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## CHAPTER I

### WHY THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN

*"My heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things which I have made touching the king."*

I WAS ONCE TALKING on the subject of religion with an intelligent agnostic, whom I very much wished to influence, and after listening to me politely for a little while, he said, "Well, madam, all I have to say is this. If you Christians want to make us agnostics inclined to look into your religion, you must try to be more comfortable in the possession of it yourselves. The Christians I meet seem to me to be the very most uncomfortable people anywhere around. They seem to carry their religion as a man carries a headache. He does not want to get rid of his head, but at the same time it is very uncomfortable to have it. And I for one do not care to have that sort of religion."

This was a lesson I have never forgotten, and it is the primary cause of my writing this book.

I was very young in the Christian life at the time of this conversation, and was still in the first joy of my entrance into it, so I could not believe that any of God's children could be as uncomfortable in their religious lives as my agnostic friend had asserted. But when the early glow of

my conversion had passed, and I had come down to the dullness of everyday duties and responsibilities, I soon found from my own experience, and also from the similar experiences of most of the Christians around me, that there was far too much truth in his assertion, and that the religious life of most of us was full of discomfort and unrest. In fact, it seemed, as one of my Christian friends said to me one day when we were comparing our experiences, "as if we had just enough religion to make us miserable."

I confess that this was very disappointing, for I had expected something altogether different. It seemed to me exceedingly incongruous that a religion, whose fruits were declared in the Bible to be love, and joy, and peace should so often work out practically in an exactly opposite direction, and should develop the fruits of doubt, and fear, and unrest, and conflict, and discomforts of every kind; and I resolved if possible to find out what was the matter. Why, I asked myself, should the children of God lead such utterly uncomfortable religious lives when He has led us to believe that His yoke would be easy and His burden light? Why are we tormented with so many spiritual doubts, and such heavy spiritual anxieties? Why do we find it so hard to be sure that God really loves us, and why is it that we never seem able to believe long at a time in His kindness and His care? How is it that we can let ourselves suspect Him of forgetting us and forsaking us in times of need? We can trust our earthly friends, and can be comfortable in their companionship, and why is it then that we cannot trust our heavenly Friend, and that we seem unable to be comfortable in His service?

I believe I have found the answer to these questions, and I should like to state frankly that my object in writing

this book is to try to bring into some troubled Christian lives around me a little real and genuine comfort. My own idea of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is that it was meant to be full of comfort. I feel sure any unprejudiced reader of the New Testament would say the same; and I believe that every newly converted soul, in the first joy of its conversion, fully expects it. And yet, as I have said, it seems as if, with a large proportion of Christians, their religious lives are the most uncomfortable part of their existence. Does the fault of this state of things lie with the Lord? Has He promised more than He is able to supply?

A writer has said, "We know what overadvertisement is. It is a twentieth-century disease from which we all suffer. There are posters on every billboard, exaggerations on every blank wall, representations and misrepresentations without number. What visions we have seen of impossible fruits and flowers grown from Mr. So-and-So's seeds. Everything is overadvertised. Is it the same with the kingdom of God? Do the fruits which we raise from the good seed of the kingdom verify the description given by Him from whom we obtained that good seed? Has He played us false? There is a feeling abroad that Christ has offered in His Gospel more than He has to give. People think that they have not exactly realized what was predicted as the portion of the children of God. But why is this so? Has the kingdom of God been overadvertised, or is it only that it has been underbelieved; has the Lord Jesus Christ been overestimated, or has He only been undertrusted?"

What I want to do in this book is to show, in my small measure, what I firmly believe, that the kingdom of God could not possibly be overadvertised, nor the Lord Jesus Christ overestimated, for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,

neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him; and that all the difficulty arises from the fact that we have underbelieved and undertrusted.

