

IN THE GRIP OF ICE

By Nell Truesdell

A characteristic of mortal life is that it is very brittle when it is encased in artificialities. Imitations and substitutes do not lend support to life; they tend to weaken it to such an extent that what we call "our life" becomes a precarious existence.

This idea was clearly illustrated to me one morning last winter, when I went out of doors to view the elaborate scenery of a snow-covered, ice-incased world. The ground was white, and everything that stood above ground (grass, shrubs, and tall trees), was glazed with ice. Electric and telephone wires were embroidered with ice. Wire fences formed into lace-like patterns of glittering ice. Fence posts, gates, the eaves of the house -- everything in sight -- sparkled in the semi-sunlight; for the sky was overcast with its cold burden of low-hanging ice clouds. Ice filled all space.

I reached out to touch a twig on the hedge that borders a walk. Its stem and oval leaves were coated with a thickness of ice that made the leaves look like small crystal pendants. I decided to break off the twig and thought it would be tough; instead, it snapped between my fingers. I mused, "How brittle the plant is when it is frozen." Then I touched another twig, and it snapped off. (I must tell you that such heavy cold weather is most unusual in our part of Texas.)

"My," I thought, "I could easily break all the twigs and actually trim the hedge for the Spring growth." The idea intrigued me, so I started to break off stem by stem. It was fun. Trimming this way was so much easier than when I had tried to cut the hedge with sheers during the growing season. As I worked, I reasoned that if all the small twigs broke off with no effort on my part, why not snap off the larger limbs that had been left to sprawl during the summer because it took so much energy to trim them? I grasped a thick branch, and lo, it snapped like a match stick. This encouraged me. I went from one limb to another and broke each one off at the height that suited my purpose.

This hedge was never very trim because the branches had been allowed to spread out of line. When I tried to prune it the summer before, I gave up because the expenditure of energy was needless in ratio to the result; for this hedge is hidden from the street by a building. However, when the bushes were caught in mid-winter's grip, I snapped off the large limbs so easily that in about thirty minutes I had the whole twenty-five foot length, shaped and trimmed to the right height. No florist would condone such action, I am sure, but I was minded to accept the opportunity and act on it, or have double the growth to cope with in the coming Spring. A hedge that is allowed to grow too wild is not attractive, because the growth tends to move toward the top and leaves the lower branches bare. After I finished breaking the hedge into shape, I looked at the even lines and gave thanks that when the new growth came I could trim it easily with the shears and not belabor myself. (By the way, the plants suffered no ill effects from this unorthodox treatment; and I gained the point in having a low, well-trimmed hedge to enjoy all summer.

As I trimmed my hedge on that cold, cold day in mid-winter, when twig after twig snapped off easily because it was encased in ice, I considered the

breaking action that attends human life in the world. When life is overlaid with make-believe, it is weakened. Sham might be attractive in some of its aspects, but it lends no support to actual living.

The brittleness of the twigs was a result of stiffness. The ice made the stems rigid and they were robbed of the ease and grace that protected them from breakage. In this unyielding state, any force that attacked them could cleave them asunder.

We might liken this lack of pliancy to a state incurred in us by unfounded fears, hatred, emptiness, and lacks of all sorts. These negative covers give life a different outward appearance from its true aspect and, by often wearing attractive garb, entice us into states of inflexibility, which make us easy prey for any force that would snap us asunder. The man who lay thirty-eight years beside the Pool at Bethesda is a good example. Not until Jesus Christ appeared and asked, "Wilt thou be made whole?" was the galvanized state that gripped him loosed so that he could move about freely.

The subtle but stubbornly maintained attitudes concerning any issue in daily affairs often play havoc with supple life. All the stiffness in human bodies stems from an obstinate disposition toward everything in general. All of us know what it means to be galvanized by fear; and all of us have been unyielding at times when it would have been more profitable to have practiced nonresistance.

