soul. The will to commune means that communion has begun. When I kneel in sincerity I am opening the door to the heavenly guest: "If any man will open the door I will come in and sup with him and he with Me." That is the promise of the Master; it has never been re-yoked; it has never been unredeemed. There is no unwillingness on the part of the Lord; the unwillingness rests with us. "If thou wilt!" That is the challenge of the Master; and the willing soul will discover the Lord in the innermost room of the soul.