

SAMPLE

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUNDS AND BEGINNINGS

THE scene is a large convention tent. The congregation is mainly composed of Christian leaders and ministers of many denominations, representative of the finest elements in the spiritual life of Scotland. The platform has always been reserved for men, and outstanding men at that. Today tradition has been set aside, and speaking in a hush indicative of rapt attention is a small, frail-looking woman. Her message is centered in the cross of Christ. It is a rare thing to hear “the message of the cross” preached in any other aspect than its relationship to the forgiveness of sins and our acceptance before God. Sometimes it *is* shown to be the one place of victory over the power of sin, in accordance with the teaching of Romans 6. But here was something that led yet further into God’s ways with His children. There is a place where the nature and outlook of the Lord Jesus begin to over shadow a life that is

yielded to Him. To use Jessie Penn-Lewis' own words:

On the Godward side the soul will be led from faith to faith, from strength to strength, from glory to glory; while on the earth ward side, the outward man is 'always delivered to death' and becomes increasingly a partaker of the afflictions of Christ for His Body's sake, the Church—until, in a very real sense, the language of the soul finds expression in the words of Paul the apostle: "As *dying*, and behold, we live; as *chastened*, and not killed; as *sorrowful*, yet always rejoicing; as *poor*, yet making many rich; as *having nothing*, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:9–10). Like the Lord they serve, "*crucified* through weakness" (13:4)—daily, even hourly weakness—yet living, in union with Him as the Risen One, by the power of God toward others for whom He died.*

When later she was lunching with a group of speakers and ministers, she protested that she was "no theologian." The reply came immediately from one of the party: "You have the very best kind of theology—the theology of the Holy Ghost." How was such an understanding of Scripture and equipment for ministry brought about?

* At the same time as the Bridge of Allan Convention, which was the occasion of this meeting, Mrs. Penn-Lewis was engaged in writing her book *The Story of Job* and this quotation is the final paragraph of this book.

To understand this it is necessary to go back to the beginning, and to see if we can trace something of the development of her spiritual life. How instructive such beginnings, backgrounds and early growth can be!

Born on February 28, 1861, Jessie Jones was the oldest of her parents' eight children—being followed by four brothers, two sisters, and then another brother. She was brought up, as she herself put it, “in religious surroundings and in the lap of Calvinistic Methodism.” Her grandfather; the Rev. Samuel Jones, was an eminent minister of that “connection,” his main ministry being the building up of believers and his favorite theme “The Atonement.” Her father was a civil and mining engineer in the little town of Neath, in South Wales, where her parents were very active in all kinds of church work. They kept open house for ministers and others engaged in the work of the denomination. Later, as the younger generation were more and more making English their language and the services in the Methodist Church were in Welsh, her parents, being on cordial terms with the local Anglican rector, decided that she should attend the Sunday School of St. David's Church; and later she joined the choir.

Very early she gave evidence of being an exceptionally clever child—walking at nine months. But because she was a sickly child, the family doctor forbade her being pressed in any way to learn. In spite of this she taught herself to

read and at four years of age could read the Bible freely. She was able to pick up a story book and afterwards to describe every character in it. But the brake was applied to any thought of formal education until she was eight. Then she was sent to a boarding school for periods of about three months at a time, the other months being spent at farmhouses in the mountains, where there was no temptation to read and she could run wild in the country.

Even so, her home was a library of books, her father being a great buyer and reader of many classical and other standard works.

Being physically frail, she had to struggle against recurring illness all through life. This fact has to be kept in mind, for no true understanding of Jessie Penn-Lewis can be reached without remembering this handicap. A happy home; a father who was never too busy to find time for his children, was a delightful companion, and a stickler for truth being told and promises kept; books everywhere; the close proximity of open country and a garden where cricket was played and there were trees to climb—all these things were her joy in early years.

Then at ten years of age she was sent to a boarding school in Swansea, where special precautions were taken to care for her health; and it was here that she began to understand something of the limitations of her physical strength. She herself told of a pathetic incident when she

crept into a boot cupboard and sobbed because the other children were sent out to play, but she had been kept in because an east wind was blowing; and it was not long before it was decided that she needed her mother's constant care and was returned home.

