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"He Made it Again"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"He made it again" (Jeremiah 18:4).

It was a crisis in the history of the clay. The Potter had been forced to the necessity of reducing it to a shapeless mass. After long and patient effort, working and painstaking He had been compelled to take a sad and painful decision. The clay must be broken and go into a period in which it will seem - only seem - that the Potter has discarded it. During that time the clay - because it is not mere inanimate and insentient matter, but self and God-conscious humanity - will have the occasion for considering its condition in the light of the past, and coming to see why this tragedy has overtaken it.

Into this crisis of the Potter's House we have to read both the history of Israel and the history of many a piece of work which God undertook, either in the Church or in individual lives. There are two or three aspects of this crisis.

Firstly, the clay - the material of the vessel - was selected, chosen. Not because it was better clay than any other. It was all-of-a-piece with the mass of humanity. There was everything on the positive side to justify it being left in its abandoned state, and no merit to command its consideration. It was all that it should not be and nothing of what it should be to satisfy God's requirement. Its selection was all of grace.

"Love to the loveless (unlovely) shown".

But in the mystery of grace and the potency of grace it was taken, separated, and brought onto the wheel of Divine purpose. It was spoken to, with promise and covenant; with comfort and

exhortation; with instruction and warning; with entreaty and love. Not only in words, but in works; strange and mystifying, deep and painful, gracious and kindly. The combining of word and deed constituted the Potter's aim to produce "a vessel unto honour, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work".

From time to time a warning shadow crept into the Potter's face, and it implied that all was not well with the clay. There was something inconsistent with His object. His sensitive fingers met some foreign and unyielding substance. He added a little more pressure of pain, of warning, of instruction, of exhortation; but that propensity, that adhesion persisted.

At last, after long and thorough endeavour, the Potter had to say 'I cannot go on, the only hope lies along a course of confusion, suspense, and breaking down'.

In that state the clay was driven to much heart-searching, in which, like David after his great mistake in the Philistine cart, the reasons were sought.

As these reasons were sought in heartbrokenness, the Potter, at length, began to speak again to the clay.

Some of the things that He said were these.

1. 'The fact that I chose you in sovereign grace, and therein took the initiative in bringing you into relation with My great purpose, was never intended to exonerate you from being responsible and co-operative substance. Rather did it involve you in the obligation of responsive love and self-abandoning gratitude. My very mercy and kindness, to say nothing of the immense glory that was to be the end, was meant to inculcate in you My own nature of grace and selflessness. But you have viewed it all objectively and acted as though you had little or nothing to do to "make your calling and election sure".'

2. 'Then, you have failed to give sufficient heed to another very vital factor. I have given you much light and truth. My servants have risen up early and prayed late to obtain for you that truth that could minister to the "conformity to the image" that I have in view. Over a long period you have been receiving and receiving until you can hardly bear to have more. But you have not given heed to the fact that it is not sufficient to have light and truth without walking in it, and having it "in the inward parts". You have failed to remember that the greatest tragedies are those which have had most light and have not turned it into life and character. You have the truth in abundance but it is not yourself. There is a gap between what you know in theory and what you are in being'.

3. 'Further, again, the greatness of My selecting grace, the patience of My longsuffering mercy, and the lavishness of My giving of light have only added up to make you spiritually proud, conceited, and superior. You have become self-centred and straitened. In all My thought and work regarding you I have had a vessel in mind, and a vessel not as a mere ornament on a pedestal, but for use. A great world-vocation has dominated all with Me, but you have fed your own souls and not enough cherished and valued the great honour and responsibility of having a ministry to *all* the world. These are some things that I cannot go on with, hence the crisis of frustration, confusion, and suspense'. (It will be recognised that these were some of the things which constituted God's controversy with Israel and which led to the crisis of the exile, when the clay was set aside awhile. They are tendencies at all times amongst the people of God.)

The Potter waits. Is there recognition, repentance, remorse, and yielding? If so - "He made it again".

God does not finally abandon an undertaking or purpose. Even His most drastic dealings *in this life* are in hope. He is "the God of hope".

We open the Bible with the earth in a sad state of chaos, but "He made it again". We see the human race in terrible desolation through Adam's sin, but "In Christ there is a new creation". "He made it again".

Israel in Egypt is in a sad and devastated plight, but "He made it again". Israel in Babylon is the clay cast off and - for the time - rejected; but "He made it again". Peter was peeled, scattered and desolated by his denial of his Master; but "He made it again".

John Mark no doubt had many heart-burning and self-reproaching hours after deserting from the work; but "He made it again". This is the history, story, and - thank God - the testimony of much "Broken Earthenware". "He made it again... as seemed good to the potter".

As we move into this new year 1960, and maybe are all aware of how we have failed and disappointed earlier hopes and expectations, let us focus upon - not "it was marred in the hand of the potter", but - "He made it again, another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it". The end of all God's work is, "It is very good."