



The
Catherine Booth
Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

PART II: TREADING THE HIGHWAY

CHAPTER THREE: With Christ on the Offensive

SUPPOSING we could blot out from our minds all knowledge of the history of Christianity from the time of its inauguration with the Pentecostal baptism—or, at any rate, from the close of the period described in the Acts of the Apostles—and take the Acts of the Apostles and sit down and calculate what was likely to happen in the world, what different results we should have anticipated, what a different world we should have reckoned upon as the outcome of it all! Considering the system which commenced under such auspices, with such assumptions and professions on the part of its Author (speaking after the manner of men), and producing, as it did, in the first century of its existence, such gigantic and momentous results, we should have said, if we knew nothing of what has intervened from that time to this, that the world would have long since been subjugated to the influence of that system, and brought under the power of its great Originator and Founder!

From reading the Acts, from observing the spirit which animated the early disciples, and from the way in which everything fell before them, we should have anticipated that ten thousand times greater results would have followed. And, in my judgment, this anticipation would have been perfectly rational and just.

We Christians profess to possess in the gospel of Christ a mighty lever which, rightly and universally applied, would lift the entire burden of sin and misery from the souls of our fellow-men—a panacea, we believe it to be, for all the moral and spiritual woes of humanity. Christians have professed to believe this ever since the time of which we have been reading; and yet look at the world, at so-called Christian England, in this present century! The great majority of this nation utterly ignoring God, and no pretence of remembering Him one day in the week.

Now, I ask, how is this? I do not for a moment believe that it is in accordance with the purpose of God. Here is a system launched under such auspices, with such purposes, with such promises, and with such prospects, and yet how little alteration has been effected in the habits and dispositions of the race!

But some will say, 'Well, but there is a good deal done.' Thank God there is. It would be sad if



The
Catherine Booth
Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

nothing were done; but it looks like a drop in the ocean compared with what should have been done. I cannot accept any theory which so reflects upon the love and goodness of God as to make Him to blame for this effeteness of Christianity. I believe that the old arch-enemy has done in this dispensation what he did in former ones—circumvented the purposes of God and retarded the accomplishment of God's purposes by deceiving God's own people. He has always done so. He has always got up a caricature of God's real thing, and the nearer he can get it to be like the original the more successful he is.

He has succeeded in deceiving God's people as to the standard of their own religious life. He has got the Church, nearly as a whole, to lower the standard which Jesus Christ Himself established of victory over sin, the world, the flesh and the devil; real, living, reigning, triumphing, Christianity! Satan knew what was the secret of the great success of those early disciples. It was their whole-hearted devotion, their absorbing love to Christ, their utter abnegation of the world. An enthusiastic religion had swallowed them up and made them willing to become wanderers and vagabonds on the face of the earth—for His sake to dwell in dens and caves, to be torn asunder, and to be persecuted in every form. Before this degree of devotion Satan saw he had no chance. Such people as these, he knew, must ultimately subdue the world. So the arch-enemy said, 'What must I do? I shall lose my supremacy as the god of this world.' No use to bring in a gigantic system of error, which everybody would see to be error. That has never been Satan's way; but his plan has been to get hold of a good man here and there, who shall creep in, as the Apostle said, unawares and preach another doctrine, and who shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. And he did it! He accomplished his design. He gradually lowered the standard of Christian life and character, and though, in every revival, God has raised it again to a certain extent, we have never got back thoroughly to the simplicity, purity and devotion set before us in the Acts of the Apostles. And just in the degree that it has approximated thereto, in every age Satan has got somebody to oppose and to show that this was too high a standard for human nature.

I said when I was young, and I repeat it in my maturer years, that I would never pull this standard down. There it is, a glorious standard put before us. The power is proffered, the conditions are laid down, and we can all attain it if we will; but if we will not, do not let us drag it down and try to make it meet our little, paltry, circumscribed experience. Show the world a real, living, self-sacrificing, hard-working, triumphing religion, and the world will be influenced by it; but anything short of that it will turn round and spit upon.



The
Catherine Booth
Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

I have been reading the New Testament with special reference to the aggressive spirit of primitive Christianity, and it seems to me that we come infinitely short of any right and rational idea of that spirit. Satan has got Christians to accept what I may call a namby-pamby, kid-glove system of presenting the gospel, a sort of half-frightened way of putting the truth before unconverted people. To me this is utterly antagonistic and repugnant to the spirit of the early saints. 'Go ye into all the world,' said Jesus, 'and preach the gospel to every creature.' What is implied in this commission? People have never yet fathomed its meaning. I believe we of The Salvation Army have come nearer to it than any. Would it ever occur to you that the language meant, 'Go and build chapels and churches and invite the people to come in, and if they will not, let them alone?'

