



OUR DESERTS

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BY GEORGE MACDONALD

Luke vi. 36-38.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.

One often hears complaints against this world, and against mankind; one hears it said that people are unjust, unfair, cruel; that in this world no man can expect to get what he deserves. And, of course, there are great excuses for saying so. There are bad men in the world in plenty, who do villanous and cruel things enough; and besides, there is a great deal of dreadful misery in the world, which does not seem to come through any fault of the poor creatures who suffer it; misery of which we can only say, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the glory of God may be made manifest in him.

But still our Lord tells us in the text, that, on the whole, there is order lying under all the disorder, justice under all the injustice, right under all the wrong; and that on the whole we get what we deserve. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.

Of course, as I said just now, it is not always so. None knew that better than the blessed Lord: else why did he come to seek and save that which was lost? But still the more we look into our own lives, the more we shall find our Lord's words true; the more we shall find that on the whole, in the long run, men will be just and fair to us, and give us, sooner or later, what we deserve.

Now, to deserve a thing, properly means to serve for it, to work for it and earn it, as a natural consequence. If a man puts his hand into the fire, he deserves to burn it, because it is the nature of fire to burn, and therefore it burns him, and so he gets his deserts; and if a man does wrong, he deserves to be unhappy, because it is the nature of sin to make the sinner unhappy, and so he gets his deserts. God has not to go out of his way to punish sin; sin punishes itself; and so if a man does right, he becomes in the long run happy. God has not to go out of his way to reward him and make him happy; his own good deeds make him happy; he earns happiness in the comfort of a good conscience, and the love and respect of those about him; and so he gets his deserts. For our Lord says, "People in the long run will treat you as you treat them. If they feel and see by experience that you are loving and kind to them, they will be loving and kind to you; as you do to them, they will, in the long run, do to you. They may mistake you at first, even dislike you at first. Did they not mistake, hate, crucify the Lord himself? and yet his own rule came true of him. A few crucified him; but now all civilized nations worship him as God. Be sure, then, that his rule will come true of you, though not at first, yet in God's good time. Therefore hold still in the Lord, and

abide patiently; and he shall make thy righteousness as clear as the light, and thy just dealing as the noon-day.

Now this is a very blessed and comfortable thought. Would to God that all of us, young people especially, would lay it to heart. How are we to get comfortably through this life? Or, if we are to have sorrows (as we all must), how can we make those sorrows as light as possible? How can we make friends who will comfort us in those sorrows, instead of leaving us to bear our burden alone, and turning their backs on us just when our poor hearts are longing for a kind look and a kind word from our neighbours? Our Lord tells us now. The same measure that you mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.

There is his plan. It is a very simple one. It goes on the same principle as He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall save it. If we are selfish, and take care only of ourselves, the day will come when our neighbours will leave us alone in our selfishness to shift for ourselves. If we set out determining through life to care about other people rather than ourselves, then they will care for themselves more than for us, and measure their love to us by our measure of love to them. But if we care for others, they will learn to care for us; if we befriend others, they will befriend us. If we show forth the Spirit of God to them, in kindness, generosity, patience, self-sacrifice, the day will surely come when we shall find that the Spirit of God is in our neighbours as well as in ourselves; that on the whole they will be just to us, and pay us what we have deserved and earned. Blessed and comfortable thought, that no kind word, kind action, not even the cup of cold water given in Christ's name, can lose its reward. Blessed thought, that after all our neighbours are our brothers, and that if we remember that steadily, and treat them as brothers now, they will recollect it too some day, and treat us as brothers in return. Blessed thought, that there is in the heart of every man a spark of God's light, a grain of God's justice, which may grow up in him hereafter, and bear good fruit to eternal life.

Yes; it is a pleasant thing to find men better than we fancied them. A pleasant thing; for first, it makes us love them the more, and there is nothing so pleasant as loving. And more; it does this it makes us more inclined to trust God's justice. We say to ourselves, Men are, we find, really more just and fair than they seem to us at times; surely God must be more just and fair than he seems to us at times. For there are times when it does seem a hard thing to believe that God is just; times when the devil tempts poor suffering creatures sorely, and tries to make them doubt their heavenly Father, and say with David, What am I the better for having done right? Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart; in vain have I washed my hands in innocency. All the day long have I been punished, and chastened every morning. Yes; when some poor woman, working in the field, with all the cares of a family on her, looks up at great people in their carriages, she is tempted, she must be tempted to say at times, Why am I to be so much worse off than they? Is God just in making me so poor and them so rich? It is a foolish thought. I do believe it is a temptation of the devil, a deceit of the devil; for rich people are not really one whit happier or lighter-hearted than poor ones, and all the devil wishes is to make poor people envy their neighbours, and mistrust God. But still one cannot wonder at their faith failing them at times. I do not judge them, still less condemn them; for the text forbids me. Or again, when some poor creature, crippled from his youth, looks upon others strong and active, cheerful and happy. Think of a deformed child watching healthy children at play; and then think, must it not be hard at times for that child not to repine, and cry to God, Why hast thou made me thus?

Yes. I will not go on giving fresh instances. The world is but too full of them.

But when such thoughts trouble us, here is one comfort ay, here is our only comfort God must be more just than man. Whatsoever appearances may seem to make against it, he must be. For where did all the justice in the world come from, but from God? Who put the feeling of justice into every man's heart, but God himself? He is the glorious sun, perfectly bright, perfectly pure; and all the other goodness in the world is but rays and beams of light sent forth from his great light. So we may be certain that God is not only as just as man, but millions of times more just; more just, and righteous, and good than all the just men on earth put together. We can believe that. We must believe it. Thousands have believed it already. Thousands of holy sufferers, in prisons and on scaffolds, in poverty and destitution, on sick-beds of lingering torture, have believed still that God was just and righteous in all his dealings with them; and have cried in the hour of their bitterest agony, Though thou slay me, O Lord, yet will I trust in thee!

Yes. God is just. He has revealed that in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. There is God's likeness. There is proof enough that God is not one who afflicts willingly, or grieves the children of men out of any neglect or spite, or respecteth one person more than another. It may seem hard to be sure of that: unless we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the co-equal and co-eternal Son of the Father, we never shall be sure of it. Believing in the message of the ever-blessed Trinity, we shall be sure; for we shall be sure that, Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost perfect love, perfect justice, perfect mercy; and therefore we can be sure that in the world beyond the grave the balance will be made even, again, and for ever; and every mourner be comforted, and every sufferer be refreshed, and every one receive his due reward if they will only now in this life take the lesson of the text, Judge not, and you shall not be judged: condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: forgive, and you shall be forgiven; for if you forgive every one his brother their trespasses, in like wise will your heavenly Father forgive you. Do that; and then you will get your deserts in the life to come, and by forgiving, and helping, and blessing others, deserve to be forgiven, and comforted, and blessed yourselves, for the sake of that Saviour who is day and night presenting all your good works to his Father and your Father, as a precious and fragrant offering a sacrifice with which the God of love is well pleased, because it is, like himself, made up of love.

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