Mother and daughter were in this way thrown closely together, and she soon began to share her mother's interest in the cause of temperance. So keen a "Good Templar" did she become, in fact, that on the first lodge night after her twelfth birthday she was initiated into the adult lodge. Before long a junior lodge was opened, and she found an outlet for her gift of organization as presiding officer of this lodge, composed of forty to fifty children—the Treasurer being William Penn-Lewis (her future husband), then age fourteen.

At fourteen further "promotion" came to her, and she was made Honorary Secretary for the adult lodge, a friend of the family stepping in to give her some secretarial training. For quarter after quarter she was re-elected to this post, and she filled it with real enjoyment and efficiency until she was sixteen.

It was at this point that the family was called to face the sad loss of husband and father. After an illness of two years, Mr. Jones died in the prime of life and at a time of rising success in his profession. "My mother," wrote Mrs. Penn-Lewis later in life, "was left with eight children; I was

the eldest, being sixteen, while the youngest was only three months old. How well I remember the funeral, when from a window I watched the sad procession, with two uncles behind the coffin and two fatherless boys on either side." Financial difficulties followed, and the widow gallantly faced her heavy responsibilities, becoming so successful in business that she was able to send one of the boys to Oxford, to send a second through training as a civil engineer, and the third as a surveyor, finally setting them all on their feet. So it was that Jessie Jones inherited from her parents a legacy of integrity, ability, courage, and perhaps above all, a capacity for sacrificial love.

At nineteen came her marriage to William Penn-Lewis, who had become Auditor's Clerk for the County of Sussex, which meant living in Brighton. Mr. Penn-Lewis was warned before the wedding by one of the bride's uncles that he was marrying one who was likely to be an invalid for life. This in no way deterred him, and he proved to be a constant source of strength, encouragement and support to her all through the active life of ministry to which God commissioned her.

Jessie spoke of her marriage as a "genuine love match." She loved William for his character. She reasoned that a man who never broke his word and never failed an appointment was a safe one to whom to trust her life.

As it often is with children brought up in the midst of religious surroundings, her true inward

change of heart did not come until she had married and moved away from the old home. At the time of their marriage, William was attending the Church of the Annunciation at Brighton. Neither of them, however, threw themselves into the vicar's High Church teaching and practices.

Some eighteen months after her marriage she began to feel ill at ease about the Lord's Second Coming. She realized that she was not prepared to meet Him and really began to seek the Lord. It was at this point that she first glimpsed one of the great secrets of the Christian life: that she must deal with God Himself, direct and alone.

Would it not be true to say that every living biography you have read tells the same story? There comes a time when no human help can avail, and the influence of another personality can only be a disastrous hindrance. God is jealous in His love and will Himself reveal the salvation secured for us at such cost. He will not share His glory with another.

So it was that Mrs. Penn-Lewis wrote:

My conversion occurred without the aid of any human instrument, but the day—New Year's Day, 1882—and the hour are imprinted on my mind. Only a deep desire to know that I was a child of God; a taking of my too-little-read Bible from the shelf; a turning over of the leaves, and my eye falling on the words, "*The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all*"; again a casual turn of the sacred pages and the

words, “*He that believeth hath eternal life.*” A quick facing out whether I *did* believe that God had laid my sins upon the Lamb of God on the cross; a pause for wonderment that it really said that I had eternal life if I simply believed God’s Word; a quick cry of, “*Lord, I do believe*”—and one more soul had passed from death to life, a trophy of the grace of God and the love of Him who died. The Spirit of God instantly bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God, and deep peace filled my soul.

The immediate result of this transaction with God, and of His acceptance of one who, believing His promise, came to Him on the ground of Calvary alone, was a deepening consciousness of her own sinfulness. Jessie soon found that her attempts to overcome her besetting sins ended in abject failure, and the succeeding few months were a record of bitter repentance and many tears over sins she was utterly unable to conquer.

