

**WHAT THEY DID
WITH THEMSELVES**

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What they did with themselves by Ernest Hamlin Abbott

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WHAT THEY DID WITH THEMSELVES

I

THE DISCIPLES RESTING THEMSELVES

TO such a man as the honorable councilor Joseph, of Arimathea, or the scholarly Nicodemus, there must have been something pitiful beyond words in the sight of the Galilean subjected to the mercies of unscrupulous fanatics, supercilious rulers, and inefficient disciples. The taunt, "He saved others, himself he cannot save," echoes with strange irony to-day. It was he alone of all that throng who was safe; and not even he could save these others without their will. It was not possible for the most intelligent spectator of that time to see there an impregnable being surrounded by groups of men who were doing themselves irreparable damage; yet in that series of events that shifted uneasily between garden, priests' court, military headquarters, and barren hill-top, the significant fact was not what they were doing to him, but what they were doing with themselves.

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The eleven who were with him in the garden meant well. Indeed, they were quite resolute. They had understood very clearly the danger that was threatening their Master and had provided themselves with weapons. That their talk about their willingness to defend their Master's life and to die with him was not idle boasting was shown later when Malchus was wounded. Men who strike out with swords in the presence of Roman soldiers cannot be fairly accused of cowardice or braggadocio. No; these men were devoted, loyal, brave. And yet when the time of testing came, when their Master took them to spend the last moments they were to have alone with him, when, if ever, he needed the support of friends — they went to sleep.

Their fault was not disloyalty or cowardice; it was inefficiency. There was a task to be done, a sacrifice to be made; and the grief of it all weighed down their spirits. As it is written in the Gospel of Luke, they were "sleeping for sorrow." But if to them the prospect was pain, it was agony to him. Yet the sorrow that intensified his powers deadened theirs; the sorrow that drove him to his Father drove them to slumber. Yes; their intentions were good, but they were incapable. Their spirit was eager, but their flesh

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was weak. That was Jesus' own verdict upon them. They had "good hearts," as the saying is; their purposes were all right. They had a task to do, and they were disposed to do it; but when the time came for them to perform it, they muddled it.

This is the pet sin of the Church — inefficiency. It is true that Judas has had his successors; but it is very doubtful if they have constituted anything like the proportion in the whole body of the Church that Judas constituted in the disciples. On the whole, the spirit has been eager; but how incapable the performance! Are we reminded of the great Roman Catholic hierarchy? That has the appearance of efficiency; but is there real efficiency even there? Here, for example, it is confronted with a great task: men have found their way to new worlds of knowledge, and they are bewildered and perplexed. What does this Church do? Is it efficient in interpreting faith in the light of new knowledge? No, the task is too hard. The sacrifice of the past is too painful. Like the Eleven, it shuts its eyes and takes refuge in slumber. Do we then turn to the other branches of the Church? Here they are, for example, confronted with the slum, the overdriven worker, the swollen fortune. What is the Church doing?

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"Moving uptown." The distress of social wrongs is too much; it is something to be fled from. So sermons are preached which carefully avoid the unpleasant facts, and stick closely to the "simple Gospel." So the congregation finds rest and refreshment in the eloquence from the pulpit and the harmony from the choir. It is not cowardice or disloyalty that does this. The spirit is eager. No, it is simple inefficiency. The Church is not capable. As in the case of the Eleven, the flesh is weak.

This does not mean that all churches are wholly inefficient; that no Roman Catholics are trying to meet the intellectual problems of to-day: that no Protestants are struggling with the slum and the swollen fortune. It means simply that, in so far as the Church fails, it is not because of disloyalty or disingenuousness, but because of inefficiency.

And if we look for the cause of this inefficiency, we shall find it in a wrong conception of faith. "What shall we have?" asked the disciples. That is the attitude of the inefficient. It is the attitude we take when we regard faith as a consolation prize for the disappointments of life; as a refuge from the roughness of the struggle of life; as a harbor from the storm; as the Lethe from

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which our troubled spirits may drink oblivion. When we regard faith in this way, then, as soon as the crisis comes, we have recourse to our faith — and sleep.

It was not so with the Lord of the Eleven and the Lord of the Church. The relation to God which we call faith he spoke of in terms of action: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." And efficiency was his test of faith; not every one that saith, "Lord, Lord," but he that doeth the will.

The time came when those same men who so ingloriously slept in the Garden of Gethsemane found in hardship and labor a signal, not for flight to a refuge, but for new exertion and for great achievement. It was then that they gave proof of their faith. It is not enough in the face of trial to remain loyal. Inefficient loyalty is better than disloyalty, but it is hardly more serviceable. Surely this is what those disciples must have learned as they heard through their drowsiness the voice of their Master saying, "It is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

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II

JUDAS HANGING HIMSELF

As with the other actors in that tragic scene in the garden, what Judas did to his Master signified not so much as what he did with himself. When we read, "And he went out and hanged himself," we are almost ready to exclaim, That is the most intelligent act of his life! The truth, of course, is quite the contrary; it was the supreme instance of his unintelligence.

Many have sought to uncover Judas's motive. Some have thought they have found it in his greed for money — or, to put it more modernly, his keen commercial instinct. Thirty pieces of silver constituted the usual price for a slave; it was not an insignificant sum in the eyes of a man who knew the value of money. Those who pretend that business is business and nothing but business must acknowledge that the transaction was not discreditable to Judas as a commercial man. The fact, however, that he returned the money showed that not even with Judas could business be nothing but business. Some have thought they have found Judas's motive in his