

All The Sons of Earth

By Carlyle Marney



[1951]

THE LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

BY



ALL THE SONS OF EARTH

For an hour or so, I suppose, subconsciously, I had been hearing the "snip-snip" of Jim's trimming shears as he worked around the walk-ways. Through the haze of a heated summer afternoon when my work in the study had bogged down of its own humidity I was dimly aware of a feeling of gratitude that the old man had come to make at least one thing go right.

Vaguely I remember hearing a light door slam and little feet running on a walk . . . then the piping little voice of my three year old floated up to the study—

"Oh, Jim, sweet Jim," she was saying over and over.

Twenty years he had been our sexton. Since my coming to the pastorate he had been my staunch friend. I heard the numble of voices, the sound of the shears stopped. I stepped to the window to see a study in black and blonde.

On hands and knees, shears still in hand, my aged friend was making talk like all old people make to baby girls, while the baby leaned against him, her arm across a bare and huge black shoulder.

"Sweet Jim." I heard her say as she patted him.

But she was renegeing on her nap-time and I had been left in charge, so down I went, unthoughtedly, to get her.

Such a strange expression crossed his face when I walked out. A mingled feeling of embarrassment and alarm . . . as if one had been found loving one he had no right to love.

It stung my heart, and as I stooped over to pick up the half-protesting child a feeling of pathos made my eyes fill. Knowing how his loyal old heart needed ease, I had to say to my dear friend . . .

"Strange, isn't it, Jim, little babies have no prejudice, but they catch it before they are at school, from folks like you and me."

His eyes were full, too, as he said, "*they can't be'p it, can they.*"

I caught mine the same place you caught yours, for Christian people were all I knew. My prejudices are the same, for my background is the same, hence our personal task is the same.

But for that matter, all prejudice is the same . . .

racial,

religious, or

personal,

all prejudice is one and the same.

All are aspects of the same disease of soul: PRIDE.

All are but petty resentment of some "other" than myself.

All are ill-founded, falsely based and narrow.

None are worthy, all breed decay.

My heart protests them even while my mind is giving in to them. Yet, in line with the spirit of my Master I have been seeking the destruction of my own littleness and have come today to share with you this matter of conviction:

*God has intended that all the Sons of Earth
shall live in peace and unity together.*

How courageously and with what joyous abandon our more liberal minded pastors have beat us over the head with our failures to live in unprejudiced freedom.

I have done it myself . . . preening myself piously before my cracked mirror that I have had courage to *say* something about prejudice when I should have *done* something long before.

It's almost *too late* to *preach* about it. Yet, all along, there have been those who did more *doing* than preaching.

Let me come at it with you from a different direction.

Let me insist that

*In spite of all appearances Christian people
have long been fighting prejudice and we have
been in the fight.*

Does it come as a surprise to you? The modern fight against prejudice began at least 800 years ago. Have you heard of our spiritual kinsmen,

the *Waldensians*, of the 12 century, fleeing to the Alps to multiply their free gospel of free worship high in the mountain valleys?

Or, have you heard of *John of Paris* and *Marsilius of Padua*, taking life in their hands to cry against a mighty opposing system that *all power is not in a Pope, it is in the people?*

You likely know of *Dante Alighieri* and his *Divine Comedy*, but in 1311 he was also proclaiming a *people's peace* as the best condition of mankind.

The pre-dawn thunderings of *John Wyclif* were not silenced even when his long-dead body was exhumed for burning. "The Church is the people," "The only head of any church is Christ." "The Scripture is the only law of the church."

Perhaps you have heard of the praying circles of the *peasants*. Long before Luther they littered the floors of German forests with prayers they must have thought unheard. From thousands of rude huts crude faith sought to pull down God's arm that the chasms between kinds of men might be filled in.

Luther was afraid of the early Anabaptists. They were too wild for him in their millennial expectations and their social experiments. Later Lutheranism turned savagely against the Muenster New Jerusalem; perhaps justly, who knows? Only in 1935 were the last skeletons of Muenster martyrs taken from their cage against a town spire, but in

and through their wild excesses of the heart ran the teaching that *common men* must have their day. Those who died were our forebears.

