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LIVING THROUGH BEREAVEMENT

J. N. BAGNALL

Foreword by the Bishop of Armidale

A booklet which will be
of great value to all who
have suffered bereavement.

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LIVING THROUGH BEREAVEMENT

by

THE REV. J. N. BAGNALL

Vicar of Christ Church, Geelong, Vic.

Foreword by the Bishop of Armidale

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Foreword

by

The Right Rev. J. S. Moyes, M.A., D.D., Th.D.,
Bishop of Armidale

There is so great need with many of us for a message which turns sorrow into joy. This booklet will be a blessing to many because its message has depth, and reality, and a sense of victory.

All readers will remember the words of Jesus Christ, when twelve years old, to his mother. "Did ye not know that I must be about my Father's business?" He was a partner!

So are we! Life's happenings are not events that happen to us, but through us! We are "fellow workers together with God."

In the course of history (which is "His story") evil has its seeming victories even as it did on the first Good Friday. But death was swallowed up in victory! The whole Person of Jesus Christ rose from the dead. So shall we, in Christ.

Hence, we do not passively accept our bereavements and sorrows as having happened to us, but, as the Greek word for accept really means, we reach out our hands and take our sorrows from the Hand of God, the living God, that something victorious and strong may happen through us to bring blessing to others and Glory to God Himself.

I commend this booklet. It is based on the Word of God, on the Acts of God, it makes real the Love of God. May the Holy Spirit use it abundantly.

JOHN S. ARMIDALE.

Bishopscourt,
Armidale, N.S.W.

Commendation of a Christian Soul:

(From the Prayer Book)

*Go forth upon thy journey from this world, O Christian soul,
In the Name of God the Father, Almighty, Who created thee,
In the Name of Jesus Christ, Who suffered for thee,
In the Name of the Holy Ghost, Who strengthens thee,
In communion with the blessed saints, and aided by angels and
archangels, and all the armies of the heavenly host.
May thy portion this day be in peace, and thy dwelling in the
heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.*

Prayer for the Departed:

(1928 Prayer Book)

*O Father of all, we pray to Thee for those whom we love, but see
no longer. Grant them Thy peace; let light perpetual shine upon
them; and in Thy loving wisdom and almighty power work in them
the good purpose of Thy perfect will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Introduction

No experience in life raises basic questions of such depth and intensity as the experience of bereavement. It may be the loss of a loved one whose life has drawn peacefully to its close, it may be the sudden death of a friend, it may be the death of a child through tragic accident or illness. All the major problems of faith are focused in one shattering experience.

Sooner or later this happens to us all. The problem may be an academic one till that moment. Then it becomes deeply personal. And the answer must be given in terms that make it possible for us to live through that experience. Not merely to survive it, to live out the rest of our days numb and desolate, but through faith and hope in God to weave the dark thread of this bitter loss into the pattern of life's meaningful experience.

This booklet is written to help such people. It is neither original nor profound. It is largely the fruit of what others have taught me and my reflection on their experience. It bears, on every page, the stamp of what I owe to men and women I have met in my pastoral ministry. If it is eloquent at any point, it is where the lives of men and women speak of the serenity and joy they have found in the Christian faith in the hour of their bereavement.

It was intended that this could be a booklet to hand to men and women who have recently suffered bereavement. I have, therefore, tried to be simple and direct and, as far as the written word makes it possible, to speak person-to-person. I hope that where others read it, it may build up their spiritual reserves against the hour of death and loss.

All of us know the dread of going to see someone who has been bereaved, and wondering what on earth we can say that will help. I hope that this booklet may be of service at this point in the ministry of Christian compassion.

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CHAPTER 1

The Acceptance of Bereavement

Not long ago a mother and father I know lost an infant son in a tragic accident. The circumstances were almost unbelievably harrowing. It so happened that this tragic event followed very closely on the doctor's advice that the mother was to have another child. Nothing can ever compensate them for the loss of their son nor, I am persuaded, can they ever forget. But, even on the occasion of my first visit, I knew they were accepting what had happened. It was an accident and, like all accidents, might have been avoided, IF—. But it had happened, and no one was to blame. They were not taking refuge in the silly statement that it had to be. They were prepared to carry on, to accept what had happened and, in their heart of hearts, they were deeply grateful for the providence that not only had they fine sons to live for, but the promise of further life and joy. They would believe that, in God's good time, the purpose that links all things into meaningful pattern would be revealed.

