

THE SEED THAT GREW SECRETLY

‘**A**ND He said : the Kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the earth—and should sleep—and should rise night and day—and the seed should spring and grow up whilst he knoweth it not.

For the earth of itself bringeth forth fruit—first the blade—then the ear—afterwards the full corn in the ears.

And when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.’
[Mark iv, 26—29.]

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10th May, 1932. Eureka! To-day in a home of contemplative nuns to whom I am presuming to give a retreat, I seem to have found what for years I have sought in vain to find. St. Mark, who has so few parables, has yet this one that is to be found in no other gospel. The questions that have troubled me for years were, first, if St. Matthew and St. Luke knew of this parable, why did they pass over it? and, secondly, why did St. Mark, that is St. Peter, think it should not be passed over?

My first question seemed to have the easier solution of the two. To St. Matthew and St. Luke the parable may well have seemed one of those dark mysteries of the kingdom, which needed to be further explained even to the Apostles; but which the Maker of the parable did not vouchsafe to explain.

But this solution of the first question seemed to make the second question still more insoluble. I could not discover why St. Peter, in his talks to the first converts in Rome, saw something in this parable which made him risk the telling of it. Yet I felt that,

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like so much else in that great Roman Catechesis of St. Peter, this parable of the seed that grew up whether a man slept or was awake, had touched something in St. Peter's life or character that urged him to give it to the world.

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To-day I was suddenly struck by the phrase 'Whilst he knoweth not.' As suddenly I remembered St. Peter's poignant cry, 'Thou knowest.' Eureka! I had found what for so long I had sought.

Simon Bar Jona, lately renamed Cephas, a seedling in the new Kingdom of God, was one of those souls who love to register their love; as a seaman takes and registers soundings of the water's depth. He was all too conscious of his strength; he was none too conscious of his weakness. Only experience was to make him know that a soul that is conscious only of its strength and not of its weakness cannot truly know its strength.

The two chidings he received from his Master needed reinforcement by his own bitter but irrefutable experience, before he was humble enough to know that he could desert and deny' his Master. If ever he thought that the Kingdom of God was within him, and within him for good, his curse-confirmed denial of Jesus must have denied and refuted that thought. In the end little was left in the old self-conscious Simon Bar Jona but a sense of weakness. His strength was plainly only that of a broken reed—his fervour of love only that of smouldering flax.

Yet all the while, in spite of his weakness, and it almost seemed because of his weakness, the Kingdom of God within him was growing without his knowing it.

Sometimes he slept, alas! when he ought to have been awake. Sometimes, as when he denied his

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Master, he was awake when he had better have been asleep. Yet night and day, whether he slept or was awake, the Kingdom of God which had been sown as a seed in his soul was growing silently within.

Such seedling love as he had at first could hardly help seeking to know itself. It is the heroic lover that seeks to know only the beloved. When at length, through humiliating failures, Simon Bar Jona recognised in himself only the weakness of a reed, Jesus was endowing him with the strength of a rock.

Indeed, Jesus was now supplementing the bitter revelation of flesh and blood by reassuring him by His own lips of flesh. But it was the Hero reassuring a hero, caught in cowardice; Jesus heartens him from his cowardice and his shame by telling him that one day he will die for his Beloved.

In after years, amidst the gloom of the Catacombs, and under the doom of a cruel death, when thinking what best he might say to the Christian men and women of Rome, his mind went back to the parable of the seed growing silently; with its dramatic close:— ‘And when the fruit is brought forth immediately HE (for Simon Bar Jona there was only One) putteth in the sickle because the harvest is come.’ Death would come to the speaker like a reaper’s scythe; and God would harvest another soul.

Although the words of the Way, the Truth and the Life were towards reassuring St. Peter’s hero-heart, we may well wonder whether this now cowed yet not coward heart was wholly reassured. It was not an easy task to reassure this Simon Bar Jona—the man who had denied, yea with a curse denied, the Truth. Five and twenty years of life would make the stern words of reassurance spoken by the lake-side seem almost as dim and unreal as a far-off coast. But as Simon Bar Jona drew further and further away from these words of hero-heartening, he drew nearer and

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nearer to those 'airless coasts of death' which could re-echo and confirm his Master's words of reassurance. When he looked into his own soul, and especially when he looked into his past life, he did not know whether 'he stood or fell,' whether he loved or loved not, whether he was worthy of love or hatred. Such questions as he put to his unknowing heart he felt to have but one answer; and that the Answer of Death.

Now there is no conscious living being that does not somewhat dread the doom and pang of death. Yet there are few lovers who do not seek to prove beyond all gainsaying their love for the beloved to the beloved, if not to themselves. Thus the feet of Simon Bar Jona that had failed to follow their leader on the day of self-sacrifice were now yearning for the cross and the nails that would show them to have followed.

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All this was given to me to see in Carmel by the Tees; where no doubt the 'shewing' (to use a word of Mother Juliana) was vouchsafed me at the prayer of the cloistered brides of Christ. In this master light I now see other lights. I now see how the same Simon Bar Jona unlocked his self-mistrusting heart in a hundred kindred ways in the first letter to the young wondering Church; but nowhere opened it wider than in his words to the νεώτεροι (the young men), *Casting all your care on Him, for He hath care of you* (I Pet. v, 7). It is in his Gospel alone that we have the cry, 'Master, do you not care if we perish?'

One day the cross and nails proved even to the doubt-affrighted heart of Peter that he could say to Jesus, 'I love Thee.' His doubts had been given the Response of Death; and the seed that had secretly grown was fit for the scythe and the table of its Sower.

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