Among the myriads of the unknown who died we can still hear the anguished voices of

Jan Huss, chained to the stake,
Balthasar Hubmaier, ("salt me well")
Hugh Latimer, ("courage, Master Ridley")
Doctor Ridley, (in manus tuas, Domini)
Miles Coverdale,
and

50,000 Huguenots in one dread bloody day;
and,
more than a million death fires
of the "Holy Inquisition."

Great was their gift.

Fiery the death of every one of them.

But *morning stars only they were!*

Barons still owned any woman they wanted among their
"paysans."

Farmers still clenched hands full of soil as they swore
allegiance to their liege-lord.

Men rotted in the mines to make the Fuggers rich.

No cow or plow belonged to the man who used it.

Not even the dead wood of the forest was free for the taking.

Men were strangled for killing crippled deer for meat.

The Lord of the Manor had first-night privileges in any
marriage.

A plowman said,

"When day breaks I drive the oxen to the field and must
plow a whole field in the day. My boy is hoarse with the
cold and shouting. After that I fill the bins, water the
cattle, and carry out the dung. Yea, truly this is great
labor because I am not free."

Chalk was taken from the earth to mix with flour.

Faces grew lean, they had no strength to drag around.

Pits were dug and the dying dragged to them.

Wolves found so many bodies on the road they were
emboldened to attack the living.

In Tonnere a man was burned because of the kind of flesh
he offered for sale, but another man dug up the buried flesh
and was burned, too, for eating it.

All over the West the writhing protests were mounting, but
a French Seigneur could

still,

shoot no more than two peasants off his roof for sport, if
hunting was poor

and

could still bathe his tired feet in human blood after a day
in the field.

Or, so the law said.

The world could not stay like this. The big guns had
opened their barrages on the continent:

The Reformation,

The French Revolution,

Cardinal Ximenes in Spain.

In 1734 an embittered little man who never weighed more
than 120 in his life limped home to England from his com-
plete failure as a preacher in the colony of Georgia.

Home to an England

where there were 160 crimes punishable by hanging . . .

where to steal a loaf of bread cost a life . . .

where public hangings were the only public diversion .
except that

a man could get drunk for a penny,

or "dead drunk for tuppence," the sign said,

or, he could watch

a bear-baiting, or see

a prostitute rolled downhill in a barrel on Sunday

. . . That was always sporting.

An England of industrial revolution . . .

with little boys and girls 14 hours a day at the looms,

in the mines, mired in the stinking prisons.

Or, if you were not one of the thousands dying in the Welsh collieries, perhaps you were 5, and waded all day in a hip-deep vat of cattle urine turning the piles of wool being bleached in the acid.

An England of rotting hulks for ships, drowning sailors, debauched poor, cruel neighbors, grasping landlords and factory-men, slaves, white, black, and tormented.

Sick at heart, dead religiously, the little man, *John Wesley*, went to meet the Moravian *Boehler*, who had fire in his heart. With *Boehler's* fire and *Luther's Preface to the Roman Epistle* the fire was transferred. The two found *Whitefield*, and went to the streets like flaming giants with their gospel for the common man.

Years later, see *Wesley* at 80 years of age standing at 4:00 a.m. to preach to 4,000 miners at *Gwennup Pit*, and already his own age had been reborn.

The fire spread—as fires do. *Whitefield* was clamorously received in America. 20,000 could hear him in the open air, tall and gaunt against the sky.

Already in America, from English seed, was a people's movement ready for the torch. They boasted five principles, hammered out on the anvil of long travail:

1. The individual soul is competent to deal with God for itself; and is responsible for itself before God.
2. The Church is a fellowship of people who have so dealt with God individually and who come into that fellowship by immersion in water after belief.
3. This fellowship, under Christ, of baptized believers governs itself and is responsible to God.

4. Such a fellowship is entirely separate from the State and must ever remain so.
5. The Holy Scriptures provide the full and authoritative standard for all matters of faith and practice. The teaching of Scripture as interpreted by the fellowship under the Holy Spirit is to guide all personal and social belief and action.

