

## THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

BY THE REV. F. LEWIS.

“Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.”

THE poet plucks a common flower from the crannied wall and looks at it curiously as it lies on the palm of his hand. He is filled with wonder as he gazes on it. He is in the presence of a great mystery. The poet is, if any man is, a man of insight. With trained imagination he can see further into things than most persons. He has the gift of utterance as well as the gift of insight. He is a prophet with the power to declare what has been revealed to him.

He can “give to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.” Yet in the presence of the simple little flower in his hand he confesses that he is baffled. It is something beyond his comprehension. It is a mystery. Could he understand the mystery of that little flower and explain it, he would be able to explain two greater mysteries yet, “what God and man is.” But both are equally beyond his powers. The botanist would take the flower, dissect it carefully, classify it exactly, discourse eloquently on its habitat and its properties. But would the botanist be any nearer to the solution of what the flower is, and what it symbolizes, than the poet? would it even be to the botanist, what it might be at least to the poet, a symbol, something visible which represents the invisible, something temporal which reflects the eternal? To the unspiritual man

“A primrose by a river’s brim  
A yellow primrose is to him,  
And it is nothing more.”

To another conscious of the mystery of life, with all its cares and sorrows, with its joys and fears,

“The meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

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How men hate mystery! And especially in the present day. One of their chief objections to the Christian religion is that it is mysterious. They lose patience with it. Everything, they think, in religion ought to be clear, plain and straight-forward. Considering that religion is such a vital matter for the human soul they consider that there ought to be no mystery about it. And yet from its very nature religion must be mysterious. Religion means for us the consciousness that we are in the presence of Something which is quite beyond our comprehension; a Power which fills us with awe: a Being from whom we shrink in reverence and dread, and yet we long to be in union and communion with Him. And it is when the troubles and perplexities of life gather thick about us that we most long to know

Him. We want some explanation of this strange universe which shall at least secure to us tranquillity of mind. "O that I knew where I might find Him."

"The mystery of the Kingdom of God." "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel." Such was the message with which our Lord began His Ministry in Galilee. But what is the Kingdom of God which Jesus Christ proclaimed? Why does He speak of it as a mystery? The New Testament use of the word mystery is in the sense of a secret known only to God but made known to man by revelation. It is something which man could not have discovered for himself. But though revealed to men it could not adequately be expressed in language. There was no language capable of fully expressing it. To our Lord Himself "the Kingdom of God" was an experience. Out of the fulness of His heart He spoke: but He could only express the momentous truth symbolically. He spoke in Parables. To the pure spirit of our Lord everything in the natural world spoke of the spiritual world. The natural world was not merely the illustration of the spiritual world but there was an actual affinity between the two worlds. Things on earth were reflections, if only pale reflections, of things in heaven. But the deep things of the spirit can be apprehended only by the spirit of man. There was something in the disciples of our Lord which had commended them to Him so that He chose them to be with Him continually. They were in sympathy with Him. They were receptive. But that does not mean that they were men of quick perception or of extraordinary mental ability. They often tried their Master's patience by their dullness of apprehension and their

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slowness of heart. But still they had such qualities of heart and will as enabled them to apprehend in some measure our Lord's teaching, and gain such an experience by personal contact with Him that they were compelled to go out and proclaim to the world at large what their experience had been. "To you hath been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Blessed are your eyes for they see; and your ears for they hear." There was something in the characters of the disciples whom our Lord had chosen which made them different from those in the crowd surrounding them. So the secret of the Lord was revealed to them. What that difference was, is, perhaps, indicated in the explanation of the Parable of the Sower from which the text is taken. The Parable ought more properly to be called the Parable of the Different Kinds of Soil, than the Parable of the Sower, as the comparison is instituted between the soil which brought forth fruit, and that in which the seed was either not received at all, or else was choked and made unfruitful by different causes. Of the three Evangelists, St. Luke best sums up the conclusion "But that on the good ground are they, which having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Christian faith requires a large amount of moral preparation. But so much stress is laid by people upon the sins of the flesh that they overlook altogether the sins of the spirit. What our Lord censured in the Pharisees who would not accept His teaching was their unbelief, their pride, their hardness of heart and hypocrisy. What He insisted on so strongly was humility; the humility of little children. "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot enter the Kingdom of God." "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." The two great requisites of to-day are humility and patience. We cannot even step across the boundary of the Kingdom of God unless we become as little children, humble and confiding. We shall bring no fruit to perfection but with patience. Life is new to the child. He looks out upon it with wonder in his eyes. He gazes to the far horizon of the future. The world is lit up for him with the glory of the rising sun. It is full of mystery for him, but he takes things as they are. He does not trouble about

explanations. But as we grow older we cast our thoughts backwards. We are filled with regrets for the "might have beens." What we need most of all is patience. We need to be content still to walk by faith and not by sight: and to retain something of the wonder of our [p 402]

childhood, something of its poetry; something of the awe and reverence which must be felt in the presence of mystery. How wretchedly dull life would be if all were plain and straight forward, with no mystery in it, with nothing to keep us on the alert for the next surprise awaiting us. I like to think of faith as the fighting spirit bold to take difficulties as they come and struggle to overcome them; the spirit of adventure that is willing to take chances. Life is a great adventure. We need the magnificent spirit of Abraham who, with the promises of an inheritance, went out not knowing whither he went; and the patience of Moses, who endured as seeing Him that is invisible. "To Abraham and Moses with their wide and varied experience, life must have been full of mystery; a very storehouse of Divine Secrets waiting to be revealed. And there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested: neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad." "The deep things of God are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes." We have to recognise our limitations, that is be humble. We must recognise that there is much that is quite beyond our comprehension. If the mystery of a little flower baffles the poet still more must the mystery of God and Man. God, so infinitely great and good, stooped to earth that He might raise poor sinful struggling man to heaven. But the way of redemption is the way of the Cross; the way of self-sacrifice. The Cross of Jesus Christ has revealed the mystery of the Kingdom of God: that there is a Divine Purpose being worked out in human life through human agents but not without agony and sweat and tears. And God has called each one of us to take part with Him in carrying out that work. Our equipment for the work is faith, humility and patience. Faith in God, to "trust that somehow good shall be the final goal of ill." Humility, to recognize our limitation, and remember that in a Universe so vast there must be things beyond our understanding. Patience to wait and work: doing the best we can in the hope that the dim twilight in which we move will shine more and more unto the perfect day; "one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night; but it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light." That God should veil Himself in mystery seems to me most natural, to teach us reverence and awe. Religion is a matter of faith, not of reason: to them that wait upon God He will reveal the Divine secrets which pass all human understanding.