

The Gospel of the Elder Brother

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On a recent Sunday morning, being extra early for church, I entered the almost empty building and while waiting for the congregations to assemble, I sat quietly musing.

That sacred hush which seems to pervade a church under these particular circumstances had cast its spell over me. On my right was a beautiful memorial window of Holman Hunt's famous picture the "Light of the World".

The sound of the birds and the locusts singing in the trees outside added a sense of dreaminess to the mood I was in. Almost simultaneously there came to my mind just such another Sunday morning but that was linked to another face.

Back in my early home there was a beloved Elder Brother, the hero of our childhood. He was the eldest of a family of thirteen, twenty years my senior, and the comfort of my mother. I have heard her say there were never too many babies in our home, all the little newcomers were made welcome by this big brother.

What gracious memories we have of his little attentions - a splash of lavender or other perfume for our Sunday hankies, or now and then we were allowed to handle and examine little trifles (rare enough in those days) that his box contained; a cake of soap in the form of a yellow rose I remember being a special favourite.

Then on this particular Sunday to which I have referred, he was taking us "small try" out for a walk and the flowers in the picture recalled the old childish song he sang to us

"Buttercups and daisies
Oh, the pretty flowers
Coming in the spring time
To tell of summer hours".

Like a flash it was revealed to me where I had got my gospel of the Elder Brother, and what a sweet and precious gospel it had always been to me. Possibly an old photo in a family album played a small part in the association of the two faces, it being taken with a full short beard.

How dull of discernment we are! That brother has long since gone to his reward, yet the gospel he practised has come down to me over the years. Who can estimate the influence of such a life.

Well do I remember when only a little mite of five or so, I had been sweeping his bedroom and he came in just as I was in the act of sweeping the dust through a loose board in the floor instead of using the dustpan. At this distance, the expression on his face was more of mock surprise and amusement than of reproof "Oh I didn't think you would do that" have been a lifelong reproof to me. Our love for him was such that we hated him to be disappointed with us.

Let us take heed how we present the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Divine Elder Brother.

Written in memory of Ethel's older brother, Edwin who died at 38 when Ethel was only 19.