Such principles ran directly counter to state-churches, infant baptism, taxation for religious purposes, credalism and sacramentarianism. Barriers of law were hastily thrown up, but old man Cartwright preached through his cell bars, blood dripping from his whipped hands. Bands of Baptists withdrew to Kentucky's mountains shutting themselves away from the state-church of Virginia and, incidentally, from all social progress for decades to come. Under the preaching of Dan Marshall there was a rippling spread of converts in Georgia where the young Wesley had given up.

The Revolution swept over, and these early American Baptists swelled the ranks, pastors and all. John Leland announced his candidacy for high office in Virginia, but when James Madison supported his principles he withdrew and Madison's Bill of Rights became the law of the land.

In 1820 a church began to protest against the social vice of slavery. It was little Cherokee Baptist Church, Holston Association, in East Tennessee, near the famous beech-tree bearing (until about 1940) the famous words:

"D. Boone
cilled a bar
on this tree."

In 1828, in little Jonesboro settlement, came the first real anti-slavery newspaper -- The Jonesboro *Emancipator*.

It is quite true that in two or three decades the Uncle Toms and Henry W. Beechers of the North along with the Greeleys, would thunder loud against slavery,

but this was Baptist, and in
the *South*.

They, with the Methodists, worked at the evangelism of the Negro. Many members were slavers. Communion split over it, great bitterness billowed up, *but there was progress*.

The first white man to help Negroes organize a church in Paducah, Kentucky, was run out of town. Pastors were fired; congregations split, *but there was progress*.

Race commissions were born, schools, conventions, and societies. Most Associations condemned smoking, drinking, and mixed bathing, never seeing the evils of illiteracy, share-cropping, and enforced servitude, *but progress was made*.

And just this year it has come true that no school of graduate seminary standing that we have denies admission to Negroes.

Progress has been made; but progress is relative. It was a great improvement when men quit eating their prisoners of war and started making slaves of them.

Progress is relative and there is yet much to do. But the point I am making is:

A fight has been made against Prejudice
and we have been in the fight.

Yet:

We made our best fight when we were a small persecuted sect struggling for room to exist.

We fought best when the prejudice was against us
Now *the curse of respectability is upon us, and*

“it sounds so lovely what our fathers did.”

While today, as when they carried the corpse of King Henry past the Lady Anne,

“O, Gentlemen, see, see, dead Henry’s wounds open their congealed mouths and bleed afresh.”

And the present day situation is such that our whole civilization is involved.

A great challenge stretches immediately before us. It faces all our civilization. Our response is the life-determining factor.

Arthur Toynbee has claimed and proved to my full acceptance the proposition that all civilization is produced by *response to a challenge*.

He cites 21 civilizations all made by the response of a people to

hard country,
new ground,
set backs and pressures,
from circumstance of
history,
geography,
or climate.

He cites arrested civilizations like the Esquimaux, exhausted by environmental struggle, and he cites the fall of the great Roman civilization, crumbling from within and collapsing from without.

Actually civilizations do not really die, they just evaporate, passing to new cultures all that is worth keeping from the old. But the record indicates that all departed civilizations left the scene through their inability to respond to their great challenge.

The challenge to our civilization in our age is

to learn to live together!

This we must learn, or fly apart in pieces. There seems to be no escape. The age must face it, and its only tool is a *spiritual one*:

The Church of Jesus Christ.

In the last message I claimed that the church of Jesus is constantly up against things too big to be handled. Too often the only thing we Christians do is to call for the benediction and go home.

"Send them away, Lord," the disciples cried when they faced an impossibly difficult matter in the feeding of the 5,000.

Pronounce the benediction, Lord

Church is out! Let them go away.

There is nothing we can do.

I have said already that historically the church is still repeating the old discouraged cry of the disciples, "Send them away, Lord; this is a desert place and the day is far spent."

And we did it. In the face of slavery, drunkenness, vice, crime, war, and mass starvation.

God Himself cannot help us if we continue to do it in this crisis of *learning to live together*.

But the churches of Jesus have stood in many a desert place. I will not repeat; here is another list:

10,000 bodies whose graves contain Christian symbols have been found outside old Carthage. Each skeleton holds its skull in its lap. Who were these? In what desert place did they stand? For whom did they die?

