

LESSONS

WHICH

THE HEATHEN MAY TEACH US.

MRS. C. V. LUTHER, M. D.

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FRIENDS, we are accustomed to look upon the heathen as people to be instructed by us, but I think if we look more clearly we shall find that there are lessons which we may learn from them. Some of these I wish to bring to your notice to-day.

I. Worship without sacrifice is not acceptable to God.

The heathen religions teach that a prayer, to be acceptable, must be accompanied by a gift. The Buddhist never goes up to the temple leaving his pocket-book at home. The devout worshipper in the East does not wait until the contribution box comes round, and even then studiously look the other way or peruse his hymn-book until all dangers—and the box too—have passed. He recognizes what we are so slow to learn, that offering is a part of worship, and so he generally precedes his prayer by a gift. Then, if he receives that for which he asked, he makes a thank offering beside.

How many thank-offerings are we owing to day, my sisters? Thank offerings for loved ones given back to us from the gates of death, thank-offerings for personal deliverances and recoveries from sore distress or severe illness, thank offerings it may be for uninterrupted health, and a year of freedom from any shadow or great trial, thank offerings for the salvation that has come to some dear one for whom we have long prayed, for the reclaiming of some wanderer's feet to the strait and narrow way, and, oh, strange paradox! thank-offerings, too, for some of our hearts' best treasures that have been gathered into the Saviour's bosom. The angel of translation has been in our homes and taken, it may be, the sweetest and loveliest, but as we look up through our tears, we can thank God that He spared them to us so long, and even thank Him that it has pleased Him at last to crown them with eternal beauty and infinite joy in His own immediate presence.

My sisters, you who have been walking through green pastures, as well as you who have been passing through the valley of Baca, "how much owest thou my Lord?"

The second lesson that we may learn is,—

II. The *best* is to be laid upon the altar of our God. The heathen man does not drop his punched coin or his smooth quarter into the church contribution box. He does not serve himself all through the best years of his life and give the remnant of his days and his waning faculties to his God. He does not work so late Saturday night that he must lie in bed on Sunday morning to make up for it, and then go to bed early on Sunday night so that he may be able on Monday morning to go bright and early to his work. He does not limit his giving to one tenth, or do as some Christians have done—take out all the personal expenses of the year from the income, and, dividing the remainder into ten parts, give one of these and call that giving one tenth to the Lord. Heathen arithmetic is not so elastic as that.

The heathen man does not live in luxury while his priest has hardly enough to keep body and soul together. True, we see priests who live in huts and who are clothed in rags, but to one of these ascetics we may see scores who dwell in magnificent monasteries and who spend their days in luxurious idleness, while the poor people around them are laboring hard in order to earn the money which is to support all this splendor and build these costly edifices.

The heathen ascetic is such from choice, and not because his people have prayed, as did certain deacons in America concerning their new pastor, "Oh Lord, thou knowest that Thy servant should be poor and humble. Lord, keep him humble, we'll keep him poor." If the Eastern priest is clothed in rags and lives in a hut, it is because he has refused the free-will offerings of his people, and not because his salary is in arrears. We have but to look at the gigantic and costly temples and pagodas that crown almost every hill-top, and compare them with the wretched mud and bamboo houses of the men and women who built them, to learn a long and wide and deep lesson. In the year 1870 there was given, in free will offerings to regild a single pagoda in Rangoon, more money than was spent on all our missions in that country for the entire year.

The heathen give not only their silver and gold, they give themselves. When the Lord reminded Satan that Job remained faithful even after the loss of all his earthly possessions, you remember that the adversary said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; but put forth Thy hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." This was the last test which even so ingenious an enemy as Satan could devise, and before it many of us fail, though we bear the others patiently.

We are willing to work for God, to do His will; but to suffer for Him, to lie on the bed of anguish, to feel every nerve in the body thrill and quiver in agony, and yet count it all

joy for His dear sake,—this is the triumph of faith. Here we may learn a lesson of patience and self-sacrifice from those whom we regard as so far our inferiors. When we see them roasting by slow fires, cutting themselves with knives, hanging from iron hooks fastened in the quivering flesh, torturing and maiming their own bodies, that they may please their idols, yea, even giving their own lives and dying the most agonizing deaths for the same cause, how poor and paltry do our so-called sacrifices for God appear.