The adaptable attitude is fraught with promise. Ease in meeting requirements, willingness to make necessary changes, bending readily without breaking, the ability to spring into immediate action, promptness and quickness in perceiving right values, maintaining the friendly, natural simplicity of an innocent child -- such are the ingredients of a happy, adjusted life in this earth-experience. The Master indicated clearly that openness of mind and demeanor was essential to entering His Father's Kingdom. "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

He taught also that the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of worldly wealth threaten a man's life. To learn to be free from the encasing elements of human existence is a possible achievement for any child of God.

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TREASURE IN THE KINGDOM

By Alden Truesdell

When we consider the Kingdom of Heaven, we realize that in each person there is a different concept of God and of His Kingdom. Perhaps one of the simplest statements we can make concerning God is that He is Good, and that the Kingdom of Heaven is our consciousness of Good, which, at one and the same instant, is a consciousness of Harmony. Since a varied appreciation of Harmony exists among all of us, I cannot insist that you accept my concept of Harmony, nor can I force you to subscribe to my idea of the Good. I would be safe,

however, in directing your attention to the Source of Good and the Origin of Harmony from which you may receive your own realization.

In a certain sense each man has his own God and his own Kingdom of Heaven. This Deity (and the region in which He dwells) is actually man's own concept of himself and his own realm of consciousness, which he may rule with a rod of iron to cause it to be obedient to his will. The saints and some of the more zealous practitioners of the mental law were able so to rule their ideas and thoughts that they could perform miracles. To attain this mental discipline, such devotees would beat their bodies into a state of physical slavery. Then their mental powers, without the hindrance of demands of the flesh, would be freed to formulate what was believed to constitute the Good.

But there is an easier way to the demonstration of the glories of God's Kingdom. Jesus Christ found it, and He suggested that we seek the Kingdom of God first, and then all things would be added. We are to learn to place our sense of values in the Source of Values; then all things valuable will be added or given by the Giver of rich gifts. The secret involved is this: if we are rich toward God, all departments of our being will show forth the things that go to make up riches. We need not concentrate upon any definite demonstration of the Good, nor need we accumulate things; for "added unto you" means that the Good will naturally appear and we shall find ourselves experiencing that Good in ways we can enjoy most.

There are treasures and treasures of varied values; but there is an undeniably transcendent value in the treasures of Heaven. Life itself is the foremost of Heaven's gifts (or treasures). A man born into the world and filled with the breath of animals considers the average three score and ten years, with all their countless limitations, to be his normal span. Yet Life, as it exists in the Kingdom, or consciousness of Good, is limitless, ageless, and unburdened.

Consider strength. A man may have been a strong man, as the world measures strength; and now his strength is ebbing so fast that he is willing to accept strength from any source -- even from God, if necessary -- and at this point he is apt to hear an inner communication, "Out of your weakness I am made strong." "Let the weak say, I am strong." If he is obedient, he feels an inward strength, such as is never experienced by the natural man. Truly God does not give as the world gives.

Protection is a treasure in Heaven. In the world man thinks of protection in terms of police organizations, of various kinds of insurance, and of types of structures in which he dwells and carries on his business. But, with the passing of time, these protective measures become inadequate. However, the protection given of God covers every contingency and meets every need, as was so frequently demonstrated by men during the recent War, when protection was given in times when no protection was at hand.

Provision, similar to protection, is another treasure. Consider the quality of different kinds of provision. The deceitfulness of worldly riches was revealed too late to many ill-fated millionaires who fall during the crash of twenty-nine. The rich are not excluded from the Kingdom of God; for the truly rich are they who know God as their provision. Those who attempt to draw wealth to themselves find it to be an unfriendly companion, treacherous, and undependable. But those who are free with what is entrusted to them discover the true secret of increase and of abiding riches.

