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Tenth Anniversary Memorial

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" Whose I Am and Whom I Serve "

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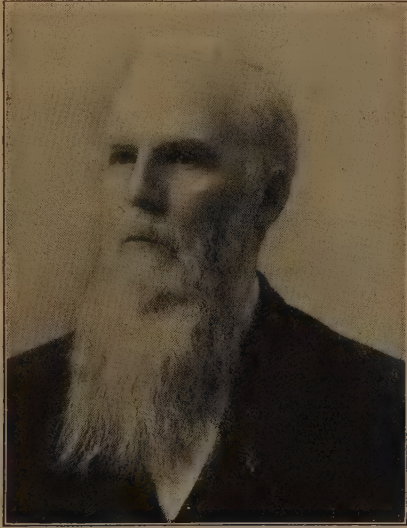
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CHAPTER X.

Worship.

BY THE REV. W. H. M'MILLAN, D.D.

"I will turn aside and see this great sight," said Moses in the wilderness of Sinai when the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush; but God said to him, "Put off thy shoes from thy feet; for the place where thou standest is holy ground." It was not a time for interested curiosity. It was a time for worship; for he was in the presence of God. He was about to be sent on his life mission, and for it he was to be made ready by that time of communion with God.



REV. W. H. McMILLAN, D.D.

When Isaiah was about to be sent out with his great message to his countrymen, he "saw the Lord seated upon a throne high and lifted up," and the vision was so majestic that he could only say, "Woe is me, I am undone," until the live coal from the altar touching his lips, made him worthy and able to respond to the call of his God.

When John was about to receive his prophetic office and draw aside the veil to discover

the history of his Lord's kingdom down through the far-reaching ages, he heard a voice behind him; and, being turned, he saw his Lord in such glory that he fell at His feet as dead.

You believe it to be the Lord's purpose that this great gathering of His disciples should be the beginning with each one of you of a larger activity, and a higher devotion to His service. You have come to meet your Master expecting to be re-commissioned, re-enlightened, and re-inspired for His service. You desire and expect it to be the beginning of a new and greater life for you all. You desire to be commissioned again as deliverers of men from a worse than Egyptian bondage; you are to go with God's messages of warning and of promise to a people dull of heart and blind of eye to the things of God; you are to have your eyes anointed

to see into the future with your younger and more hopeful vision, and tell to some who are older and perhaps are growing sad in the hard battles of the Lord, about the light you see "which tips the golden-spired apocalypse." It is fit, therefore, that, like those servants of old, you should spend this first hour in communion with God. Every one who has ever gone to his fellow-men with any blessing for their lives has gone out to them from the presence of the Lord where he received it, for "every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from Him." The Master said, "Freely ye have received, freely give." When we return from this gathering we desire to give more freely; then let us wait to-night in the Presence, that we may first receive.

Worship is expressing to God by words or deeds our appreciation of what He is and of what He does. Following the natural current of our thought concerning God, we are impressed first of all with the thought of His power. As we sit to-night under the gleam of these lights, and think of God, our thoughts run beyond them away out into His universe to the bounds of which, urge them never so wildly, the steeds of thought can never run, and reflect that those infinite spaces are all filled with suns and systems without number, and all made, sustained and controlled by the might of God. There is Neptune yonder on the outer edge of our system, traveling with the speed of thought, and yet requiring one hundred and sixty-four years to complete his orbit. That great racer of the skies is reined and held by the hand of God. The universe is a vast mechanism of acting forces whose action and interaction are everywhere and whose measure no one can compute; and that whole universe with all its forces is under the power and control of our God.

In this world, which is but a mite in God's great dominion, we are surrounded by evidences of His power that appal us. The sea in its fury hurls its waves one and another against the beach, as if it would break the bounds of its habitation; but our God has said, "I prescribed for it My decree and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." Earthquakes sway the continents to and fro, but He laid those foundations of the earth that they should not be removed forever. Tempests run like mighty furies sweeping the earth with the besom of destruction, but "He maketh the clouds His chariot, and walketh on the wings of the wind." David expresses his thought concerning the almightiness of God, saying, "He by His strength setteth fast the mountains being girded with power." "He stilleth the noise of the seas, and the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." Isaiah, seeing that God's power of control extends to all sentient being as well as material things, says, "Behold the nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold He taketh up the isles as a very little thing."