See the thousands following old Cyprian to the block, waiting to dip handkerchiefs in his blood by which to remember their sainted Bishop.

Earlier, hear ancient Polycarp crying from his funeral fire, "eighty six years have I served Him . . . How shall I now renounce Him?"

Hear Savonarola crying to the Florentians to

“pull the cloak of righteousness over your heads before I hail all over you” though his death chains rattled even then.

Have you heard the death cry of that early English translator of the Scriptures: “O God open the eyes of the King of England.”

Or, Luther, sending word that he would come to Worms if the very shingles of the roof-top turned to devils from hell.

And, Cranmer, burning off the hand with which he had once signed a retraction of his Protestantism before he allowed the Catholic flames to have the rest of his body.

And the Bishop of Norway, binding his guards with the same chains Paul used on his guards in Rome, the chains of the Christ way, so that he could escape to lead his people against Quisling’s kind in Norway.

The Church has stood in many desert places. And stands there now.

Indeed this is a desert, too. I went apart and wept months ago when I read great Winston Churchill’s speech at Dover:

“We will strive forward,” he said, “toward that fair future for all men in all the lands . . . *which we thought we had won*, but of which
we will never
despair!”

Which we thought we had won!

I know of a warden in Georgia, and a jury in South Carolina. I know about salt in the soup at Rochester, and no red-men in white men's graves in Iowa. I saw a Jew berate a Negro porter for trying to help him, in the airport at Knoxville. I have heard about bombs in Dallas and mobs in Cicero. I have seen bedraggled white children sitting on curbs outside movie palaces and grocery stores. I saw G. I.'s turned away from shoddy hovels because they had kids. I've watched the "line-up" in police courts on Monday morning and I have ridden in squad-cars on Sunday nights. I know about drunk Mexicans, and hungry sneak thieves, and the powerful clause "Caucasian only" in deeds and contracts. I know about the 284 little sects in America with bigoted little men sniping at each other from behind flimsy little theological ram-parts made up of unexamined concepts.

And the Societies for the preservation of established prejudices; and the orders for the prolongation of perverted perspectives. I know how important it is not to be an immigrant. How vital it is to have two ancestors of officer rank in the Revolution. How much it helps to resurrect a forgotten coat of arms. How good to have come from Virginia, or to have made Phi Beta Kappa; or to have married money.

I know about railroad tracks and inheritances, share-croppers and tenants. I have heard black Maria's scream as she roared down Madison to pick up a load of flotsam. I have heard the "thwack" as a club met a head outside where I preached in the slums. I have smelt the fourth floor of a broken down tenement . . .

and I tell you—

My Master did not intend

this.

O my friends, whatever Jesus intended it was *not* this.

We have heard,

We have known.

We have seen and smelt and felt.

Our Master did not intend this.

Our brother's blood crieth out from the ground.

The world waits, and waiting, grows old. And for what does the world wait?

For the Manifestation of The Sons of God!

For the Sons of God to *demonstrate themselves.*

For the Sons of God to *show what they've got.*

For the Sons of God to *grow up and act like it.*

I believe our hope lies in the church. I still believe most frankly that our best hope for immediate progress lies in the church in the South.

We are closer to more basic problems.

We are able better to understand.

We are more personally involved.

Our segregation has been more open.

Our consciences hurt more keenly.

And,

our progress has been greater, in spite of the fair haired sons of an even deeper prejudice and their reports.

States like Arkansas and Mississippi have made real progress. Newspapers, notably in Raleigh, Atlanta, Memphis, and Louisville are leading out. Commissions and committees and schools have been working. But our churches?

It is a desert place and the Church is not what my Master intended His Church to be!

For:

The Church was never meant to be a gathering of smug saints.

It is no club for people of proper social standing. It has no valid educational requirements, no set of heraldry and lineage qualifications. That we know.

But subtly and with unreasoning power a type of *moral-smugness*, the worst of all, has begun to possess us.

I do not forget the dowager leader of a distant church who invited a nine year old girl not to come back because her sister had been caught sinning in the town near by.

I do not forget the presiding officer of a Woman's Society who flounced from a bus in a moral huff then twenty minute later had to introduce the main speaker for her society in the person of the Negro she had refused a seat on the bus.

