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Mission of Jesus,' and 'The Great Symbols.' These symbols, which sum up Luke's account of the Gospel, are the Manger, the Cross, the Empty Tomb and the Common Meal. In each division there are sections and sub-sections, and the plan in each sub-section is to give first a selection of passages from the Gospel, then brief comments in numbered paragraphs, and, finally, suggestions for 'thought and prayer.' It will be seen that the method is broadly that made familiar in the Fosdick books. And this study is quite as original and suggestive as any of these. In point of fact the value of the book lies just in this, that it contains a fresh and informing reading of the ministry of Jesus. And, whether he be scholar, theologian, or unlearned layman, the reader will find much in this book to enlighten and inspire him. Surely, however, the author is rather belated in her critical attitude when she dates Mark A.D. 70 and Luke still later.

The Student Christian Movement continues its good work of commending religion and the Bible to circles far beyond its own. One of its latest services is the volume on *The Making and Meaning of the Bible*, by George Barclay, M.A. (4s. net; in paper covers, 2s. 6d. net). Mr. Barclay deals with both Testaments, selecting from the Old Testament for special treatment the historical books, the early chapters of Genesis, the Prophets and the Book of Jonah, and from the New the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel, the Epistles coming in for more cursory treatment. The treatment, as one would expect in a small volume of one hundred and sixty-eight pages, is sketchy and elementary, but for that reason it is all the better fitted to enlighten those to whom the modern attitude to the Bible is unfamiliar. Difficulties are fairly met, and perplexed minds are given valuable guidance as to the true approach to the Bible.

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## A Sermon.

BY PROFESSOR W. M. MACGREGOR, D.D., GLASGOW.

'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.'—Mt 5<sup>6</sup>.

HERE is a text which must always be unwelcome to any indolence of nature, for in speaking of effort and ambition and frustration it actually calls these blessed. Our Lord in His Beatitudes raises the familiar question—Who is the fortunate and the enviable man? And His answer is startling, for He lays His hand on the poor, the troubled, the often disappointed, and declares that these are the really fortunate. It is a paradox, of course, but we must not blunt its point; for He intended by its sharpness to penetrate the thick protecting skin of our settled prejudice.

I do not need to say that there is a great deal of hungering which has no touch of blessedness. When a man is back from a day on the hills he may congratulate himself on being so gloriously hungry, for hunger then is his friend and lends a flavour to all that he eats. But it discovers a very different quality in shipwreck or in siege, where hunger appears as one of the most appalling of human distresses; and when we widen our use of the word and talk of the hunger for companionship, or kindness, or success, the grimness still continues.

Everywhere we find men like ourselves enduring this sickness of hope deferred. They wish and long, and they never see. They search in vain for any look of friendship in the wilderness of faces on the street; and such a hunger grows to be a wasting fever in the blood, of which it would be cruelty to say that it brings blessedness. Indeed hunger, in almost any sense, appears so little blessed that people everywhere are toiling to exclude it from their lives. 'All the labour of a man is for his mouth,' says the Preacher—just to keep him from ever being hungry.

Then is the Master's word mere paradox? or is there some true sense in which, looking and looking again, we may find that He is right?

1. For one thing, it is surely true that there are things in the world which it is good to hunger for even if we never get them in possession. Leonardo da Vinci said of his own calling—'A painter who has the misfortune to be satisfied with himself has mistaken his vocation; whilst he who is never satisfied has at least a chance of becoming an admirable workman.' There, in the language of another craft, Christ's judgment is repeated. A

painter may have the *misfortune* of being satisfied with himself—that is only the other side of Christ's declaration that he who is never satisfied but always dreams of a better than the best he has attained, he is a fortunate man.

One of my old University teachers in Philosophy—Professor Campbell Fraser—had the amiable fashion of congratulating his students on their privilege in entering his class ; and yet what was there he could offer ? At best, I suppose, a search for truth, in which there were bound to be disappointments and delays. The seeker would often blunder up some blind alley, from which he could only escape by confessing that he had gone wrong. But when all is said, that search is still a worthy quest, in which a man of noble heart would rather fail than succeed in many another direction. He confesses that he will not ever get the truth entire within his grasp, but at least the hope and the desire of it are always with him. He will not allow that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' for a bird in the hand is one whose song has ceased—a poor prize after all. But the truth which constantly outgoes me—that makes me rich though I never lay my hands upon it. An artist is not sorry for his pupils though they have to strive a hundred times to bring upon their canvas dreams and radiances which have visited them ; certainly they fail, but their failure is a vital part of their success. They come short because they aim so high ; and meanwhile, in their failure, they are keeping company with beauty itself, aiming at it and following it and engaging their faculty with it. They hunger and thirst after it, and thus they are truly to be envied.

And the same is true of goodness, said Jesus ; and many who have fallen hopelessly in love with it would add their witness to His. They are never satisfied, always they find something to condemn, and yet they go on trying. No doubt it is disappointing to make so little progress ; but since first they saw what goodness is like their heart has been drawn out after it. Humbly confessing that they are not the men they ought to be, they stubbornly hold on to hope ; and in spite of many defeats they would not choose another life than this in which goodness is the prize. Thus they keep company even in their dreams and desires with the highest, and Jesus, who knew men, pronounced them blessed. They do not as yet enjoy the comfort of attainment, and mislikers on every side may be quick to proclaim their shortcomings ; but

there is a glory even in their failure, and the Master has said that they shall not always fail.