There is nothing unusual about this couple, though there was something unusual about their calm and courageous acceptance. Yet it is the Christian way and, taking it, they were finding strength for the journey. For the real test of acceptance is whether or not we are prepared to carry on. It is so often true that the life of many a man has stopped at the point of loss of a loved one. From then on he has simply existed, and death has been a release. Perhaps all his ambitions were wrapped up in his loved one, and death has meant, in almost every usable sense of the word, that life can never be the same again. Everything, literally, is changed.

THE REFUSAL TO ACCEPT

There are different ways in which men and women refuse to accept the death of their loved ones. Some take refuge in sullen rebellion. "Why did God do this to me?" they cry. Others take refuge in bitterness. They blame a doctor, or some human being involved in the accident, or

the chain of circumstances responsible, or else in their mind they go over and over again the whole sad business, mentally working out how it could have all been so different. Or else they run into senseless forgetfulness. The loved one is not spoken of or referred to. Things that bring back memories are removed from sight, and a ban is placed on all conscious recollection.

None of this is said in criticism. I am trying to expose the ways in which we try to deal with grief, in our pathetic attempt to hide from our eyes the inevitable. Sometimes we say, I can't feel that she's gone, in a pathetic attempt to hide the fact of loss and separation. Our minds know the awful truth, but our hearts will not acknowledge it. The very words by which we refer to death are often a cloak to hide the harsh reality we know. "He has passed on." "He is no longer with us."

In the shock of loneliness, and bewildered by your loss, you are tempted to cry, "He was all I had!" In a profoundly Christian sense, this is never true, and to say it amounts to idolatry. For no human being can be, or should be, this to us, just as we can never be all there is to anyone else. If we look squarely at this, we shall see how wrong it is to feel that someone's death, however near and dear, means that nothing is left to us to make life worth living.

UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT

We are unwilling to accept the death of a loved one because it seems so final. Acceptance seems a betrayal of the memory of the one we loved. But acceptance does not dispense with remembrance. It would be a thousand pities if in the days of our sorrow we could not dwell with love and affection on the loved one. For memory will never be as sharp as it is now, and, anguished as remembrance is, it distils into the memory impressions that remain forever.

In our clumsy attempts to give comfort to the bereaved, we sometimes tell them to have courage and they will get over it. As if they want to get over it. There is some-

thing bitter-sweet in their pain, and there is no desire or ability to forget, The more we love, the more this is so.

I am sure that in bereavement it is important to be able to remember the departed and talk about them with those who knew them. You will not want to project your intimate sorrow on everybody but, within the circle of your family, you can recall a father, or mother, or child. And, within the circle of friends, there is surely another who will share your fondness.

TALK WITH YOUR PRIEST

Your priest can help you. He is a man trained to listen, and there can be real balm in conversation which is neither sentimental indulgence nor a projection of yourself for sympathy. One of the real difficulties in the way of acceptance is the remorse we feel for the things we regret in our relationships with our loved ones. People say, "If only I'd been different," and so on, and torture themselves with remorse and vain regret. It is vain, for nothing can make any difference to what now is. It is so often mere self-pity, and you are thinking of yourself only. And however just your criticism of your past action may be God is able to make good any gap in the life of the one you loved. To go on being remorseful is to deny the reality of forgiveness. You did wrong, and the time is past when anyone can be hurt by what you did. Confess it, and be forgiven.

FAITH RECONCILES

Sometimes we say that time heals; this is poor comfort. For the very thing that heals is the very thing we don't want. Who wants time, when your lover is no longer there to share its passing moments with you? Who wants to be healed, if healing means that you no longer feel the absence of your friend?

Should we not rather say that faith reconciles? Faith means acceptance. Faith knows that back of the stage on which our lives are playing out their little drama is the great backdrop of the love of God. Whatever changes may come, however the players draw near to one another or

away from one another, the great unchanging fact that remains through all the changing scenes of life is the fact of the love of God. If you can accept that, the Universe becomes to you the house of your Father, from whose love nothing can ever separate you.