The power of our God extends not alone to things vast and forceful. It controls also things most intangible and minute. In the ninety-first Psalm the writer breathes his confidence of safety from such things under the care of God. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. Thou shalt not be afraid for

the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon day." This God of infinite power is the God whom we worship. In our weakness we draw near to repose on the bosom of the Almighty.

In worship we also praise the infinite wisdom of our God. His wisdom is seen in His adjustments of all things one to another, and in directing all to good ends. It has been said that the sharpest spear in the side of modern skepticism is the correlation of forces seen in all the universe of God. Nothing exists alone. Everything stands in relations of adjustment to all other things about it. Out in the vast spaces where the heavenly bodies sweep on their majestic rounds, it is seen that the force which drives them forward is so adjusted to the force that holds them to their centers that they move on a path so exact that astronomers can calculate to a second when they will pass a certain point in the sky. No machine made by human hands ever ran with the exactness of those vast movements of the skies. In making furniture, mechanics dove-tail pieces together. God has done more than this in fitting force to force, existence to existence, in His creation. Certain flowers wait for insects to come and carry their pollen from stamen to stigma. Our ears open their convoluted chambers and stretch a membrane across the door for the vibrating air to sound the voices of the world upon them. Our eyes lift their lids off their sensitive plates for the sun to write the pictures of the world on them. Thistles wait for the winds to sow their seeds. The rivers lift their lids off their sensitive plates for the sun to write the pictures of the world on them. The rivers wait for the sun to lift the vapors from land and sea and for the winds to carry them far away over mountain and plain to drop them down in rain to keep their currents flowing. These things are not the evolution of blind forces. They are the handiwork of God.

As we sit with bowed head to-night to worship our God for His wisdom in making and governing all material things, we also cherish the higher thought that He also holds in His hands all the tangled threads of human existence, and of all animal life. The law that governs sentient beings in their relations to their environment is not the survival of the fittest; the truth is, that God has made all things the fittest for the survival of His creatures. He gives powers, and gives a suitable sphere in which to exercise them. He creates wants and provides for their supply.

But it is for His wise weaving of the web of human life that we worship Him most. His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts, yet we know that He can and does "make all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose." He takes our individual measure and adjusts all the conditions of life to that measure. "He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear." He is a Master who never lays a burden upon His servant too heavy for him to carry; a Teacher who never gives a lesson too hard for His pupil to learn; a guide who never suffers His charge to lose the way; a pilot who never allows our ship of life to run upon the rocks. Holding in the grasp of His infinite mind all facts, all forces, all relations, and all individualities, He suits

every path to the feet that are to follow it, every back to the burdens it must carry, and all permitted assaults of temptation to the strength of those who must resist them. Men go stumbling because they do not know. Their wisdom fails them; they miscalculate and are disappointed. Events surprise them because they cannot foresee the future, and they are baffled and beaten in their endeavors. But God has never been surprised; He has never met the unexpected; His purposes never miscarry; for He sees the end from the beginning, and adjusts causes to effects with un-failing precision.

Our worship also bows to the goodness of God. When we come into His presence we approach not with blanched cheeks and lips trembling with fear while we speak His praises, but with faces radiant with filial trust, and lips saying, "Abba, Father." The way of transgressors is hard. The heathen devotee bows to a cruel divinity, and the world-worshiper of to-day serves a heartless master. The world is hard in its policies, its feelings and its acts. Underneath its pretentious forms, it conceals heartless cruelty and deceit. But when we approach our God, we come to outstretched arms. Whenever one says, "I will arise and go to my Father," he sees his Father running to meet him. When we remember past gifts, we know that it was only our lack of faith that kept them from being far greater and better; and when we ask for future gifts, we know that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them who love Him." God is the author of no human pain. His goodness has touched with the cordial of happy life every sense of every sensitive thing. He has given the birds their songs and the flowers their beauty. When we walk in His ways, "our mouths are filled with laughter, and our tongues with singing." And after all the blessings of this life, He has promised us a still better country. Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, and wherever He went pain and death gave place to life and joy. He always went about doing good. And His ministry of goodness did not end when He went to the Father; it touches our daily lives with its benedictions. We praise Him not alone for the record of the long ago, but also for the experience of the present. It is not only a memory, it is a present fact.

"Warm, sweet, tender even yet,
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

"The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in the throng and press,
And we are whole again."

God is our Sun, and from Him flows in boundless effulgence our light, our life, our joy.

