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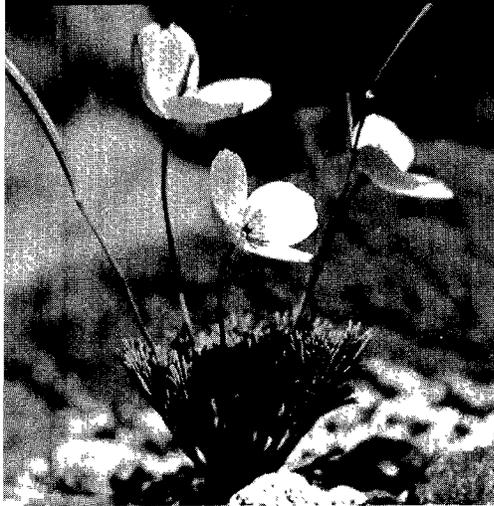


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*Why multitudes looked at Jesus and
declared that He had*

no Beauty

By Wilber Alexander

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THE diary of a young flier shot down during World War II details his account of a nerve-racking experience while he was waiting to be rescued. He reached out to pick some lilacs from a bush nearby and as he parted the branches he was startled by the sight of the half-decayed body of a soldier beneath the flowering bush. He drew back in horror, not because he had never looked upon death before but because of the screaming contradiction between the dead body and the flowering plant. He winced because decaying death did not fit into God's flowering world. In his mind he could not reconcile its presence.

In your own mind contrast this experience with these words of the prophet Isaiah: "He grew up . . . like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:2, 3, R.S.V.).

Here in a strictly spiritual sense we have the young flier's scene somewhat in reverse. Here is a prophecy of death looking at life; a half-decayed, fast-decaying first-century world looking upon the glory and grace of God as it is found in Jesus Christ and turning their ugly faces and lives away saying, "There is no beauty that we should desire him."

In Isaiah where the prophecy of Christ's rejection is recorded and in the Gospels where that rejection is so graphically illustrated, God gives us insight into our own personal reactions to Jesus Christ at those times when we resent and reject the beauty of His presence in our lives.

The Isaiah prophecy begins with two questions: "Who has believed what we have heard?" and "To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isa. 53:1, R.S.V.) These questions written largely in the sense of a historic future are a clarion call

to man's conscience. The answers express a common confession of the guilt man bears because of his common indifference to what he has heard and what he has seen.

"Who has believed what we have heard?" Those to whom this question specifically applied had heard more than enough on which to bestow their wholehearted belief. The biography of their Lord was scattered all through their Scriptures. In outline form, beginning with the first book, Genesis, and reading through the last book, Malachi, the story of Christ's life and mission is clearly told. Yet only a few who heard really believed, only a few!

"To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" This question relates to the revelation in Christ of God's purpose and plan for men's lives, and the power available for fulfilling life after the perfection of the pattern revealed first in divine counsel before the beginning of man, revealed through the written Word and at last in the living Word. Yet even in the living Presence of this highest form of revelation, only a few who saw Him really believed.

Dry Ground

Isaiah says that the Lord grew up like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground.

To His heavenly Father and before the universe Jesus was a tender, growing plant, perfect in every stage of His human existence, willing and obedient during each hour of His life on earth, beautiful in His character and His unselfish service to those for whom He came to minister. But to the proud Pharisees, the skeptical Sadducees, and the rowdy Romans, He was a root out of dry ground.

And dry ground it was! The dry, rigid formalism of the Pharisees with its dried purification of persons and things, its dry wall of partition and separateness for fear of ritual contamination, its dry wash of the outside of cups and platters. The sterile souls of the Sadducees mouthing de-

hydrated discourses on the burden of expense for the daily burnt offering, or the degree of purity required to officiate at the preparation of the ashes of the red heifer, denying the resurrection, the existence of angels, the mercy and love of God, was all dry religion with its heart eaten out.

Heathen Rome exhibited the parched soil of sin-hardened hearts, the daily highways for the traffic of every known form of vice. As these shriveled human souls stared out from prayer shawls, priestly turbans, and iron helmets through jealous, vicious, bloodthirsty eyes, they could see no beauty in Jesus. They admitted Christ had no form or comeliness, no beauty that they desired.

What poor judges of beauty! Lifted up in their pride, filled with vanity and rebellion, all they saw was the issue of a natural womb, the son of a poor, unnoticed virgin, brought up in a disreputable village, the leader of a few simple fishermen, an itinerant preacher, wholly untrained in the so-called letters of the land.

Isaiah says, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:3, R.S.V.). The language used here is descriptive of that surrounding the lepers of Christ's day—the language of loathing, contempt, and disgust.

John says that Jesus came to His creation, and His own creatures received Him not (John 1:11). Blind, stupid, needy humanity looked at divinity, threw His words back in His face, ridiculed His claims, repulsed every offer of His love, and hung Him on a cross!

As a child the teachers rejected His questioning mind and sought to squeeze Him into the group mind. His brothers rejected Him as an iconoclast. Early in His ministry He came to Nazareth, went into the synagogue, and used these words of Isaiah to announce His mission:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has

anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (Isa. 61:1, 2, R.S.V.).