Basically the refusal to accept bereavement is the refusal of the power and presence of the Living Christ. The Christian faith is faith in God, Who ever lives. The grace by which we accept bereavement gives also comfort in our sorrow and loneliness, and the assurance that death is for our loved ones, as it will be for us, the gateway to life everlasting.

PRAYER

O Eternal Lord God, Who holdest all souls in life: We beseech Thee to shed forth upon Thy whole Church, in paradise and on earth, the bright beams of Thy light and heavenly comfort; and grant that we, following the good example of those who have loved and served Thee here and are now at rest, may at the last enter with them into the fulness of Thine unending joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Finding the Creative Purpose

It is natural in bereavement to feel that a vital part of you has died with the one that has gone. The more intimate the relationship, the more likely this is to be so. Indeed, we have seen that for some souls it is almost literally the end of living for them. From here on their life is a mere existence.

This is really atheism. It is a confession that God has finished what He wants to do through you. But it is always possible that the closing of one door is the opening of another. You can keep going!

God is the Creator and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His death and resurrection we find the most overwhelming testimony to the creative purposes of God. This earth may be enemy-occupied country, and disease and evil the weapons of the enemy to frustrate the plans and purposes of our Father in Heaven. But in the death and resurrection of our Lord the final victory has been won. What we see now are not the opening skirmishes that precede the launching of an attack. They are the mopping-up operations that follow the decisive battle. The Resurrection was the decisive battle.

This means, in terms of your life, lonely and lost as you feel, that the final word is always with Life and not with Death. If you are willing, in the spirit of what was said in the last chapter, to accept what has happened and trust yourself to God, He will yet use you for His purpose.

THE DIVINE ALTERNATIVE

Let me illustrate. Some time ago we installed in the Church, of which I was Vicar, a set of vestry cupboards. The whole unit was rather a dream of mine and I was proud of the final design. Because of cost, the design had to be re-drawn. I was reluctant to do this, but it was inevitable. Then, as a new design began to evolve, incorporating much of what we had already planned, the

alternative turned out to be much more interesting than the first plan. I could never have known the satisfactions of the alternative had I not literally surrendered the first design.

On the very day that the alternative design took final shape I called at a home where there had been, months before, a tragic bereavement involving an only son, for whom many plans in family and business had been made. It was the mother to whom I talked that day and, suddenly as she talked, she said to me, "But why did it happen, Vicar? Why did it have to happen to our boy?"

I didn't know why. No one does. Even the mother knew there was no sufficient answer to it in this life. But I suddenly thought of the Parish Church and the plan that had to die so that something better still could take its place. It seemed to me at that moment a parable of life and existence. We make our plans and then, for reasons beyond our understanding, God over-rules. We give ourselves to what we feel are the plans of God, as parents, as individuals; we wrap our most powerful emotions up with the plans, we invest our hopes in the future in ways that seem right and good, and then—in one fleeting second, as was the case in this family—it's all over. Some seemingly senseless event empties our plans of all their joy, robs the future of its promise, and we are left with the burnt-out ashes of what we had hoped for.

GOD'S OTHER PLAN

Some months ago I was called to the hospital bed of a very sick man. His family was with him. It was Sunday morning, the Lord's Day. This man was very ill, but we bowed our heads and prayed, in Christian hope, for the gift of healing and life. A few hours later I was there again and the situation had changed for the worse. It had to be a different sort of prayer this time. I looked at the man's wife, and she said, as if she read my thoughts, "I know! God must have some other plan!" And the prayer for the gift of healing and continuance of life became a prayer of quiet trust and submission to the will of God.

The first prayer had not been in vain—it had expressed what we, with our limited insight, wanted and what we

felt we could justly ask God to do. But when that could not be, this woman, in Christian faith, was ready for this other thing. "God must have some other plan!" "In My Father's house are many dwelling places," said Jesus. If not here, then somewhere in God's great universe, our home, His purposes will be fulfilled.

