

THE POOL OF BETHESDA... the pulpit where angels preached
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(John 5:6)

It was the sabbath day in Jerusalem, and many people had neglected going to church. Bethesda, the sheep market pool, was a scene of lazy indolence, and on the steps surrounding its placid waters, the sick lay in frustrated expectancy. The synagogue service had ended, and some of the worshippers were walking toward the famous place. They passed beneath the arches made by the five porches, and saw before them "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." Alas, on that sabbath day the waters were very still!

The Pool That Said God Still Lived

A great deal of discussion has taken place concerning the accuracy of this story. It has been said that the district was rich in medicinal qualities, and that periodic eruptions in the earth's strata filled the pool with healing propensities. Theologians have said the incidents always took place during such disturbances, and that every miracle was due to a man's being able to seize his opportunity when subterranean movements liberated elements beneficial to sick people. This, however, appears to be absurd. Either the account is true or it is not. None of these teachers explained why the healing powers were all exhausted after the first miracle, nor for that matter how, irrespective of the type of disease to be treated, the swirling waters always healed the seeking sufferer. The Bethesda pool was God's pulpit! Malachi had been the last of the prophets, and his ministry had almost been forgotten. The nation possessed a dead formalism, an ornate temple, but no prophet. Yet as long as the pool offered healing to sick souls, it did the work of the temple pulpit. The priestly theologians only spoke of healing; the pool supplied it. Perhaps that was the chief reason why folk were sitting around the still waters when they might have been in church.

The Power That Said God Still Listened

If the priests had known how to pray as did the people at the pool, there would have been no need for an angel to stir any waters. The need of a world is generally governed by the spirituality of the house of God. Every true sanctuary liberates more healing power than the sheep market pools of the world ever possessed. A dead church sends seekers elsewhere. The hopes and prayers of Israel had been transferred from the temple to the pool. When the waters were suddenly stirred; when wild confusion sent scores of unfortunates tumbling one over the other in a frantic bid to be first into the water; when someone emerged to cry aloud for joy, everyone realized that once again God had been sufficiently interested in His creatures to ordain another case of healing. Thus God tried to teach His people to be ready to respond whenever He should shew His hand.

The Preacher That Said God Still Loved

"And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he

THE POOL OF BETHESDA... the pulpit where angels preached saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?" There was no fuss, and the conversation was carried on in normal tones. "Sir," replied the sufferer, "I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool: but while I am coming another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath." And the proud pharisaical people immediately misunderstood his motives, and accused him of forgetting the sanctity of God's day. And while they were arguing over the do's and don'ts of the law, the great Healer quietly withdrew. Yet He left behind a sermon without a text. It was the will of God that every man should have a chance of salvation, and since this lonely sufferer had none to help him, the love of God brought healing to his bedside. "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple." It is noteworthy that the man found his way into the sanctuary. God only visited the pool-He lived at the mercy seat!

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