The congregation saw no beauty in His readiness to give Himself away, and in the heat of their rejection they tried to stone Him.

Continually Rejected

His sandaled feet led Him on down the road into other towns, into other homes, in and out of the Temple, and everywhere except for the few He was rejected and forced to move on.

His lowly birth haunted Him. Men kept asking, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Always they asked Him for signs to prove He was the true Messiah, then openly rejected His miracles. The power of His words they attributed to Beelzebub, the Devil.

Sweating, hungry crowds gathered close around Him as He ministered to their needs only to have them throng after Him for more loaves and fishes and to turn away when He pressed upon them their need for eating His body, for drinking His blood, and accepting Him wholly. Things were so bad He even asked His disciples, "Will ye also go away?"

He ate with publicans and sinners and felt the hot breath of pharisaical wrath for fellowshiping with the "down and out," for eating with unwashed hands.

So it was that through childhood, youth, and manhood, Jesus walked alone. When they met Him face to face men turned from Him, they would not see Him, would not recognize Him even though He offered to each one forgiveness, rest, friendship, and the kingdom.

At last they disclaimed Jesus as Messiah and as king, willingly accepted His blood on their heads, and crucified Him. His life was a rebuke to their lives. He did not fulfill "their" expectations. They did not know who He was or what He was doing. Is it any wonder Isaiah calls Him "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"?

It has been said, the greater the love, the greater the sorrow of the loving heart when love is rejected; the more intense the yearning for companionship, the sharper the pang when it is rejected. It was not the amount of grief, but His capacity for grief that made Jesus a man of sorrows. He moved from quiet communion and joy with the Father in

heaven, into a hostile rebellious world.

He was ever moved in the presence of human suffering, sin, and sorrow. Grief was His intimate acquaintance because of His empathy with the grief of others. He felt to the depth of His soul because of His capacity to care. But notwithstanding all this demonstration men and women turned away from Him. They looked the other way and esteemed Him not.

Messages from God are never widely welcomed. Only a few people ever find open-hearted willingness to listen to what God is saying and to obey. We too have heard. We have no lack of information, but how many have really believed the gospel and have submitted to its power? How many sense the beauty of their loving Lord?

We have not captured His beauty if we look on Him only as an ideal teacher, an ideal man—He is more!

We cannot sense His beauty if we

doubt that He is all the Scripture says He is. The carnal heart sees no beauty in Jesus, sees nothing to induce desire to know Him, wants only to despise and reject Him. There can be no beauty in a belief in Christ that is so theological it can never be personal. Spiritual beauty is spiritually discerned. The heart sees beauty only in what the heart loves. Only through continual surrender of the heart, the will, to the work of the Holy Spirit can we know and worship Jesus in the beauty of His holiness.

"He that will not believe in Christ must see to it how he can get along without him. As for you and me, we cannot. We need someone who will lift and hold us up when we are alive and who will lay his hand beneath our heads when we must die, and this he can do abundantly according to what is written about him, and we know of nobody whom we'd rather have do it."

Providence at Work

By W. P. Bradley

Associate Secretary, General Conference

WHEN we use the word *Providence* in speaking of Christian experience we really mean God. That is one meaning ascribed to the word in Webster's dictionary: "God, conceived of as guiding men . . . through His prescience, loving care, or intervention." When people are young, and before they become too sophisticated, they are inclined to give God credit for the good fortune that comes their way. The worldly simply calls it luck.

Take, for example, the trusting brother in Inter-America who found a pumpkin vine from his neighbor's garden creeping under the dividing fence and making itself very much at home on his property. He mentioned the situation to the neighbor, who lightly told him he could have all that grew on the vine on his land. With that, our brother quickly dedicated any such pumpkins to the Lord, to be used for Sabbath school investment. The result? The pumpkin vine produced more and larger pumpkins on his side of the fence than on the neighbor's. In his simple trust the brother told us it was all due to God's blessing. His trust was refreshing, like that of a little child.

Or take the case of the colporteur in Surinam who had been sick, couldn't work, and came to the point

where his money was gone. He went out to work, made five calls, but sold nothing. Then down the street he saw a purse. Quickly he picked it up, feeling that perhaps God was answering his prayer, supplying his family's need. Upon examination he discovered the purse contained a large amount of money, and other valuable articles. He hurried home.

Further search in the purse revealed the owner's name. Soon the colporteur was on his way to return the purse to its owner. He found a distracted household and the daughter in tears. She was to leave for Holland that very day, and the purse contained the funds for the trip.

The colporteur's reward was threefold: (1) Sale of several sets of books through this contact, (2) several persons, deeply impressed by the colporteur's integrity, began attending Sabbath school, (3) a very real conviction in the heart of the colporteur that God had guided in the experience.

Trusting our heavenly Father's wisdom and care in every experience of life brings rich rewards. Spiritual discernment and the communion of His presence open eyes to the providential arm on whose strength we come to depend and establish our faith in the One who never fails.