It is the dawning of this conviction on the night of bereavement that has been the beginning of a new day for many souls in the hour of their great loss. Most of us are familiar now with the story of Peter Marshall, whose brilliant ministry in Washington was brought to an end with his death in 1947. Or so it seemed for his young wife, Catherine. In a simple article she has told us how she learnt to conquer grief. It meant the acceptance of what had happened and the belief that God could comfort. Then, she writes, "It takes no little courage to take the next constructive step; hunt for the door—the new creative purpose—rather than stand weeping before the closed door of grief." We all know how she found the door, and how magnificently she has continued the ministry of Peter Marshall, so that he, being dead, yet speaketh.

FATHER JAMES BENSON

You find the same faith and courage seeking the open door in the life of Father James Benson, whose work in New Guinea till his death in 1955 is part of the epic of the Anglican Church there. James Benson went to New Guinea at the end of the First Great War and was there for three years till ill-health forced him to retire to a parish on the coast of New South Wales. In a tragic accident his wife and three children were drowned, and James Benson was left, alone and desolate. But faith triumphed and, in 1937, he returned to Gona to build up the work of the Church there, and was there through the Japanese occupation. He went to England in the spring of 1955, and died later in the same year following an emergency operation.

I think I can hear you say, "This is all very well. Catherine Marshall was a woman with rich gifts of her own. Father Benson was a man of extraordinary courage.

I am like neither of them. I am made of simpler, more ordinary stuff. If there were a door, I would go through it, but I cannot see one." It is true that these are extraordinary and gifted persons. But consider, not the end, but the beginning. Think back to the day of their sorrow and loss, the initial broken-hearted surrender to God, the tentative seeking for a way through their grief, and remember that these things are possible for you, too. The same consequences may not be. That is largely a matter of gifts and opportunity. Catherine Marshall and James Benson had the gifts. But each of them had to do the thing that is open to you to do in the moment of your desolation—accept what has happened, keep your faith in God, and trust Him for all that is to come.

What the results of your commitment may mean, only eternity will reveal. But the same serenity and courage can be yours.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I dare not close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

PRAYER

O Almighty God, Who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which Thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love Thee; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Resources to Keep Going

It is the rather large aim of this modest booklet to help men and women in bereavement to face up to what has happened and to find what the Christian Gospel is able to give them—the faith and power to live creatively through bereavement. For live through it we will. And live through it creatively we must, if we are to keep faith and be of help to others. The Christian Gospel offers us the resources to do this.

I think that you should first accept the fact that as a bereaved person you need help. This is no invitation to wear your heart on your sleeve and burden the lives of others who have sorrows of their own. It is a counsel that you should not be too proud or too stoic to acknowledge your need of help at this time.

I remember a man, a friend of mine, who had always been very active in the service of other people. He was a prominent business man and performed many acts of thoughtfulness and kindness. Then one day his own wife died. His friends rallied round him and I can remember how he said to me afterwards, almost with surprise, "You know—I was on the receiving end for the first time!" Sometimes it is necessary to accept our place at the receiving end and take with gladness and gratitude the help others want to give, and that you ought to have.

You may have to face the fact that while your loved one lived you owed them something you never gave them, and nothing you can do now can alter that fact. This is a bitter pill to swallow but, if they are now beyond your help, they are also beyond your hurt. They are no longer sufferers because of your thoughtlessness or unkindness. They are in the land where there is neither sorrow nor tears, and where sin and its hurt have been healed forever.

Do not let futile remorse stand between you and peace of mind. If you cannot come to terms with your past

regrettable actions, and they lie on your heart as unforgiven sin, then go at once to your priest. Make an act of confession and be assured of God's forgiveness; it may be a new experience for you to do this, but it is the very thing you are invited to do in the exhortation in the service of Holy Communion.

"If there be any of you who cannot quiet his own conscience, let him come to me or some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word and open his grief that, by the ministry of God's holy Word, he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with spiritual counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience."

MANY WAYS TO PRAY

There are many ways in which you can pray. That is a simple and, perhaps, obvious statement. Unfortunately many people think of prayer only as petition. The inadequacy of this becomes clear to any parent who only sees his child when he wants something. During the critical days in September, 1958, when this nation was called to prayer by the Prime Minister because of the situation in Europe, a minister noticed a friend of his University days in the congregation and, as they shook hands at the door, said to him, "See you again?" "Oh, yes," was the reply, "at the next crisis."