Mental and physical man takes delight in gathering up and manipulating ideas. But he who has touched the High spiritual consciousness is rather indifferent to his ability to reorganize something that already is perfectly organized. He sees the necessity of standing alone with Jesus Christ, who pointed out that He did what He saw the Father do. The solution for all the phases of living can be found only in the practices exemplified by Jesus Christ. He entered that interior Kingdom which can never be of this world, and He commanded, "Follow Me!"

All Good is in God. All the treasures of Heaven are to be found in man's consciousness of God. There is a state obtainable right here, right now, wherein each man may find his good. If this be true, then any instruction to be of value must point direct to that Source of Good.

The Harmony attending the Source of Good can be obtained through man's love for God and in his discovery of God's Love for him. If, then, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, where is man's Treasure?

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RELIGIOUS IDEAS IN THE JOSEPH STORIES

By Robert Applegate

The Joseph stories contained in the last fourteen chapters of Genesis are, in the form that we have them, a combination of three elements. The stories are of early origin and were circulated orally for centuries before they received written form. They are undoubtedly not the work of a single author, but rather their polished form in their present state suggests that they went through a long period of development. Further, because of the close agreement of the J and E accounts, it has been suggested that there was an early written document containing the stories, which both the Yahwist and the Elohist used. In any event, the stories are ancient and, as is natural, contain traces of primitive religious conceptions.

In the Joseph narratives, as in the preceding parts of Genesis, the J and E documents were united by the Compiler. Here, however, the usual method of distinguishing between these sources almost completely fails; but they are differentiated by the appellations, Israel and Jacob, which are employed by J and E respectively, although this criterion is not infallible. The two accounts are closely parallel, so that, in spite of discrepancies in detail, the resulting compilation is a unity. The Yahwist and Elohist, however, has each given his own particular coloring to his narrative, so that it is possible to distinguish differences of emphasis and interests in their respective contributions. Both were of course constrained by the traditional nature of the material that they were reporting, so that it is not possible to say with finality where they have injected their own ideas; but, with this caveat, we can roughly outline their differences and agreements.

There are, thus, three different groups of religious ideas in the Joseph stories: the primitive elements handed down from remote antiquity with the stories themselves and the distinctive contributions of the Yahwist and Elohist. To these may be added, as a fourth, one idea, which, although not specifically enunciated, runs through the story as a whole, as it does through the complete

Old and New Testaments. An exhaustive treatment is not possible, but these four elements will be briefly examined in this order.

Among the primitive religious elements in the Joseph narratives is Reuben's appeal to the horror of bloodshed: "Do not shed any blood; ... throw him into the pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him." Reuben, although planning to release Joseph, suggests that it would be better to let him die of starvation than to shed his blood. The primitive idea was that blood cried out against the murderer, as Abel's blood did against his brother. Blood was also in itself a pollution that could be expiated only by the blood of the slayer.

Later in the story, when Jacob goes to join his son in Egypt, he stops at Beersheba to offer a sacrifice. This was an ancient, local sanctuary, where there was a well, or wells, and a sacred tree, which was a tamarisk. The god who had been worshipped there from prehistoric times was 'El 'Olam, "the ancient 'EL." The E narrative preserves the name 'El in the theophany that occurs to Jacob, but identifies the deity with the God of Israel. At about the time that this account was being written by the Elohist, Amos, in the name of Yahweh, forbade worship at Beersheba.

Joseph's dreams and his interpretations of the dreams of Pharaoh and his officers were probably elements in the primitive stories. They are mentioned, however, only in the E narratives, where they play a prominent part. Thus, although the belief in divine revelation through dreams may have been prehistoric in origin, it was a belief that had not been discarded at the time that the Elohist composed his account. It may thus be regarded as a distinctive interest of the E author, rather than as merely a vestige of primitive belief.

Both Jacob and Joseph, when they were on the point of death, insisted that they be buried with their fathers in the cave of Machpela. This is a part of the evidence that Oesterly and Robinson adduce to show that there was among the Hebrews a "popular" belief in life after death. They remark:

In these and many another passage what is meant is that a man should be buried in the same sepulchre as his fathers; that is to say, it was believed that there was a gathering together again of the clan in the family burying place, and this is clear evidence of the belief that the departed recognized one another and enjoyed one another's companionship in the After-life.

