The Exhilaration of Pentecost.

LUKE says that at Pentecost some spectators said: "These men are full of new wine." It is an illuminating word. Many a true thing is spoken in jest or mockery. At times it is a far truer word than the speaker knows. The foes of our Lord bear valuable witness to Him when they say in bitter scorn that He receives sinners and eats with them, that He has saved others, but cannot save Himself. "Master, we know that you are true and teach God's way in truth and that no fear of man misleads you, for you are not biased by men's wealth or rank." That, of course, was flattery, but even flattery must needs bear some resemblance to truth or it would be futile. So the Pharisees witnessed to Christ's fearless sincerity. Quite a good sermon could be made upon "The Gospel according to Christ's Foes." They tell us much about Him. And the words of the mockers on the first Whit Sunday give us in like manner some clearer idea of what happened on that day. Devout men were there, as we read in Acts ii. 5, men like Simeon waiting for the consolation of Israel. But these others accused the apostolic company of being drunk. When Paul preached at Athens some mocked, as Luke tells us, but he uses a stronger word here. These men were not indulging in any light, good-tempered banter. They were using the language of scorn.

But something *gave rise* to the jeer and made it possible. The words of the enemy are revealing. There was excitement in that company of disciples of Christ, there was talking, emotion, rapture, ecstasy. They were like Paul on that day of which he said he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body. He, writing to men tempted to indulge in strong drink, said, "Don't get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit," as who should say, "There is a nobler, finer exhilaration." And that was what came to the disciples at Pentecost, joy unspeakable, joy that stirred their souls to the very depths. They were hilarious with it. What else but wine too freely drunk could make them the stirred, excited men that they appeared to be? We take note of the fact to which the scorners witness and proceed to ask what was the real cause of that joyous excitement.

Remember how awful the Cross had been to those men. Peter found the very mention of it so unendurable that he rebuked his Lord for foretelling it. Rome disdained to crucify her citizens. She reserved the cross for the vilest of her alien

subjects, for the very scum of her populace. To the Jew, a man who was hanged was accursed of God by the very fact. That Jesus should suffer that fate—the holiest of the holy, so entirely innocent, the one flawless man, as they knew—it was intolerable even to think of it! Jewish men told the disciples, no doubt, that the Crucified could not have been God's Messiah, for God would never have allowed *Him* to be hanged on a gallows. That was unthinkable. As we know by many a proof, the minds of the disciples worked slowly, and even after Easter it was probably still a poser for them when men put the taunting question: "If your teacher was the Messiah, why was He crucified?" A Paul with master mind was needed for that question, and he was not yet of their fellowship. But they kept together, they awaited fuller light, they prayed, and we may be sure they did some hard thinking. Light broke. Peter stood up at Pentecost and said that that death on the cross was an act of men for which they needed to repent, but nevertheless, it happened in accordance with a divine purpose. It was a great word of insight. Peter said not a word about that Cross as Atonement or Propitiation. Probably he had not as yet seen that as he did later. But what he did see was great. Man was responsible for that most awful deed of wickedness—the crucifying of God's Christ. But God did not intervene. He did not send twelve legions of angels to rescue His Messiah. He had sovereign purposes of wisdom and grace which were to be served by that death. "What shall I cry?" says the servant of God in Isaiah xl., when he is commissioned to preach. "All flesh is grass . . . because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." There is a great truth in those words. God gives and God takes away. Birth is His will and so is death. He enriches and He impoverishes. *He* does it, not a hard, remorseless fate, not chance, not ill-luck. One of our own Chinese missionaries said at the end of his career to his daughter, "Death must be a good thing for us or God would not call us to pass through it." That is the truth which Peter and the rest of the disciples had got hold of. God was working out His own purposes of infinite grace and wisdom through that staggering event, the crucifixion of His Son. He was achieving His high ends even by means of the act of wicked men.

Turn to our own experience. The mind slowly reacts to a great grief. At first it bewilders and stuns the soul. It seems to be the end of all things. One loses the wish to go on. One understands Elijah when he said, "O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." Then, if one is a man of faith in God, comes the recollection that he has a Lord, and it is a steadying force, as R. W. Dale found at such a crisis. You have a Master, you are in His hands and you must gird

yourself to do His will and to bear it. But it is a blessed thing when there breaks upon the soul that is tried almost beyond human endurance the certainty that the Father, whose love is perfect, deliberately lets it have that educative agony, that life is no confusion, but an order directed to high ends for the individual and for the race. That gives one something infinitely more enriching than "Islam" can ever create. God reigns. He will not be defeated. He means to make us better, richer, stronger men by means of all experiences that try and disappoint and make pain. If we will be loyal the end will be blessed beyond all telling.

> Ye humble souls that seek the Lord,
> Chase all your fears away,
> And bow with pleasure down to see
> The place where Jesus lay.

So Philip Doddridge wrote, but one word in it did not content Wesley, so he edited the hymn, reading, "And bow with *rapture* down to see." Rapture! That is what came at Pentecost, as it does still when that truth grips us; God is working out His purpose in our lives, the purpose of the perfect Wisdom and Love.

Now Pentecost is, of course, a many-sided thing, and no complete account of it is aimed at here. But what is suggested is that the beating heart of it was the breaking in upon the souls of these first Christians of the fact that God was over-ruling the wicked deed of men for the fulfilment of His own great ends, which fact is the symbol of so much in the lives of men and nations. For the Spirit of God is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord which is religion. The Holy Ghost, said our Lord, will guide you into all the truth, and what came at Pentecost was the fulfilment of that promise. Pentecost was like Wesley's great day when he said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed," and it was that because again, as in Wesley's case, it was a great illumination of the understanding.

> Jesus, I am resting, resting
> On the joy of what Thou art;
> I am finding out the greatness
> Of Thy loving heart.

To be finding out His greatness and to know Him as the image of the Father—that makes rapture always as it did at Pentecost.

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