God delights in our finding refuge in Him in the days of crisis, when resources run low and faith needs support. But, if religion is a "long falling in love with God," there are surely times when silence itself will be eloquent with communication, when "spirit to spirit doth speak." There will be times when all we want to do is to look up into the face of God and, in His presence, affirm our love for Him and trust in His ways.

The Reverend George Docherty, who came from Scotland to New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, tells the story of Jimmy, an apprentice ship riveter in Glasgow, who came to the parish church daily at his lunch hour and sat down on the front pew silently, for a few

moments, looking into the chancel. The parish minister, curious at this daily visit, asked him, "What do you pray about, Jimmy?" "Naething," said Jimmy, after an abashed silence, "I just say, Jesus, this is Jimmy."

Let your prayers at this time of bereavement be simple prayers of adoration and thanksgiving. In the presence of God dwell lovingly and gratefully on the life of the one you loved, now fully alive to God. I have already suggested that you can find ease in your grief in conversation with your priest. Cultivate even more the presence of God. God is never so near to us as in the times of our grief and loneliness.

You may find it difficult to form your own prayers. I have tried to help you by including prayers in this booklet. They are from the 1928 Prayer Book. Let your mind and heart rest upon the great thoughts of these prayers, and feel yourself, as you pray, to be one of the great company of God's people—some with Him in the unclouded glory of heaven, you with others serving Him still on earth.

THE JOY OF THE EUCHARIST

At no point in the worship of the Church will you feel the reality of this than in the Eucharist. Make much of the Eucharist and do not stay away because of the effort it may need to go. Admittedly, the services may, for a time, be a strain, calling for self-control and restraint, but gradually, and perhaps more quickly than you expect, you will find your way into the joy and peace of this wonderful Sacrament, at once a memorial of our Lord's own passion, and a celebration of His victory.

It is a good thing to make an act of special remembrance and thanksgiving on the anniversary of your loved one's death, or on the Sunday nearest to it. In the Feast of All Souls on 2nd November you can rejoice with the Church in its commemoration of "all souls."

As in the Sacrament you remember their death, so, too, you can commemorate their entrance into life. Your gratitude to God will be deepened, your own fellowship with the saints strengthened, and your own devotion purified.

THE PATTERN OF LIVING

This may well be the time for a re-orientation of your life, a re-arrangement of its pattern. Most of us settle into comfortable ways, and resent anything that is demanding and unfamiliar. Furthermore, we are earthbound creatures; we grow up, fall in love, marry and have children, and set about building our little castles of security and comfort. In that ordered life, secure and happy, we farm our own little plot and are quite content to let the rest of the world go by.

At such a time as this we ought to ask ourselves whether God may not be calling us out of our security without Him into insecurity with Him. For we can be secure, and blind. Bereavement shatters this kind of security and offers us the chance to come to terms with Him Who alone can offer ultimate security, for He is the ultimate security.

Perhaps we have been altogether too self-centred. Most people are content to take from life all they can get, without thought of making some return to humanity's common fund of goodwill and spiritual treasure. Perhaps you have been like that yourself. But the one whose death you now mourn was not like you. He paid life's glad debt in full, in unselfish service. Why not carry on the tradition he himself served—even if you have to rebuild your life from the foundations? Life is our meeting-ground with God, and in God's mercy it is never too late to come to Him, and never too early.

PRAYER

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, till the shades lengthen, the evening comes, the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work done. Then, Lord, in Thy great mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

The Communion of Saints

You will have said, "I believe in the Communion of Saints," more than once as you have shared in the worship of the Church. Perhaps, for a moment, your thoughts have wandered and you have asked yourself, "Do I? And, anyway, what does it mean?"

I remember clearly the first real experience of bereavement that I had. When I was in College another student and I conducted a mission in a country town on the Darling Downs in Queensland. He and I were guests in the home of the senior layman of the church and his wife. They were a fine family, happy, gay and devoted. It was a week of wonderful fellowship and I can remember how each evening we would go home from the church to sit late around the fire, talking.

