

FIRE AND WATER

Harry Foster

THE twins were having an argument as to whether all fires could be put out by water or not. As a matter of fact the twins were always having arguments, and this one had been started by the fact that at family prayers that morning their father had read from the Bible a verse which seemed to speak of a fire which no waters could quench.

Now it was afternoon, they had come back from school and were at it hammer and tongs, Angela saying that there was no such thing as a fire which could not be put out by water and Beth insisting that there must be because it was in the Bible and then changing her argument to one about science.

"Science" scoffed Angela, "we can soon find out about that when Daniel comes home." At that [17/18] moment, however, Mother came into the room, So they asked if she could decide. They both began talking at once, making such a hubbub that she had to command silence to hear herself think, and then, after wracking her brains in an effort to remember what she had learned at school, she suddenly said, "Of course! Phosphorus! You just put it on water and it bursts into flame. At least I think so" she added, and then hurried on into the kitchen to cook the meal.

Angela, however, was far from satisfied, so when their brother Daniel came in from school they met him with the question as to whether phosphorus does burst into flame on touching water. "On the contrary" Daniel replied laughingly, "you always keep phosphorus in a jar of water to prevent it from burning, so you have got it quite wrong." He hurried past them to do his homework saying "Try sodium" as he slammed his bedroom door. Poor Beth felt thoroughly confused by now and Angela so certain that she was right that when they were all gathered round the table for their meal she told her father all about it. She expected to be told that she was right and Beth wrong, but she made a big mistake.

Father began by quoting the text which had been the cause of the argument, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Songs 8:7) and pointed out that the flame which could not be quenched by floods of water was the flame of true love. Then he went on to consider the truth about the scientific facts which were muddled in their minds. "First, phosphorus" he said, "that is never really quenched by water for as soon as it gets out into the air it begins to burn of itself. So you see, Angela" he continued, "phosphorus has an inner fire which may be kept down by water but is never drowned by it. Sorry Mother" he said with a smile to her, "but you had better go back to school again!"

He then went on to confirm what Daniel had said about the extraordinary property of sodium which ignites when it comes into contact with water. "What a wonderful fire that is" Father commented, "for it is actually set on fire by water." But he had not finished yet. "There is one more kind of flame" he continued, "which tends to spread by means of water. If oil is burning, then to pour on water not only fails to put out the fire but means that wherever the water runs, the fire burns on top of it."

By this time Angela was ready enough to admit that she had been wrong and even asked Father to repeat what he had been saying about the three water-conquering fires. First there was phosphorus, which was only temporarily checked by water, then there was sodium which burned because of the water and then there was oil which spread its fire wherever the water took it. "Don't forget" added Father, "that what we are really talking about is love, the love which will not be quenched by trouble but which burns the brighter and spreads the more as floods of wrong try to quench it."

The twins knew that this kind of love was too high a standard for them, but it was also too high for Daniel and even for their father and mother. Once again, then, they were reminded that the only love which can do these things is the love of Christ and that the marvel of the Christian life is that this same love is actually given to work in our lives -- and through them too. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).

As usual Mother had the last word. "I may be wrong about science" she said, "but I know that I am right when I sing my favourite hymn:

'Come let us sing of a wonderful love,

Tender and true;

Out of the heart of the Father above,

Streaming to me and to you.'"

How true it is that many waters cannot quench that love, neither can the floods drown it! Is it burning in your heart?

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