One of the wonderful things in the Christian life is the way in which God, knowing the needs of His children, works on their behalf and brings them into touch with those who can help and guide just when they need it most. So it is fascinating to see Him opening the door for the next stage of the journey. In August of 1883, Mr. Penn-Lewis was appointed Borough Accountant of Richmond in Surrey, where they found their way to Holy Trinity Church and came under the ministry of Rev. Evan H. Hopkins, who has been

called the theologian of the early Keswick Conventions. The very first sermon was “an opening of heaven” to the intense and hungry heart of Jessie Penn-Lewis. For the first time she heard of the way of victory over besetting sins through the blood of Christ, of the joy of a full surrender to Him, and the possibilities of a Spirit-filled life.

One day when Jessie was visiting the vicarage, Mrs. Hopkins asked her a direct question as to whether she was “a Christian.” Her immediate reply was “Yes,” and this was her first open confession of Christ. Another question followed—“Did she know victory over sin?” And she had to admit that she had “never heard of it.” But there was in her heart a longing for the utmost that God could do for her, and her innate honesty prevented her from being content with anything less.

Jessie’s pursuit of the goal she sought in the face of the physical weakness which was a constant handicap to her is best glimpsed in her own words. A half-sheet of notepaper dated 8 a.m., February 28th, 1884, gives us an insight into God’s dealings with her and hers with Him.

Lord Jesus, on this my 23rd birthday I do again yield my whole self unto Thee, soul and spirit, life, time, hands, feet, eyes, lips, voice, money, intellect, will, heart, love, health, thoughts and desires. All that I have, all that I am, all that I may be is Thine, wholly, absolutely and unreservedly. And I do believe that Thou dost take me, and that Thou wilt work in me to *will* and

to *do* Thy good pleasure. Lord, use me in whatever way it seemeth good to Thee, keep my eyes fixed on Thee, ready to obey even Thy glance. Thou art my King, my Saviour, and my Guide. Take not Thy Holy Presence from me, but day by day draw me nearer, until that glorious time when I shall see Thee face to face, and faith be lost in sight. Amen.

An entry in her tiny pocket diary made after a watch night service as the year 1886 opened runs: “Thank God, I commence the year ‘right with Him,’ but I long intensely to be more single-eyed to His glory, my will more lost in His.”

Another series of entries read:

A day of constant temptation and battle against a discontented spirit. Was enabled to hold on all through in spite of darkness: Fear I gave way many times, but was kept near to the precious Blood. . . . Gave way once or twice to hasty speaking. Oh, how I want even the tone of my voice to be gentle. Am more at peace and trusting, but still not very bright, but I mean to keep on trusting. . . . Very tired all day, felt ruffled again this morning. When shall I learn the peace and love that endureth all things and is not easily provoked! Difficult to believe afterwards that the Lord *does* forgive at once, so depression instead of fullness of joy fills one’s soul. One wants to *feel* forgiven—how much training one needs, and how patient the Lord is!

How good He is to those who seek to follow Him! There were also, of course, times of deep conscious fellowship with the Lord she was growing to know more closely, and entries read: “Happy day, no cloud, but conscious presence and smile of the Lord—oh, why do I not trust Him more utterly in times of temptation? . . . Happy day again, the Lord so near and so precious. Such sweet sense of nothing between.”

It was about this time that Mr. Penn-Lewis found the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord. What joy this gave her!

And from then on they sought together to serve Him and win others to Him. Those were busy days. Mr. Penn-Lewis soon became a powerful speaker in open air meetings; and a mission held in Richmond in March of 1886 gave both great opportunities for personal work.

Many of us will recognize in these brief extracts from her diary the joys and testings of our own early efforts in His service.

Led two children to Jesus and had a long talk with young B____. He yielded so far as to promise me to go home and pray God to give him the desire.

At Hammond’s meeting, although poorly all day. Young B____ there: I watched for him. . . . After a long time, thank God, he decided. . . . I was led to *claim* him this afternoon.

Spoke to Walter D____, but no good—Lord have mercy on him!

At College Hall this afternoon—led four boys to decision.

“Young B____” appears to have been very really “born again,” for later on we find him speaking at a meeting, followed by the note, “Thank God, he is coming on well!”

And through it all there appears a little refrain of the young wife’s practical daily round: “Very busy all day—making marmalade, ironing, etc.”

What happy, formative years in His school those must have been, preparing both husband and wife for all that was to follow in. His plan for them!