I want, therefore, to show as best I can the grounds there are in the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ for that deep and lasting peace and comfort of soul, which nothing earthly can disturb, and which is declared to be the portion of those who embrace it. And I want further to tell, if this is indeed our rightful portion, how we are to avail ourselves of it, and what are the things that hinder. There is God's part in the matter, and there is man's part, and we must look carefully at both.

A wild young fellow, who was brought to the Lord at a mission meeting, and who became a rejoicing Christian and lived an exemplary life afterward, was asked by someone what he did to get converted. "Oh," he said, "I did my part, and the Lord did His."

"But what was your part," asked the inquirer, "and what was the Lord's part?"

"My part," was the prompt reply, "was to run away, and the Lord's part was to run after me until He caught me." A most significant answer; but how few can understand it!

God's part is always to run after us. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. "What man of you," He says, "having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing." This is always the divine part; but in our foolishness we do not understand it, but think that the Lord is the one who is lost, and that our part is to seek and find Him. The very expressions we use show this. We urge sinners to "seek the Lord,"

and we talk about having "found" Him. "Have you found the Saviour?" asked a too zealous mission worker of a happy, trusting little girl.

With a look of amazement, she replied in a tone of wonder, "Why, I did not know the Saviour was lost!"

It is our ignorance of God that does it all. Because we do not know Him, we naturally get all sorts of wrong ideas about Him. We think He is an angry Judge who is on the watch for our slightest faults, or a harsh Taskmaster determined to exact from us the uttermost service, or a self-absorbed Deity demanding His full measure of honor and glory, or a far-off Sovereign concerned only with His own affairs and indifferent to our welfare. Who can wonder that such a God can neither be loved nor trusted? And who could expect Christians, with such ideas concerning Him, to be anything but full of discomfort and misery?

But I can assert boldly, and without fear of contradiction, that it is impossible for anyone who really knows God to have such uncomfortable thoughts about Him. Plenty of outward discomforts there may be, and many earthly sorrows and trials, but through them all the soul that knows God cannot but dwell inwardly in a fortress of perfect peace. "Whoso hearkeneth unto me," He says, "shall dwell safely; and shall be quiet from fear of evil." And this is a statement that no one dare question. If we would really hearken unto God, which means not only hearing Him, but believing what we hear, we could not fail to know that, just because He is God, He cannot do other than care for us as He cares for the apple of His eye; and that all that tender love and divine wisdom can do for our welfare, must be and will be unfailingly done. Not a single loophole for worry or fear is left to the soul that knows God.

"Ah, yes," you say, "but how am I to get to know Him. Other people seem to have some kind of inward revelation that makes them know Him, but I never do; and no matter how much I pray, everything seems dark to me. I want to know God, but I do not see how to manage it."

Your trouble is that you have got a wrong idea of what knowing God is, or at least the kind of knowing I mean. For I do not mean any mystical interior revelations of any kind. Such revelations are delightful when you can have them, but they are not always at your command, and they are often variable and uncertain. The kind of knowing I mean is just the plain matter-of-fact knowledge of God's nature and character that comes to us by believing what is revealed to us in the Bible concerning Him. The apostle John at the close of his Gospel says, regarding the things he had been recording: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name." It is believing the thing that is written, not the thing that is inwardly revealed, that is to give life; and the kind of knowing I mean is the knowing that comes from believing the things that are written.

I mean, to be practical, that when I read in the Bible that God is love, I am to believe it, just because "it is written," and not because I have had any inward revelation that is true; and when the Bible says that He cares for us as He cares for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, I am to believe it, just because it is written, no matter whether I have any inward revelation of it or not.

It is of vital importance for us to understand that the

Bible is a statement, not of theories, but of actual facts; and that things are not true because they are in the Bible, but they are only in the Bible because they are true. A little boy, who had been studying at school about the discovery of America, said to his father one day, "Father, if I had been Columbus I would not have taken all that trouble to discover America."

"Why, what would you have done?" asked the father.