Our worship is also offered to the Holy One. John tells us that when he saw Him on Patmos, "His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire." When the

three disciples saw Him transfigured, "His raiment became shining exceeding white as snow as no fuller on earth could white them." That whiteness to their sight was the sign of His perfect holiness. Over against our moral stains and vileness stands the absolute whiteness of God's nature. Out of the shadow of our darkness we look up to the brightness of His glory. Out of the depths we invoke Him whose throne is where perfect beauty dwells. The deepest longing of our hearts which our worship breathes is that we may be made whiter than snow, being washed by Him, and that the beauty of the Lord our God may be upon us.

In our worship we also adore Him who is absolutely true. In the world we are everywhere confronted with false appearances. Beneath an attractive exterior deadly dangers may be concealed. An outward beauty may hide an inner deformity. Our Lord, though so patient and charitable, had occasion to speak of men who were fair without and ghastly within. And even when men try to be true, their reasoning is limited in scope, and often blunders. When we lean on humanity even at its best we lean on a broken reed. Confidence resting on any thing or on anyone save God is resting on an imperfect foundation. But building on His truthfulness, we shall never be found sitting in the shadows of life's dark mysteries, bewildered and hopeless; but we shall find our confidence standing firm, though the rains do descend and the floods do come and the winds do blow. If our anchor enters into that within the vail it will never drag. As we worship in His presence to-night we turn away from all the world's babbling voices, and, pressing to our hearts His precious word, we worship Him who is true.

Justice in God is another attribute which inspires our worship. Divine justice is the sinner's terror, but the pavilion of the believer's safety. Justice makes the condemnation of the impenitent certain; it makes the acquittal of the blood-washed equally sure. On the world side of the cross there is no hope; on the redeemed side, no fear.

In our worship we bow and adore all these attributes united in perfect harmony in the divine nature. But this is not all, Our souls find still deeper reasons for worship than these. "Sin has entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned." We lift our weary eyes from the hard bondage of evil, and behold infinite love, mercy and grace revealed in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, it was too great for the man's direct vision; but, placed in a cleft of the rock as God passed by, he heard God tell him what He was to men, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and will by no means clear the guilty." When Moses asked to see the glory of God, this was God's reply. When we look into the face of God His eyes do not flash with stern displeasure, but beam with tenderness and compassion. That God can love sinful men, knowing them as He does, is a mystery we shall never be able to solve. As fire sweeps through a temple, consuming its beauty, crumbling its

walls, and wrecking all its pillared grandeur, so sin destroys the soul, leaving only the ghastly remnants of its former glory. The eye of reason is blinded so that it cannot see the things of God. The will is turned into blind and fatal opposition to the mind of God; and the heart-temple, instead of being a sanctuary bright with the holy presence of God, is a den of evil passions, cruel, base and vile. It is the mystery of the ages that God loves the world. It is the theme which the angels desire to look into. John did not attempt to describe it, though personally he knew more about it perhaps than any other man. He could only write, "God so loved the world." Paul could not find words to define it; he could only say that in the height and depth and length and breadth of it it surpassed knowledge. David could not define his appreciation of it; he could only sing, "What fit return, Lord, can I make for all Thy gifts on me bestowed?" A quaint old poet has expressed, I am sure, our thought when he wrote:

"Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
If stretched from sky to sky."

We are filled with wonder and adoration when we contemplate the power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, truth and justice of God, but the thought that goes deepest into our hearts and trembles in our most heartfelt and soulful song of worship is the thought of His redeeming grace. There are no words that mean so much to the child of God as these:

"He took me from a fearful pit,
And from the miry clay;
Upon a rock He set my feet,
Establishing my way."

"He restoreth my soul and maketh me to walk in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake." "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

It has been said that there is a wideness in the love of God, like the wideness of the sea. That does not express the whole truth. It is a sea so wide that no mariner has ever logged across it; so deep that no plummet has ever found its depths.

This is true not only of God's relations with men collectively, but also of His relations with them individually. "The Good Shepherd call-eth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." David possessed the secret of the Lord with them that fear Him when he said, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me. Thou art my help, and my deliverer." In the eighteenth Psalm he speaks of his personal

relations with God by piling up the pronouns of personal possession one upon another until you are ready to think he has counted the Lord his exclusive possession. "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my buckler and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." It is the privilege of each one, even the humblest child of God, to stand with Thomas, with his finger in the print of the nails and try to utter the unutterable in his heart as he says, "My Lord, and my God." When you sit by the sea in the shadows of evening, when the moonlight is coming to you across the waters, it seems as if that luminary were shining for you alone; for its track of silvery light reaches along over the dark waves directly to your eyes, touching with light for you alone, it would seem, the tossing waves. So when we worship God we make of the world a solitude, seeing none between us and Him, and almost forgetting that any are by our side, so immediate and so personal is our communion with Him. Every place of worship is a Bethel where a path is open from our resting-place up to the throne of God.