Divesting our minds of all convention and tradition, what would the language mean? 'Go ye.' To whom? 'To every creature.' Where am I to get at them? Where they are. Seek them out; run after them wherever you can get at them and preach the gospel. If I understand it, that is the meaning and the spirit of the commission.

Again, to Paul He says: 'Unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' They are asleep; go and wake them up. They do not see their danger. They are preoccupied. Open their eyes, and turn them round by your desperate earnestness and moral suasion and moral force. How did Paul understand it? He says, 'We persuade men.' He did not rest content with just putting it before them, giving them gentle invitations and then leaving them alone. He ran after them and pulled them out of the fire. We, too, must go after them. The spirit of the apostles and of the early Christians was such that when they were scattered by persecution, they went everywhere, preaching the word. This does not mean that they preached always in set discourses and at public assemblies; but they went like ancient Israel, 'every man after his man' to try to win him for Christ.

Some people think that the apostles laid the foundations of all the churches. In this they are quite mistaken. Churches sprang up where the apostles had never been. The apostles went to visit and organize them after they had sprung up as the result of the work of the early laymen and women who went everywhere preaching the word. May the Lord shower upon us in this day the same spirit! We should build churches and chapels; we should invite the people to them; but do you think it is consistent with these divine commissions that we should rest in this, when three parts of the population utterly ignore our invitations and take no notice whatever of our buildings and our services? What is to be done? Jesus Christ says, 'Go after them. When all the civil methods have



The
Catherine Booth
Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

failed, go and compel them to come in.' We want more of this determined aggressive spirit.

People say you must be very careful, very judicious. You must not thrust religion down people's throats. Then, I say, you will never get it down. Am I to wait till an unconverted, godless man wants to be saved before I try for his salvation? He will never want to be saved till the death-rattle is in his throat. It is for us to go and force the truth upon the attention of those who are indifferent and preoccupied. There is some one soul that you, more than any other person on earth, can influence—some soul or souls. Are you doing all you can for their salvation?

It is a bad sign for the Christianity of this day that it provokes so little opposition. If there were no other evidence of its being wrong, I should know it from that. When the church and the world can jog along comfortably together you may be sure there is something wrong. The world has not altered. Its spirit is exactly the same as it ever was, and if Christians were equally faithful and devoted to the Lord and separated from the world, living so that their lives were a reproof to all ungodliness, the world would hate them as much as ever it did. You say: 'We should be getting into endless turmoil. There would be an uproar.' Yes; and the Acts of the Apostles is full of stories of uproars. One uproar was so great that the Chief Captain had to get Paul over the shoulders of the people lest he should have been torn in pieces.

'But,' you say, 'wouldn't it be inconsistent with the dignity of the gospel?' It depends upon the standpoint from which you look at it, upon what really constitutes the dignity of the gospel. Is it human dignity, or is it divine? Is it earthly, or is it heavenly dignity? It was a very undignified thing, looked at humanly, for Christ to die on a cross between two thieves. So considered, it was the most undignified thing ever done in this world, and yet, looked at on moral and spiritual grounds, it was the grandest spectacle that ever earth or Heaven gazed upon, and methinks that the inhabitants of Heaven stood still to look. The Pharisees, I know, spat upon Him and wagged their heads and said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save.' But He was intent on saving others. That was the dignity of almighty strength allying itself with human weakness in order to raise it. It was the dignity of everlasting wisdom shrouding itself in human ignorance in order to enlighten it. It was the dignity of everlasting, unquenchable love, baring its bosom to suffer in the stead of its rebellious creature—man. It was incarnate God standing in the place of condensed apostate man—the dignity of love!

God save us from maligning the gospel by clothing it with our paltry notions of earthly dignity, and forgetting the dignity which crowned the sacred brow upon the Cross! That is the dignity for us, and



The
Catherine Booth
Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

it will never suffer by any employer talking lovingly to his servant, maid or errand boy and trying to bring them to Jesus. That dignity will never suffer even though you should have to be dragged through the streets with a howling mob at your heels, though you should be tied to a stake, as were the martyrs of old, and surrounded by laughing and taunting fiends. That will be a dignity which shall be crowned in Heaven with everlasting glory. If I understand it, that is the dignity of the gospel—the dignity of love. I do not covet any other.