When the mission was over we returned to College. A few days later I was called to the phone to be told that our host for the mission had been taken ill quite suddenly and had passed away. He was still a comparatively young man and left a wife and young family.

To me it was the loss of a very great friend, and the recent fellowship of the mission had brought us very closely together. But, strangely and quite unaccountably, as the days passed the sense of loss was succeeded by something equally strong and pervading—the sense that now, in the life of the world to come, there was someone I knew. I think that for me in those days death lost some of its terror as I felt, consciously for the first time, that there was someone I knew in the world to come.

Others have had this experience far more vividly than I. When Dr. J. W. C. Wand became Archbishop of Brisbane in 1934, he was invited to contribute a weekly article to the Brisbane Courier-Mail. His first article was composed under the shadow of a very great grief, the death of his only son, Paul. Paul had lost his life mountaineering in Switzerland and the news of his death had come to Dr. and Mrs. Wand shortly after their arrival in Brisbane.

The article was an unforgettable expression of a father's faith and love, written, as he said, not to inflict his sorrow

upon others, but in the hope that his own thoughts at the time might bring some consolation to others called to pass into the same valley of the shadow of bereavement. In the course of that article, Dr. Wand wrote:—

"It is extraordinary how near he (Paul) was brought to us by the news of the calamity. From the first we knew that there was no hope and it seemed that his spirit, released from the local limitation of the body, had come to join us here. Everything spoke of him and one awoke in the morning speaking to him. The chapel at Bishopsbourne became the chapel at Bartlemas where he had so often served me at the altar. Whether this relieved or increased the anguish of physical separation I cannot say: I only record the fact, and I think that every mourner would have it so."

I am sure that this is what is meant when the Church speaks of the Communion of Saints. The classic experience of this is in the New Testament, in the fellowship of the disciples with their risen Lord. They had known the sharp edges of bereavement and loss. He Who had been the centre of their life had gone. The forlorn disciples on the way home to Emmaus, the distraught Mary at the tomb in the garden, the desolate Thomas—these bear testimony to the awful finality of the crucifixion. Jesus was dead!

JESUS IS LORD

But the New Testament is written, not as a memorial to a dead Master, but as testimony to a living God. He Who was dead is alive again. As a present-day American writer has said, "No disciple ever remembered Jesus." This is true. They remembered His words and over and over again they told others what He had said. They recalled His deeds of grace and compassion and set down what they knew in simple narratives that have become the inspiration of the Church and the imperishable glory of our literature. But they did not remember Jesus. They lived with Him. "Jesus is Lord" was their happy testimony. This is indeed what He had said would be and afterwards they remembered it. "In my Father's house are many dwelling places.

If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye might be also."

As you read the New Testament there is a wonderful sense of immediacy about the disciples' experience of the presence of Jesus. He is there.

For warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

It is this sense of the Presence that sustained Stephen in his hour of agony, as he lay prostrate on the dusty road, being stoned to death. "But Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

THE SENSE OF NEARNESS

I do not want to argue this point here. I simply wish to bear witness to one of the central features of the Christian experience in the Church. This sense of the immediacy of the world to come, of the nearness of those we love beyond the veil and their presence with us—this is what we mean when we speak of the Communion of Saints. In the liturgy of the Church, at the Eucharist, it is given dramatic expression when, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we say, "We laud and magnify Thy glorious Name, ever more praising Thee and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Glory be to Thee, O Lord most high. Amen."

It has its more tender expression in the prayer for the church, when we say:

"And we also bless Thy holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear; beseeching Thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples that, with them, we may be partakers of Thy heavenly Kingdom."

WHY NOT SPIRITUALISM?

Some of you, reading what I have so far written, might be wondering whether, after all, Spiritualism isn't the logical end to this line of thought and experience. You might say to me, "If it is true that you can, after death, experience a sense of the presence of the departed, isn't that Spiritualism?" I do not wish to disparage the activities of those who have engaged in psychical research and I do not know or doubt that something of what is reported on may be authentic experience. But it seems to me that rather than preserve the reality of the Christian doctrine of the Communion of the Saints, the spiritualist undermines it.