The Church must open its eyes!

The Church was not meant to serve as a seed-bed for prejudice.

Wherever it is that children learn to be little, white, American. Southern, Texan, Baptist; wherever they learn that to be thus is to be thrice blessed of Jehovah; wherever

they learn that ours is always right and best,
biggest and purest,
and the only right one

Wherever they learn it—

Let it not be in the Church!

Teachers, I plead, do not teach my little girls this. They have only begun to suspect it! Don't teach them *that* in Church!

The Church must produce better fruit!

Nor was the Church meant to serve as a sop to soak up

shallowness.

Religion attracts shallow minds as well as deep minds. Jews still require a sign. It is part of our human curse. It was not meant that a big smile and a bear hand shake qualified you for religious leadership. Clergymen were not meant to be "props of virtue" breathing a sort of "divine donkeyism" for the comfort of shallow minds. It ought not to cost a man his reputation as a Christian if he trains his mind.

Intelligence is not a synonym for heresy.

Big numbers are not the equivalent of spiritual victory.

Traditional phraseology cannot guarantee a true theology. Pious preachment is no real badge of character. Familiar religious songs do not assure that worship will happen.

Last century's standards are not this century's goals. The slave morality of grandfather's time was not the be all and end all of spiritual climb.

Membership in a service club is no substitute for service. The freshness of newcomers is not always really zeal.

Nor,

is the conservatism of old age necessarily the eternal part of wisdom.

The Church must deepen its channels!

The Church, whatever it is, was never meant to be a fat old lady, sitting in her rock-walled castle, counting war bonds.

Peering out darkened windows at the raucous ribaldry going on in the world outside; building her walls thicker

while spiritual chaos rules the homes beyond her walls; spending her energy accumulating her building fund shekels at the cost of missions and little churches. Leeching on to her select group of socially acceptable hangers on from whom she mulcts financial support for selfish absorption.

The Church is not a hostess—*she is a serving-maid.*

The Church is not a dowager-queen—*she is a working girl.*

No society ruler—*she is a waitress.*

For the Church is not proprietor, or even guest . . .

She is the working hand-maid of the Lord.

“The Church, like her Master, should be as one that serves; most often she has been as one that sits at meat.”

For

My Master intended the Church to be:

A place where men of God were so close together that marvelous things could happen.

Oh, thus will He deal with our prejudices! We are to be men in whom something wonderful has come to pass. We are to be restored to our place as spiritual changers of the world and its prejudices on the basis of the experience we have shared. “God has done something in me” and I am no longer conscious of differences because of the Lord I share with my brothers.

“We are Christians” says Angus, “because we have made our response to a great redeeming act and love which constrains us to be redemptive persons as He was redemptive.”

We are in the fellowship within which marvelous things can happen.

Do you remember how Simon Peter, in Lloyd Douglas' "The Robe," came to see the slave of the Roman Patrician when a little slave girl sent for him. Death had already begun its work in the body of Demetrius, sore wounded for his Master. The huge body of Simon loomed up in the shadows, his bulk towering over the others as he came into the room.

He emptied the slave's bed-room of all save himself and Demetrius. Prostrate he lay, calling on God to save the slave for the sake of the Master, for the slave's sake, for Simon's sake, and for the sake of the oneness he, Simon, had with God.

And a marvelous thing happened.

Next morning a shrunken exhausted Peter passed Marcus on the stairs, saying wearily, "Your friend will live."

For God and a man were close together and wonderful things could happen.

And,

My Master intended the Church to be

A place where men were so taken with Jesus, so much in love with Him, that they were incapable of littleness and narrowness and selfishness.

This was the one desire the aged little pastor at Roudaire had for his own flock. With heaviness of heart the old priest went to receive the drowned bodies of two illegitimates—a brother and a sister. The one, a hugely mishapen gnome, driven to his suicide by the unchristian taunts of the Pastor's flock. The other his fairy-like sister who had no reason to go on living in a world that had tormented to death the one thing she loved and had supported by selling her own body.

