

THE NEARNESS OF GOD
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By

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Very often I wonder, as I try to deal with life – life with all of its complexities, with its mystery, life with all of its greatness and its commonness, with its mystery, life with all of its greatness and its commonness, with its chaos and its order – I wonder sometimes how it came to be. Oh yes, I remember the stories of Genesis...of how God's brooding spirit moved over the watery abyss...of how He scooped up a handful of clay from the muddy bank of the river and molded man and breathed upon him and made him live...Oh yes, I remember that. But that creative image came of a simpler time – not an easier one surely, but simpler – and so I wonder still, how you and I came to be.

Once I gazed into a microscope and there in a droplet of water I saw creatures so tiny that hundreds of them swam within the confines of that drop. But they lived and moved and they had their being, even as I did in that moment – tiny complex fragments of life whose universe was so small that I could not comprehend it. Yet, beyond the creatures that I could see, I knew that there were yet tinier bits of life and matter and energy outside the powers of men to observe, yet a part of God's creation.

On still another occasion I peered into the eyepiece of a telescope and saw there a feathery wisp, and I knew that I was looking at a galaxy whose light had been traversing space for ten billion years and I knew that I was seeing, not into the present, but into the distant past, and my hand upon the eyepiece trembled at the knowledge that I was viewing, the unbelievable vastness of God's creation.

And I wondered at God, whose being could encompass and care for a hundred billion stars, the creatures in the tiny droplet, and for me. I said, "It cannot be. We are alone and desolate in our droplet of the universe. It is impossible that any being should know and care for all of this." Then Jesus looked at me with a patient smile and said, "With men it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."

And so I knelt, and bowed my head, and clasped my hands, and closed my eyes that I might pray. "Oh God," I said – A car door slammed. "Dear Lord," I prayed – A siren wailed. "Our Father," I whispered – A train rumbled past, and through my ears and half closed eyes the world impinged upon my prayer. The lovely words, the quiet thought, the stately phrases were all lost in the din of the

moment. I cried out, "How can God know my thought unless I speak?" Christ gazed from patient eyes and said, "Your Father knows your need before you ask Him."

Perhaps, I thought, perhaps. I wandered down the bleak and desolate streets of the city, a place as alien to me as the distant galaxy. It was January and the crusted, grimy snow lay in manmade drifts along the curb. Two children pelted one another with dirty snowballs, thrown from hands which, but for their blackness, would have been red and stinging with the cold. An old man shuffled along the street pulling a wagonload of wood. The charred and blackened shell of a burnt-out house told of how the fire trucks came too late. An old woman shivered in her ragged shawl. It was January in the city street and the bleakness there was as oppressive as the frozen lake and chilling wind, for the body and the bones absorbed the aching loneliness of the crowded city street.

And where is God now, I thought, congealed into the tiny, frozen droplet of water, dispersed in the mighty galaxy, where? Not here, surely. Not here amidst the ached and cold and loneliness of the city. This is the place of men alone, God-forsaken, lost, living death and dying to life. Is this, in truth, the place where God is not?