It is obvious that such a life is possible only in a spacious world, which many people never enter. In most of us there is a root of laziness, inclining us to rest in what, with least of toil, we can secure ; and many, if they had their way, would lie upon their backs subsisting on such fruits as fall within their reach. Their chief authentic scripture is the saying which represents it as a curse for a man to eat his bread in sweat of brow. But that curse was long ago discovered to be a blessing in disguise, and the races which now seem most to be pitied are those which have been most screened from the necessity of toil. Certainly this was the Master's estimate. He had no praise for such as are content with what they have attained, but only for those who claim a share in the ampler things beyond. They may not reach them now, but how amazingly good it is to try ! These are My friends, He said, and I count them blessed.

2. The other thing to note is the unwavering confidence of Jesus that such longings shall one day be satisfied. 'The soul will long after something,' says Matthew Henry, 'and those who fasten upon the right object, which is satisfying and not deceiving, are indeed blessed.'

This confidence of Jesus had many aspects. For one thing, it was bound up with His *absolute belief in prayer*. Emerson tells of an unlettered field labourer in New England : 'He was a Methodist, and, though ignorant and rude, he had some deep thoughts ; and one day he said to me in the field that men were always praying and that all prayers were granted. I meditated much on his saying, and wrote my first sermon upon it.' Now that faith of the New England ploughman, that men are always praying and that all prayers are granted, lived in the heart of Jesus, and it made Him bold in His prediction here. Those who hunger after righteousness shall be filled, He said ; for their hunger, whether it finds utterance in word or not, is a prayer. The restlessness and disappointment and self-upbraiding of men rise up to God, and Paul daringly affirms that the Spirit takes these groanings of ours and offers them to God as a plea. A man's nearest friend may not know what he is after, sometimes he himself hardly knows, but God understands, says Paul. 'That which drew from out the boundless deep turns

again home.' There are few things, even in the Gospels, more rebuking than our Master's conviction that prayer is inevitably heard. Without any 'if' or exception He declared that if we ask we *shall* receive; and since our hunger is a prayer it cannot but be answered, said the Lord.

No one need imagine that the seeking therefore is needless, or that the object would have come to us without our importunity. No hunger, no satisfaction: that is the rule to which our Lord appeals. In a gold-bearing region two men may tramp up a glen together, one for mere pastime, whilst the other is on the outlook for paying gold; but it is the second who detects the trace of colour in the gravel. Two men are roaming in the Highlands, one a Cockney, letting his mind lie fallow, the other on the hunt for songs and lilts; and it is he who catches the vague cradle song the granny is crooning, and reckons it a prize. The man who has hunger and the man who has none may be encompassed by identical opportunities, but the reward is for the first. Two shall be working in the field, said Jesus, but one is left outside; two shall be grinding at the mill, two sitting in the pew, two joined in the marriage bond, but always it is the seeker, the hungry, who attains. It is not enough to have a vague goodwill to goodness, the whole mind must be made up; for it is the hungry who break the husk and enjoy the kernel, who grapple with the deeper meanings of the promise, and explore the hidden graces of the sacrament.

God does not stint His creatures, only they must ask; and if the door be shut, they must knock and go on knocking. The need for effort never passes, but still the promise stands—'Ask, and ye shall receive'; and those who hunger after righteousness shall, without fail, be filled.

And Jesus was sure of what He said, *because He believed in God and in the world as made by God*. Some of us look with sombre and discouraged eyes on life as if there were something cynical in it—marsh lights to lure us on to the morass and then forsake us. But in Jesus' view God's world is fundamentally just; there is a reward for all labour, and God renders to every man according to his work. In patches of the field the soil is shallow, and in others it has not been rightly cleaned, and thus the crop is uneven; but over the whole surface of the field the one energy of life is at work. Where it cannot produce much, at least it tries to produce; and even in the stony ground there is

forthwith some sign of growth. Do not be afraid, said Jesus, that this noble appetite in you will lead only to disappointment; do not try to content it with something less than bread, and above all things do not seek in manifold distractions to forget about it. A man's desire for righteousness is the noblest part of him, and God who awakened it will not deny it satisfaction. 'Thou wouldst not have sought Me,' He said to Pascal, 'if thou hadst not already found Me.' The longing and the discontent are the best of signs, for it is God in you who accounts for them. It is He who sends the 'mighty famine,' under whose compulsion the son at last says, 'I will arise, and go to my Father.' And he finds satisfaction there.

And Jesus was sure of His promise, *because He was sure of Himself and His power of helping men*. As the promise comes from Him it can be judged of only in His presence, though we all are slow to do justice to the difference which Christ has made. The Old Testament keeps record of extraordinary achievements of faith, but mixed with these there is a story of misapprehension and of groping. I suppose there was bound to be when no one visibly stood at the back of the promises on which men had laid hold, to guarantee their fulfilment. They had leaped up to God—these undiscouraged heroes of faith; but often it seemed as if no hand were outstretched to welcome them. But now the Christ has come, and all the promises of God take on another look. This is what makes the New Testament the most buoyant and radiant book that ever was written, for the Lord of life and light and healing inhabits every page of it. The Apostles felt that, after ages of desire and longing, the day had come for satisfaction; and to all the hungry souls in the world of their time they carried the good news that in Jesus Christ the promises of God were assured.

I fear that many of us are Old Testament believers still, looking to God and in some vague sense trusting God, but always without a Saviour and the glad assurance which He made possible. But this, and every Beatitude, has Jesus Christ as its sole ground. He is nothing else than God's hand reached out to help us through; He is God's mercy now with hands and feet; and thus through Him things long impossible are brought to pass. The man who has received Christ Jesus in his heart will still be hungering, but he will not be famished; for the Father who knows our need will in this thing also give us day by day our daily bread.