This is a typically primitive belief, being found also among the Babylonians and ancient Arabs, as Oesterly and Robinson demonstrate.

In both the J and E accounts of Joseph, the central thought is God's providential care for Israel and His preservation of the nation through seemingly insurmountable hardships. In the J tradition as a whole this deliverance is related to the covenant that Yahweh had made with Abraham, the fulfillment of which is the main theme of the Yahwist's account of the patriarchs. Yahweh had promised, "I will make a great nation of you. ... I will bless those who bless you." This promise could not be broken, and thus, through Joseph's actions, both the Hebrew nation was preserved and the Egyptian Pharaoh was blessed for his kind reception of Joseph and, later, of his family. The Yahwist also incidentally gives an etiological explanation of the fact that in

Egypt in his day the land, except that held by the priests, was the property of the Pharaoh.

The story of Potiphar's wife, which is recorded by the J, is derived originally from the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers." The interesting point here, however, is the answer that Joseph gives to the immoral proposition: "How then can I commit this great crime, and sin against God?" The Yahwist saw God's presence in everything. God's purpose for man was beneficent, and every shortcoming on the part of man was a thwarting of this purpose. It was, as Fleming James remarks, "At once rebellion against God and a defeating of man's true destiny." This is particularly brought out in the J account of the temptation in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, in the present instance, Joseph declares that the proposed violation of his master's trust, although a personal offense, would be a sin against God. This theocentric orientation of conduct is one of the greatest contributions of Hebrew thought, and this ethical note is the Yahwist's peculiar contribution to the Joseph narratives.

The theme of the E account of Joseph is stated in Genesis 45:5-8 and 50:8:

It was to save life that God sent me ahead of you; ... God sent me ahead of you to insure you a remnant in the earth, and to be the means of a remarkable escape for you. So then it was not you, but God who sent me here. ... Do not be afraid; for can I take God's place? You meant to do me harm, but God accounted it good, in order to do as He has done today: save the lives of many people.

There is little that can be added to these passages by way of comment. Joseph says in effect, "You meant to harm me; but, although you did not know it, God was working through you to bless both you and me." The silent working of God on behalf of Israel is here more clearly expressed than elsewhere in Genesis. Joseph's assertions are almost the same as Paul's statement, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose"; for Joseph is clearly portrayed as one who loved Elohim; and Israel as a whole, in spite of its shortcomings and rebellions, was God's chosen.

(To be continued next month.)

Alphabet Of
DAILY MEDITATION
For Every Week Day Of The Month

FEBRUARY 1950

1. ART not thou God?
2. BLESSED art thou.
3. Be strong and of a good COURAGE.
4. DENY ungodliness and worldly lusts.
6. My heart had seen much EXPERIENCE.
7. Am I not FREE?
8. Serve the Lord with GLADNESS.
9. The Lord looketh on the HEART.
10. The Lord... understandeth all the IMAGINATIONS of the thoughts.
11. JUDGE not according to the appearance.
13. Delight to KNOW My ways.
14. LOOK up, and LIFT up your heads.
15. A MERRY heart MAKETH a cheerful countenance.
16. O Lord ... send NOW prosperity.
17. OWE no man anything.
18. PURIFY your hearts.
20. I will come unto thee QUICKLY.
21. The RIGHTEOUS shall flourish like the palm tree.
22. The Lord is my STRENGTH and SONG.
23. TRUST in the Lord, and do good.
24. A man of UNDERSTANDING walketh UPRIGHTLY.
25. I will pay my VOWS.
27. I will pour WATER upon him that is thirsty.
28. There is that scattereth, and YET increaseth.

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"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

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SPIRITICITY is the working Power of the Spiritual Principle,
As electricity is the working power of the electrical principle.