The heart of the Christian doctrine is that those who have died are with God and they are alive to Him. In Christ, we who remain on earth are linked with them, so that their presence may, in a spiritual sense, be real to us, and at every Eucharist we share with them the joys of the whole company of heaven. For the Christian there is no denial of death. Death is real and it is final. The body, however it may incarnate the spirit or soul, goes back to the dust from whence it came. It, says the Apostle Paul, is like a tent. It is, like every tent, merely a temporary habitation and at death it is taken down. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," the body goes back to be part of the material constituency of the universe, to be used and re-used, again and again, but never taking again the form it once knew.

But death, for the Christian, is followed by resurrection. It is not so much that the soul is immortal. God, who gives in a man's body a habitation for his soul on earth, gives a fitting habitation for the life of the world to come. The Bible does not give us many clues as to the nature of the life of the world to come. What we shall be in heaven and what we shall do are part of the glory to be revealed. Sufficient it is for us to know that we shall be with Christ and, freed from the frustrations and vexations of life on earth, we shall be able to give to God the reasonable service we owe to Him.

There is nothing in Spiritualism to help us here. Such messages as purport to come from the departed are usually trivial in themselves and it must be admitted that they often minister to the self-centredness of the persons waiting for the message. It is clear that the whole system lends itself to deceit, and many persons have been led into great error as a result.

Moreover, the New Testament lends no encouragement whatever to the imaginative flights often conjured up by spiritualist teachers. Indeed, we are warned to try the spirits, whether they be of God. At its best, Spiritualism seems a pathetic attempt to preserve a relationship that belongs quite naturally and properly to earth, but is in that form to be surrendered at death. The relationship remains, but we, too, must one day ourselves pass through the gates of death and enter the new relationships of the world to come.

Death, more than any other human experience, reminds us of the limitations of human existence. It underscores the limitations of our knowledge, our sight, our hopes and plans. It is the supreme symbol of our finitude. It is the realisation of this fact that casts such a profound anxiety over the life of modern man. His anxiety stems ultimately from a feeling that perhaps, in the long run, death is the end of all.

Christ comes as the first-born of a New Humanity. He endures within Himself the contradictions of our mortal existence and within Himself He wins for man a new life, an eternal existence. It is to this eternal life He calls us and it is to this life that the Communion of Saints bears testimony.

THE GLORY OF GOING ON

In the years before the last war the Reverend Norman Millar was minister of the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brisbane. I was a student in College and, though we were not Presbyterian, many of us from College would frequently worship at St. Andrew's that we might listen

to the sermons of this great preacher. He was a great controversialist and we followed his verbal engagements in the Press with joy. He wrote with vigour and passion, but never with malice. He was also a great after-dinner speaker and I can vividly remember tuning in on my study crystal wireless set to a Luncheon Club, at which he was the speaker, to hear a delightful address entitled, "The Sale of a Ship."

He was at the height of his powers when he was stricken with cancer and an eminent specialist told him he had two years to live. He resumed his ministry and, shortly before his death, announced a series of sermons on the after-life. His final sermon, which he knew was to be his last, was preached on September 25, 1938, and was entitled, "The Glory of the After-Life."

It would be a moving sermon by any standards. Delivered as it was under conditions of extreme physical weakness, knowing this was his last testament to his people, it is a miracle of courage and a supreme testimony to an unconquerable faith. He closed with these words:

"God's promise of life to come is endorsed by the verdict of our own hearts and experience and we know that death, so far from closing us in, is opening the door to our second Great Adventure, through which we may go on and on to Life's Fulness."

Oh, the Glory of Going On in comradeship with the Great Captain of Humanity Who redeemed us—for when we see Him, we shall be like Him, and free to continue to serve Him!

"Grow old along with me,
The Best is yet to be—
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in His Hand,
Who said, 'A whole I planned,'
Trust God, see all, nor be afraid."

"Now I know in part—but then shall I know even as also I am known."

Less than a month later Norman Millar died.

Great as a preacher, Norman Millar's own life was greater testimony still to the power of the Gospel. For in Christ he not only endured, he won. In Christ, the last enemy—death—was abolished, and life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel.