Our third lesson is,—

III. We cannot begin too early to train our children in the path we would have them tread.

Do you find the heathen mother sending her children to a Christian Mission School, and expecting to make good Buddhists of them after they have come to years of discretion? *Never*. She may be ignorant, as you call it, but she is too wise to expect that children exposed to all sorts of untoward influences during the most susceptible part of their lives are going to turn around and go contrary to all their early training without a struggle. The great reason why these false systems have such a firm hold on the hearts of the people is that as soon as the child is old enough to hold a flower in the little fingers, it is taught to lay that flower at the idol's feet, and as soon as the baby lips can frame a sentence, it is taught to make its petition to the god. O ye Christian mothers who leave your babes at home for fear of disturbing the preacher, who stay at home yourselves from God's house because it rains, or is too cold, or too warm, or because you are tired, or you do not like the preacher, or the music does not suit you, you who leave all the religious training of your children to the Sunday-school teacher, who may or may not be taught of the Spirit, you whose daily lives at home contradict the gospel you profess, who are cumbered with much serving, your children well clothed, well fed, carefully educated, but whose religious education has been totally ne-

glected,—you must not wonder that while the Buddhist child grows up firmly believing in the eternal truth of his mother's religion, *your* children are straying into forbidden paths, into materialism, into spiritualism, into infidelity, and preparing for you a harvest of tears, of eternal and unavailing regret.

I remember, when I was in Vermont, having one spring a fine row of early peas. As they came up out of the ground I began to look around for the man who went about with pea-brush to sell. I thought there was no hurry; I suspected that my gardener of the previous year had been in needless haste to complete his work, when he put the brush into the ground as soon as he had planted the seed, so in the multitude of my cares I neglected my peas. I let the tender little plants lift up their heads to the warm sun. I kept a sharp lookout for the brush man, and thought how glad the dainty little tendrils would be to find something on which to fasten themselves; and how beautifully the pea plants that were now straying around on the ground, searching for some support, would lean against and climb up the strong brush, when my time-came to bring it. Alas, the brush was bought and put in the ground in the most unexceptionable manner, but any one who knows anything about gardening knows that those peas never climbed on that brush. They strayed around all summer, and scorned the provision I had made for them, because I made it too late.

This was a slight mistake, but it taught me something about peas which I never forgot, and reminded me of a lesson I had-learned years ago in Burmah. I know of no lesson which the Christian mothers of to-day need more to learn than this, and we may well sit at a heathen woman's feet and let her teach it to us. Another lesson which we may learn is,—

IV. To address our God in an audible voice.

Not that we are to cry aloud as did the priests of Baal, or

stand at the street corners and pray, so as to be seen and heard of men; but surely there is some middle ground between this and the miserable way we have of thinking our prayers, and finding ourselves totally unfitted to lead in prayer at a woman's meeting, or even lead the family devotions in the presence of our children.

I have no more holy and tender recollection of my sainted mother than of hearing her in her own room, with the door shut, talking with God. The words I could not distinguish; but an awe came over me as I heard the low, pleading voice, and I doubted not that, among other objects of prayer, *I* was being presented to the God of all grace, and blessings asked for me. A mother came to me once to beg that I would talk with her son, a young man of sixteen, who was not converted. I said, "Have you spoken with him?" "Oh no, I could not." "Have you ever prayed with him?" "Oh, dear no! I never could do that; but oh, Mrs. Luther, won't you talk to him. He thinks a great deal of you, and I am sure you might do him good."

I might do him good! Why should my words have more weight with that young man, whom I scarcely knew, than those of his mother? she who had had all these sixteen years in which to impress his young heart, and teach him to love the Lord whom she loved. She could not pray with that boy! A heathen mother would have prayed with him daily, and would have taught him to pray with her, and neither of them would have been afraid to hear their own voices in audible religious worship.

Another lesson which we may learn from the heathen is,—

V. To speak one with another concerning the faith that is in us.

The heathen man's religion is one which brings him little joy or comfort; it is hardly worth talking about; but when he meets his friend on the road, they talk with one another as to what each believes, how he worships, what he knows of re-

ligious truth. This willingness to talk on spiritual subjects is one of the most powerful aids to missionary effort.