"Oh," replied the little boy, "I would have just gone to the map and found it." This little boy did not understand that maps are only pictures of already known places, and that America did not exist because it was on the map, but it could not be on the map until it was already known to exist. And similarly with the Bible. It is, like the map, a simple statement of facts; so that when it tells us that God loves us, it is only telling us something that is a fact, and that would not be in the Bible if it had not been already known to be a fact.

It was a great discovery to me when I grasped this idea. It seemed to take all uncertainty and all speculation out of the revelation given us in the Bible of the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make all that is written concerning Him to be simply a statement of incontrovertible facts. And facts we can believe, and what is more, we do believe them as soon as we see that they are facts. Inward revelations we cannot manage, but anyone in his senses can believe the thing that is written. And although this may seem very dry and bare to start with, it will, if steadfastly persevered in, result in very blessed inward revelations, and will sooner or later lead us out into such a knowledge of God as will transform our lives. This kind of knowing brings us convictions; and to my mind convictions are far superior to any inward revelations, delight-

ful as these last are. An inward revelation may be upset by the state of one's health, or by many other upsetting things, but a conviction is permanent. Once convince a man that two and two make four, and no amount of dyspepsia, or liver complaint, or east winds, or anything else, but actual lunacy, can upset his conviction. He knows it just as well when he has an attack of dyspepsia as he does when his digestion is in good working order. Convictions come from knowledge, and no amount of good feelings or bad feelings, of good health or ill health, can alter knowledge.

It is to try to help my readers to come to a knowledge of God in the plain matter-of-fact sort of way of which I have spoken, and to the convictions which result from this knowledge, that this book is written. I shall first try to show what God is, not theologically, nor doctrinally, but simply what He is in actual, practical reality, as the God and Father of each one of us. And I shall also point out some of the things that seem to me the principal hindrances to becoming really acquainted with Him.

I am so absolutely certain that coming to know Him as He really is will bring unfailing comfort and peace to every troubled heart that I long unspeakably to help everyone within my reach to this knowledge. One of Job's friends said, in his arguments against Job's bitter complaints, "Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace"; and our Lord in His last recorded prayer said: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." It is not a question of acquaintance with ourselves, or of knowing what we are, or what we do, or what we feel; it is simply and only a question of becoming acquainted with God, and getting to know what He is, and what He does, and what He feels. **Comfort and peace can never come from anything we**

know about ourselves, but only and always from what we know about Him.

We may spend our days in what we call our religious duties, and we may fill our devotions with fervor, and still may be miserable. Nothing can set our hearts at rest but a real acquaintance with God; for, after all, everything in our salvation must depend upon Him in the last instance; and, according as He is worthy or not of our confidence, so must necessarily be our comfort. If we were planning to take a dangerous voyage, our first question would be as to the sort of captain we were to have. Our common sense would tell us that if the captain were untrustworthy, no amount of trustworthiness on our part would make the voyage safe; and it would be his character and not our own that would be the thing of paramount importance to us.

If I can only say this often enough and in enough different ways to bring conviction to some troubled hearts, and lift them out of their sad and uncomfortable religious lives into the kingdom of love, and joy, and peace, which is their undisputed inheritance, I shall feel that my object in writing this book has been accomplished. And I shall be able to say, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation; and my pen has tried to tell it.

It must, however, be clearly understood that my book does not propose to touch on the critical or the theological aspects of our religion. It does not undertake to deal with any questions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. Other and far abler minds can deal with these matters. My book is written for people, who, like myself, profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who accept the Bible simply as the revelation of Him.

Putting aside all critical questions, therefore, I seek only to tell such believers of what seems to me the necessary result of their belief, and how they can personally realize this result.

Mistakes in the telling there may be, and for these I ask the charity of my readers. But the thing I want to say, and to say in such a way that no one can fail to understand it, is not a mistake; and that thing is this, that our religious lives ought to be full of joy, and peace, and comfort, and that, if we become better acquainted with God, they will be.