Pierre Van Paasen describes the poignant scene when the old man, heart-broken at his people's failure to catch Christ, defied all the laws of his church by bringing the unregener-

ate bodies of suicide wood-colts into his sanctuary. Then he sent for all the people to come to the funeral.

This, as I recall it, was the old man's sermon:

"In that day, that great day, when the Lord of all shall say to me,

Pasteur de la Roudaire, where are thy sheep?

I shall not answer Him."

"And if he shall say to me the second time—

Pasteur de la Roudaire, where are thy sheep?

I shall not answer Him."

"But if He shall say to me the third time,

Pastor of Roudaire, I gave thee sheep to guard,
where are thy sheep?

Then, I shall hang my head and weep,
and I shall say,

They were not sheep, O Lord—

*they were a pack of
wolves"*

For in their hearts, and in ours, they had never seen Him. until littleness and narrowness fell away. They could not cry,

"Hear me! O look up! See how my heart which hath been closed so long doth open to the bliss of seeing Thee!"

Again,

My Master intended His Church to be

A place where men became so humble that all pride of position and race fell away and the Brotherhood could happen.

"We talk of putting Him first," says Paul Scherer, and take to ourselves much unction. Do you suppose it matters? He is first, no matter where we put Him."

And under Him is the Brotherhood where there is room only for humility.

Old Bishop Bienvenu knew that the night he took in the great dark thief, Jean Valjean, escapee from a slave galley. He knew it, that brotherhood is everywhere.

And he remembered it again the next morning when the gendarmes returned the thief to the Bishop along with all the silver Valjean had stolen from his host. The Old Bishop remembered and met the police, the cringing culprit and his loot, with a surprised cry,

“Good, my boy, you are back! Here, you forgot the candle sticks I gave you with the rest!”

That night late passers-by heard anguished sobs coming from the shadows of the church. Jean Valjean was weeping out his heart because after twenty years someone had treated him as a man and a brother.

There are men in our town who would break and weep at the joy of being received as a Person and a Brother.

And, finally,

My Master intended His Church to be

A place where men became so much like Jesus that people would think they had seen Him.

A little band of men prayed all year to be like Jesus, and at Easter-time the people said that in the Cathedral at Milan, as they prayed, they saw wounds come in their hands and feet, and,

that when a tunic swung apart they could see a spear wound in a side.

So they called the monks *stigmata* since they bore the marks of Jesus.

In “The Tree of Liberty” the hero, Matt Howard, tried all his life to be like Washington, because once as a lad he had stopped in the deep Virginia mud to watch young Colo-

nel Washington go by on a beautiful black mare; and, as he passed had caught his pale blue eyes long enough to feel—

“Aye, there’s a man I can follow till the day I die!”

I do not have it yet; nor do my people have it.

A place where we are so close to Him and each other that our selfishness is gone, and our prejudices evaporate and our brotherhood appears, and we begin to *look like Him*.

I do not have it yet;

but I want it,

for me and mine.

And if my people do *not* want it,

If they cannot abide *my* wanting it,

then are there still brooks and ravens and
widows’ cruses of oil,

for those who want it,

and will come apart to take it.

In proportion as the Church of Christ wants it,

“a mighty healing is at work

in the land.”

Not for years had I returned to my home country by this road. I had driven all night to have a few hours at home before returning to a distant pastorate. Fog had rolled in, it was barely day as I crept along through the sharp turns, remembering.

I saw a bridge dimly, then a clearing space, and the name White’s Creek and I remembered

Twenty years before . . . cloudburst over the mountains . . . roaring flood waters . . . a troop of neighbor scouts trapped . . . all the older boys had drowned while saving some of the younger ones in that wild melee of twisting trees, debris,

black water, and thundering heavens. I remembered a boy I had known . . . and the freely given life of a Scout-leader whose name had stayed in my mind.

All this in a flash—then I saw it, and stopped.

A tall pylon of river rock, topped with a white cross, names I had forgotten since I had been a fourteen year old pallbearer, the name of the Scout Master I had remembered . . .and this phrase,

“They helped every man his brother,

and were

not

afraid.”

1848

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A Sermon
preached
in
First Baptist Church
Austin, Texas
and
Published by Friends of the Church
September, 1951