

HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

MY HAND IN HIS

WHAT IS LIFE without God? Pointless, fruitless, unfinished, actually not yet begun. I do not know the day nor the way God in His great graciousness and tenderness made Himself known to me. I wish that I could remember. I must have been six or seven when the tremendous event transpired and I became—as well as the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Snell—a child of the living God. Not only a child of God, but a joint heir with Christ! All His riches became my riches. My sins were washed away in the precious blood of Christ. I had a great high priest who would pray for me and present me faultless before the throne of God. I had the promise that nothing could ever touch me without His permission, the absolute certainty of a heavenly home lovely beyond all my dreams of beauty, where I would dwell forever through eternity.

These riches were mine, but I was unaware of it. I did not possess my possessions: I was only a poor little rich girl with a handful of uncashed checks signed by the Lord Jesus Christ. I only knew that my passionate little heart was flooded with love for God and especially for the Lord Jesus, for I had not yet learned that they are One. I loved Him so, that I thought of Him by day and dreamed of Him by night. The Bible tells us that when a sinner repents there is joy in Heaven. But when a small child puts her hand in His before too many mistakes have been made, before too many pages of life's book have been spoiled, then the angels must throng the very parapets of Heaven to look over and rejoice!

A small lonely soul venturing for the first time into the vast realms of the infinite cannot be satisfied with something dim and distant. The heart's deep cry is for someone near and dear with whom to tread these paths. And so, my Lord and I began to walk together, my hand resting trustingly in His.

One dream remains vivid in my mind. Our woodshed and henhouse made a right angle. In this was an old saw-horse . . . and I dreamed that the dear Lord Jesus Himself sat there. And I was nearby, clinging to the clothesline, balancing on the clothes pole which lay on the ground. I was trying to hide my face in the bend of my arm, too shy to look at Him except for a surreptitious peep. Then in my dream He spoke to me. His voice, like a bell, wooed my shyness away and soon we were talking as friends. I cannot describe His face. I remember His expression: love and tenderness personified . . . When on that glad day I finally do see Him face to face, I think I shall find that He looks as He did in my dream.

I kept all this to myself. Our family possessed a deep New England reticence about the things of the heart and spirit. We found ourselves unable to speak of them to each other. And so began what seems a strange existence, dual in nature. There was my very real walk with Him whom I loved so well, and which was thrilling and satisfying to me. And there was the religious life of which I heard in church and at our own family altar.

Before we went to bed, Mother read a chapter of the Bible. Then we all knelt and Father prayed, after which we joined in repeating the Lord's Prayer. I was too young to understand what he said. His prayer seemed to me much too long and besides, my chilblains began to itch and burn. I listened when he said something about thanking God for the trees. About halfway through the prayer he usually prayed that we might show God "our thankfus pyropetiens." This puzzled me greatly. What was I to show to God? He could already see everything about me, so I silently offered an inclusive interpolation, "**Thou God seest me,**" hoping thus my pyropetiens would become visible to Him. It was years before it dawned on me that Father was asking God to help us "show our thankfulness by our obedience."

It is strange to remember that my life at church and the occasional revival meetings gave me an unhappy sense of guilt. "Class meeting" was held prior to the church service. If we arrived early enough we could hear the dear old saints occasionally sounding Amen and Hallelujah. I cringed with unhappiness. I knew that I could never overcome my shyness enough to do that. And I knew too that they were talking about this mysterious thing called Experience. That was at the root of all my trouble. I searched my soul to find any trace of an experience, but I looked in vain. I never dreamed that my exultant joy over His great grace, my certainty over the truth of His Word—this was in itself an experience. Had anyone asked me the cause of this happiness I could only have replied, "Because it is all true about Jesus;"

So the little disciple struggled along, living a far-from-exemplary life but truly wanting to serve Him. Time after time, however, I "**fell from grace**"—a horrible state about which I heard at intervals.

One Sunday, not being well enough to take the long walk to church, I was left at home alone. The house seemed strange, emptied of loved ones. I was half afraid as I wandered from room to room. In our bedroom I stood before the mirror a long time, wondering how I would look as I lay in my coffin. I closed my eyes to mere slits, threw my head back, erased all expression from my face, folded my arms over my bosom and there I was—practically a corpse!

This terrified me so I fled to the dining room and looked out at the grass and the trees, so alive and green. The dancing shadows cast by the leaves of the elm tree comforted me and my thoughts turned to Him Who made the great outdoors and Who would someday take me to dwell with Him. My joy and gratitude grew beyond bounds. I wanted to pray, but I wanted an altar first. With a pencil, on the smooth plaster wall under the dining room window, I wrote in straggling capitals the word CROSS. Then I bowed before it and poured my heart out in prayer to Him. It was indeed a sacred place.

The next day my keen-eyed mother called us in. Indicating the handwriting on the wall, she asked, “Who did this?”

Silence, on the part of my sisters. Then I confessed my guilt. I think perhaps my mother knew something of that inner life of mine. I think that she longed to have me share it with her. I am sorry that I did not know how: I was too sensitive, too cowardly. So I lied to my mother and I denied my Lord. When she asked why I had written the word on the wall, I replied, “Because Amy was cross.”

A shadow passed over her face but she said nothing more about it. May God forgive me. I know that He has, long since. And some day I shall ask her forgiveness too, and we shall talk freely together of Him.

Shortly after this, when I was nine, Amy and I joined the church. Mother asked us if we didn’t want to and we said yes. Our pastor conducted a probationer’s class which we attended for a few weeks. I don’t know how much of it I understood. Amy was ashamed of me at the examination when the pastor asked how we knew we loved Jesus. That being the expression we used in our home for being converted, I quickly replied, “Because the Bible says so.” Amy, to cover what she thought was a stupid blunder on my part, spoke up, “Because I feel it in my heart.” There we were—back to Experience again! I still think that my answer was the better one.

So I struggled along, a very faulty child of God, “**falling from grace**” with appalling frequency, each “**fall**” accompanied by a time of terror lest I had “lost my salvation” and might die during that interval, thus rendering salvation a matter of timing and chance.

It was long, long afterwards that I wrote with firm hand on the flyleaf of my Bible, “Position, not experience;” and beneath that, those wonderful words of Luther:

For feelings come and feelings go
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.

But even so, for years if I took my eyes off my Saviour and turned them inward, I was haunted by that wrath of “Experience.” It finally left me when at long last I grasped the glorious truth that my soul is eternally safe, that nothing can pluck me out of His hand or separate me from the Word of God, not even my sins and failures; that as I am and always will be a child of my parents, so will I ever be a child of the living God. This is the eternal redemption which He wrought.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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