If the men and women of America were more free to talk of their spiritual state, and to give a reason for the faith that is in them, that faith would be strengthened, and the work of God's ministers very much simplified. Fancy the result, if at the prayer-meetings every one had a word to say and a prayer to offer, and if each prayer was preceded by a gift to God's treasury. Imagine the effect of men talking of God's love and goodness on the streets, in the cars, in their counting-houses, and by their firesides,—of women telling of answers to prayer, and recommending to one another the religion of Jesus Christ, as they meet at the Dorcas Society, at the social evening gathering, or the Academy of Music. The churches and inquiry meetings would be crowded, and there would be a wonderful diminution in the number of those strange anomalies found only in so called Christian lands,—men and women without any faith whatever.

In the East the people are intensely religious. They realize the fact that a reasonable being must worship something. Mr. Luther once said to an intelligent Burman, "Ko Tah, why do you worship that pagoda? you know it is only bricks and mortar. It cannot hear your prayers, and I am surprised that such an intelligent and sensible man as you are should pray to such a thing." The man shook his head sadly. "Yes, sayah, I know it cannot hear me, but can a *man live without prayer?* I must worship something." He struck the key-note; and that heathen man could have taught a solemn lesson to the would-be scientist of to-day, who glories in his unbelief, and regards faith and worship as suited only to women and children.

This brings me to the last lesson which we may learn from the so-called dark and benighted heathen, and that is,—

VI. We should be earnest seekers after more light and knowledge concerning God.

The heathen nations are in a state of unrest; they are looking for something better and higher than anything to which they have yet attained. While the masses in this land are perfectly contented with their irreligion, and are unwilling to be lifted into a higher and nobler way of living and thinking, the masses in heathen lands are searching for some greater revelation of God, and are reaching their hands toward whatever gives promise of more light and a better understanding of truth. What is truth? That is the great problem that is agitating the Hindu mind of to day, and while the nominal Christian is absorbed in the pursuit of wealth, and in demonstrating that there is no God, and that man is derived from the bathybius, through the medium of the ameba and the monkey, the millions in the East are anxiously inquiring how a man's sins may be pardoned, and searching in all directions for light with reference to spiritual truth.

A young man once came to our school asking to learn to read. He was evidently from the mountains, and his appearance showed he had come a long journey to reach Rangoon. Being too old to enter the class of little children, he was given a seat by himself near the door, and a boy was appointed to teach him from day to day. My mother, in going in and out of the schoolroom, often stopped and spoke to him, and asked how he was getting along, but he always sat with his face averted, and seemed unwilling to enter into any conversation. He was reticent to all around him, but studied most diligently, and in a very short time learned to read.

One day my mother, in passing him, noticed that he was slowly and laboriously picking out a verse in the New Testament. She stopped and said, "Shway Too, do you understand what you are reading?" He answered briefly, "No." She sat down by him and found that the verse was, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but

have everlasting life." She began to explain it to him as she would to a little child. He listened most intently, asking a question now and then. At last he said, "Does n't the Mama know who I am?" She smiled, remembering his former speechlessness, and answered, "No." He lifted his turban and showed that his head had been shaven. "I have been a Buddhist priest," and seeing the look on her face, he continued impetuously, "I don't wonder you are surprised. We Karens know better than to worship idols, but, oh Mama, I cannot tell you about it, the burden I have carried on my heart for years. I went to one Karen prophet after another, asking, 'How can my sins be pardoned?' and they said, 'We do not know; God has left us, but our traditions say He will return again; deliverance shall come to us from the West; then perhaps we shall have light and knowledge. Now we must suffer.' So I went from one to another, and all shook their heads and said, 'We know of no pardon for sin.' Then I went to the Buddhist wise men, and they laughed at me. 'Sin pardoned,' they said; 'there is no such thing as forgiveness for sin. Every sin must be atoned for by the suffering of the sinner. As surely as the wheel-track follows the hoof print, so surely must punishment follow sin; there is no such thing as pardon.' They told me, however, that performing works of merit would lessen the frightful number of years of suffering for my sins, and that one of the greatest works of merit was to forsake the world and become a priest. So, although I hated their idolatry and abhorred their religion, I was desperate, and I shaved my head, put on the yellow robe, and learned to read Burmese, and began studying their sacred books in the hope that somewhere in them I might find some light and peace for my troubled heart. The longer I studied the darker it grew and the more burdened I felt. At last I heard that down in the South, by the sea, there were white people who had brought a new religion; so I left the monastery, threw aside the hated

