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

**21. THE MORNING BREEZE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

IN Walter Pater's "Marius "there is an exquisite description of the impression produced upon him by his first fellowship with a Christian. The Christian was Cornelius, a young noble, a soldier of the Twelfth Legion. "With all the severity of Cornelius there was (at the same time) a breeze of hopefulness--freshness and hopefulness--as of a new morning about him." This delicate phrase, "the breeze of morning," came into my mind as I was reading Paul's letter to Timothy, and the account which the great apostle gives of the helpful ministry of his friend Onesiphorus. The Apostle says, "He oft refreshed me," and the suggestion is that of the coming of a current of fresh air, a reviving coolness after heat. This obscure disciple was like Cornelius who ministered to Marius, and he brought renewal of spirits to the great Apostle of the Gentiles. His was the ministry of the morning breeze.

Now it is a significant thing that the Apostle needed the refreshment. He had his seasons of fainting when the spirit grew distressed. What could there be in his life to hold his soul in gloomy servitude? There is no depression like that which waits upon natures that are intense. The passionate are familiar with depths that are unknown to the temperate. And Paul, with all his burning enthusiasms, had his moments of faintness. For one reason, there was the undying mistrust of the ultra-conservative Jews. They suspected the genuineness of his apostleship. They suspected the orthodoxy of his message. From end to end of his life this vigilant and often malicious mistrust hung around about his soul. And of all things that can come to a messenger of Christ, there is nothing more wearing and wearying than a spirit of mistrust. It chokes you. It smothers you. It makes you faint.

And then, for a second thing, there was the corruption breaking out in the young Churches he had newly planted. To a man with high ideals these rude realities would occasion deep depression. I was with a gardener a little while ago, who was taking me round the garden-beds, and pointing to one little plot where almost every flower seemed touched with blight, he said, "It is very disheartening." And when the Apostle Paul looked over his garden plot at Corinth, and saw how the fair flowers were smitten with moral blight, he became depressed and faint.

And, thirdly, there was the contemplation of his own slow progress in the world of the Spirit. "The prize of the high calling "seemed far away, and like more obscure disciples he would sometimes feel as though the journey were scarce begun. In the seventh chapter to the Romans we have glimpses of the Apostle when this mood was upon him, and when he needed all his reserves to keep going. Well, in these ways and in others, he came to times of depression when his fainting soul was in need of refreshment.

And in these times of fainting God sent His messenger with the morning breeze. Onesiphorus was a bringer of fresh air to the faint. It is beautiful that an obscure disciple could be the minister of refreshment to a great apostle. The ventilator in a room is often an exceedingly plain article, ungainly, when contrasted with more luxurious things around, but it is the medium of refreshment, the channel through which the air travels, that makes life easy and pleasant. And humble people can be the channels of the heavenly birth to greater people who are faint. Every minister knows such folk in his congregation. They are not heavily endowed with treasured attractions. They have neither gifts of culture nor of wealth, but they are makers of atmosphere. They make it easier for other people to breathe.

I wonder what windows Onesiphorus opened to let in the morning air upon the fainting spirit of the Apostle? Perhaps he directed him to some forgotten promise, some word stored with heavenly energy which the great Apostle had forgotten. When Bishop Butler was dying there came a moment of faintness over his soul, and an obscure chaplain who was in the chamber, whose name is not given to us, reminded the Bishop of some dynamic promise of the Master, and his spirit was refreshed. Or, perhaps, Onesiphorus would mention to the Apostle some exploit in his ministry of which he had never heard: "Let me tell you what happened at Ephesus after you had gone away. Let me tell you what happened to so-and-so after he had listened to your message about the heavenly love." And Paul would listen and listen until the faintness gave place to hope and quiet trust. Or, perhaps, again Onesiphorus would retrace the pathway of the Apostle's life, and point out to him unremembered mercies which were scattered like flowers along the road; or he would show him how past difficulties had been surmounted by the powers of grace, or how other seasons of depression had been fruitful because the barren desert was in reality a garden of God. Or, once again Onesiphorus might dip into his own history and bring forth testimonies to the triumphant power of Eternal Love. He would diffidently bring forth his own witnesses, and the story would be as morning air to him who was sick and faint.

Well, now, this kind of service is the one that is most needed in the Church of Christ. We want people who carry atmosphere and are ministers of refreshment. And such people will instinctively go where the ministry is most required. It is a beautiful lineament in the character of Onesiphorus which is given in the Apostle's phrase, "He was not ashamed of my chain." The great scholar, and convert, and saint, and apostle was held in servitude, but we know what a name he gave to his chain. He called it "my bonds in Christ." He linked his very servitude to the Lord. He took his restrictions, his limitations, his impediments, and surveyed them in their association with the Christ. But a man's chain often lessens the circle of his friends. The chain of poverty keeps many people away, and so does the chain of unpopularity. When a man is in high repute he has many friends. When he begins to wear a chain the friends are apt to fall away. But the ministers of the morning breeze love to come to the shades of night. They delight to minister in the region of despondency, and where the bonds lie heaviest upon the soul. "He was not ashamed of my chain." The chain was really an allurement. It gave speed to his feet and urgency to his ministry.

And is not this the very friendship of the Lord Jesus? He is not ashamed of our chains. When He was with us in the flesh He amazed people by His familiarity with the victims who were held in bonds. "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." He was not ashamed of his chain. "He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners." Their chains did not repel Him. "He remembereth us in our low estate." He brings the ministry of refreshment to those who languish in prison. "He is the Lord of the morning to the children of the night."