Such being the God whom we worship, and such His relations with us, it is manifest that our approaches to Him should be profoundly thoughtful. A person should never think so earnestly as when he is worshipping God. The song of the thoughtless is a vain oblation. If in acts of proffered worship we utter words designed to express the great facts concerning God, or our thankfulness for past blessings, or our desires for the future, we should think of what we say to God: If our words fall like light leaves down on the current of the tune, while the mind does not think the thoughts or the heart feel the feelings which our words express, we are only mocking God. Jeremiah shows us the way into the Holy of Holies when he says, "Ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." God tells us that He abhors all those who draw nigh to Him with their mouth and honor Him with their lips, while their heart is far from Him. Spurgeon taught his people the true nature of worship when he carefully explained the meaning of the words they were about to sing, and then with the thought they were to express clearly before them, raised his hand before the vast multitude and said, "Now let us send that up to the throne."

Akin to this necessity for thoughtfulness in worship is the duty of reverence in the presence of God. The stiff, hard Puritanism of two hundred years ago taught men that the worship of God was pre-eminently a service of fear. There is much of an easy, gelatinous religion of the present that teaches them not to fear God at all. The common habit now is only to remember that God is our Father, and to forget that our Father is God. Men are not afraid of God now, and they can smile at the threatenings of His displeasure. And yet the words of Scripture still stand, "Let all the earth fear before Him." The archangels know how He ought to be worshiped, and they veil their faces before Him. The saints in glory have learned the manner of a true approach, and they cast their crowns at His feet, and fall upon their faces in His presence. This is not a fear that repels; it is a fear that draws us to Him, but draws us

with bowed head and reverent heart. We are allowed to have boldness in coming before God, but it is to be a holy boldness and confidence, as children to a father.

Our worship must also be offered in faith. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." True worship does not grope after God in the dark. It is not guessing about things eternal. It is not a doubtful leaning on emptiness. It is with open face beholding the glory of God. It is feeling underneath and round about us the everlasting arms. It is a delightful sense of recumbency on His breast. The true worshiper comes before God with a radiant face and a bounding heart, for he sees God. He listens with an attentive ear, for he hears God speaking to his heart. He has come into the presence chamber and is face to face with God, whose lips are speaking exceeding great and precious promises to him, and whose hands he sees filled with every blessing. Out of those hands he has already received grace for grace and grace to help in every time of need, and with an eager heart he comes to ask for more.

Once more true worship is offered in the spirit of obedience. Every act of worship is an act of consecration. It is not simply admiration for one with whom we stand in no personal relationship. It is adoration of our Lord and Master. It is the Lord's sacramental host saluting the Captain of their salvation, and waiting to receive their marching orders. A service of words that is not to be followed by a service of deeds is worth nothing. These mighty volumes of praise that have ascended to the Lord to-night will be found true only as they crystalize in acts of devotion. All true worship has the heart in it, and wheresoever the heart is there will the hands be also. The music will be an empty sound unless the Lord hears through it all the dutiful refrain, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Our songs mean nothing unless sung as a reveille before the battle, or as sounded from the lips of obedient children going forth to their labor in the Father's vineyard with the implements of service in their hands.

These are some of the reasons for our worship of God as they are found in what He is and in what He does, and also some suggestions as to the manner in which we should approach Him. It is most fit that this great convention of the Lord's disciples gathered from far and near to consider the ends and opportunities, the methods and motives of Christian service, should first of all bow in the presence of their Lord and pay to Him the homage of their hearts and invoke His benediction. The possibilities of results from this convention are beyond conception, and if those possibilities are to become actualities, it must be by each one drawing near to the Master in thoughtful, reverent, believing and obedient worship to receive His instructions, His inspirations, His strength, and His guidance in new and better lives in the days to come. There stands our motto, "Whose we are, and Whom we serve." It is written on your banners. Write it on your hearts, and say to Him as your hearts are bowed in His presence, "I will be what you want me to be, blessed Lord; I will do what you want me to do; I will go where you want me to go; and I will say what you want me to say." In this spirit we shall be ready to receive the largest blessing from the parts of the convention to follow. Amen.