yellow robe, covered my shaven head with a turban, and came to you. I have learned to read Karen, and have been trying to understand this sacred book of yours, but all is so new and strange, and this passage I have read and re-read a hundred times. It sounds sweetly, but, oh, I cannot believe it is true. I cannot comprehend such love."

My mother explained it over and over to him, he listening in silence, and she left him. For several days he disappeared from the schoolroom, while she prayed that the seed sown in that one brief interview might spring up to everlasting life.

One evening as she sat at her table he came up, and, seating himself, said, "Is the Mama too busy to talk to me tonight?" She laid aside her writing and said, "No, indeed, Shway Too, what have you to tell me?"

"Oh Mama," he exclaimed, "I cannot tell you what a burden is lifted from my heart, or what a flood of peace and joy has come since I understood the text you explained to me the other day. Mama, you never can know anything of what a load I have been carrying for years. I felt myself to be such a sinner, and knew no way of escape from my sins; now the burden is gone, and I am so happy that I cannot sleep at night. I lie on my bed and sing the hymns I have learned here, and when morning comes I go to my Bible to see if that text is still there, and there I find it, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that *whosoever* [that means me] believeth on Him should *not* perish [oh, I thought, I must perish], but have everlasting life.' And now I have come to say good by. I am going back to the mountains to tell my friends and relations there that I have found a way by which sin may be pardoned."

My mother urged him to stay and study longer, telling him there was much more in the Bible that he needed to learn. "No," he said, "that one text is enough for me. It has solved

the great problem of my life; and there are many aching hearts in my country, bowed down with a sense of unforgiven sins. I must hasten back to tell them of pardon through Christ. I must not wait to study more, for they are dying fast, and I must return and tell them of that text before it is too late. It has taken away my burden, and it will take away theirs."

Nothing would induce him to stay. He returned and spent the rest of his life in telling his people how their sins might be pardoned, and eternity alone will reveal the blessed results of that one man's work. Almost every missionary has a similar story to tell, with slight variations according to the case and circumstances.

After Mr. Luther and I went back to Burmah, we found a man who had been thus seeking the way of life for years, and who had tried one heathen system after another, only to find deeper darkness and greater emptiness. He heard that the white foreigners living by the sea had brought a new religion that professed to tell of forgiveness for sin; so he said to his friends, "I will go down to Rangoon, and will take up my abode among those people; I will say nothing, but will watch them in their daily lives; I will then judge if they have found a way of escape from the dreadful burden of sin." He came and entered a native home near us; he went in and out freely among us. We, little dreaming of the jealous and solemn surveillance to which we were being subjected, went on with the work the Lord had given us to do. At last he was satisfied, and presented himself as an inquirer, and asked to be taught to read our sacred books and instructed in our religious faith. What do you suppose was the thing which had decided him that we had the religion he wanted and had been seeking? It was one which would be the last to occur to most of us; it was "because we laughed so much." He reasoned thus: "These people must have had their sins pardoned, or they could not laugh and be so glad; if they were

carrying the burden of sin that I am carrying, they could not be so cheerful and happy; their hearts are light, they laugh and smile so much, they *must* have found a peace to which I am a stranger. Yes, their sins must be pardoned. I will embrace their religion, so that I, like them, may be glad."

O my sisters! here is a lesson for long-faced Christians!

As we value the perishing souls that are watching our faces and our lives for testimony as to the worth of our religion to us, we must let the light of pardoned sin, and a hope of heaven, shine through our faces and bubble over our lips, and let us show by our very countenances that the love of Christ brings peace and joy into every heart which is open to receive it.

Let us never forget this last lesson. We may never know when the salvation of some souls is depending on what they see of our daily lives as they stand among us, silently watching us and making decisions for eternity.



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