PRAYER

O Almighty God, the God of the spirits of all flesh: Multiply, we beseech Thee, to those who rest in Jesus, the manifold blessings of Thy love, that the good work which Thou didst begin in them may be perfected unto the day of Jesus Christ. And of Thy mercy, O heavenly Father, vouchsafe that we, who now serve Thee here on earth, may at the last, together with them, be found meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; for the sake of the same Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

AN EPILOGUE

"Dick" Sheppard was one of the famous priests of the Anglican Church in this century. He became Vicar of St. Martins-in-the-Fields, London, at the outbreak of the First Great War and set out to make the Church a great centre of Christian witness and service. He was a loveable, dynamic personality. In 1926 he resigned because of ill-health. Later, for a brief time, he became Dean of Canterbury and then a Canon of St. Paul's.

He wrote a book that became famous. He called it, "The Impatience of a Parson." Into it he poured his frustration and his faith and his deep longing to make his beloved Church a real Church of Jesus Christ!

He was a chronic sufferer and, at last, worn out, he was found dead at his study-desk, with his head in his hands.

The next day, the Times carried the news of his death and the news cast a gloom over England and beyond, for he was known throughout the world for his brave efforts in the cause of peace and reconciliation.

With the news of his death, the Times published a picture of the lectern in St. Martins-in-the-Fields. The light was streaming down on the lectern onto the open page of the Bible. Underneath the picture were the simple words, heard at every service of morning and evening prayer:

"Here endeth the first lesson."

PRAYER

Almighty and most merciful God, of Whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I am the Resurrection and the Life;
He that believeth in me,
Though he were dead, yet shall he live;
And whosoever liveth and believeth in me
shall never die.
Lord, to whom shall we go?
Thou hast the words of eternal life,
With Thee is the well of life
And in Thy Light shall we see light.
Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil
For Thou art with me . . .
Thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Here are some other ATS publications which may help you in understanding the Church's teaching.

WHY BAPTISM? by Ian Shevill. 6d.

This little leaflet sets out in everyday language the meaning of Christian Baptism. It is a publication which everyone will find helpful.

WHY GO TO HOLY COMMUNION? by John Hazlewood. 2/-.

This popular little 48-page book sets out clearly the main reasons why one should attend this Service. People of all ages will enjoy reading it and all will be helped in their understanding of the chief Christian act of worship.

THE PARISH EUCHARIST. 5/-.

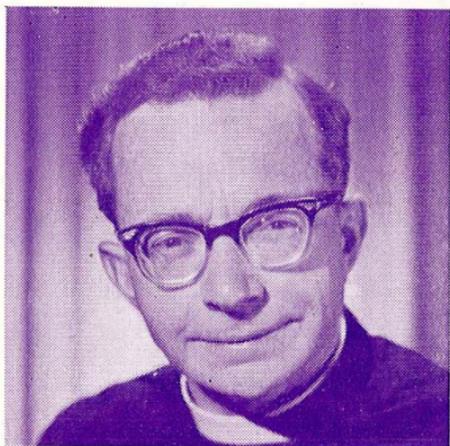
This splendidly written, fully illustrated book is one which no Anglican should miss. Originally published in the U.S.A. it is now available to Australian readers. Follows the Prayer Book service and shows how each act is related to the daily life of the community. We cannot recommend this too strongly. It is worth every penny!

All the above books are obtainable from your Church bookseller or from

THE ANGLICAN TRUTH SOCIETY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. J. N. Bagnall was born at Brisbane, Queensland, in 1915. His family was Methodist and he became a candidate for the Methodist ministry, entering King's College in 1934. He was ordained at the Conference in Brisbane in 1940.

He served in various centres in Queensland and was for five years Superintendent of the Fortitude Valley Methodist Mission. It was during this time that he began to broadcast over the A.B.C.

In 1950 he resigned from the Methodist Conference to enter the Anglican Church and was ordained in March of that year by the Bishop of Armidale, the Rt. Reverend J. S. Moyes. He was, for nearly five years, on the staff of St. Peter's Cathedral, Armidale, and in December, 1954, was appointed Vicar of the parish of Quirindi, N.S.W.

In June, 1960, he became Vicar of Christ Church, Geelong, Victoria.