

DISAPPOINTMENT

Young Samuel did not know his name was Samuel; although he would answer to 'Sam', he thought his real name was 'Disappointment'.

"You're a disappointment," said his father. "You don't fight and spit and cuss like a man."

"Why should I fight other boys?" he thought. "It only gets you hurt and into trouble. And spitting is dirty. And what's the point of cussing? Any moron can do that."

"You're a disappointment," said his mother. "You don't dress smart and don't behave polite."

"Why do I need to dress smart all the time?" he thought. "Why do I have to say 'Thank you', when I don't feel thankful at all. Isn't that just like telling a lie?"

It was no better when he went to school.

"You're a disappointment," said his teacher. "You never answer up in class."

"You never ask anything worth answering," he thought. "What is the point of answering dumb questions whose answers are obvious?"

He thought to himself: "Why are these other people disappointed? Its *me* who is disappointed. I'm disappointed to have a dad who is hardly ever sober; I'm disappointed to have a mum who's so weak and thinks only of appearances. I'm disappointed my teachers don't ask me interesting questions."

Even in secondary school he found the same,

"You're a disappointment," they said. "A boy of your talent ought to make the first eleven. Why don't you make the effort?"

"Why?" he thought. "There is surely more to life than just kicking a bag of wind about for an hour or so! Its so disappointing my teachers have such a limited view."

Samuel was right; there was more to life than football. Despite never putting himself forward, because he could never see any reason to, he passed all his examinations with high marks and went to university. But things were no better there.

"You're a disappointment," his tutor told him. "You could get a double first, but you never put yourself out."

"I know I can get a double first," he thought, "so why does he need to tell me. It really is disappointing if he cant tell me anything else than what is patently obvious!"

Although Samuel made friends at university, he never kept them for very long. Sooner or later they would tell him that he was a disappointment. Indeed, Samuel himself complained of most things, saying they were a disappointment to him. His fellow students nicknamed him "Disappointment." This did not trouble him; indeed, he found it quite natural. After all, that was his name, wasn't it?

In short, Samuel did not put himself out, just as his tutor had

said. But, contrary to his tutor's prediction, he *did* get a double first.

Did this make him happy? Not at all; it was, after all, merely what he had known he would get. He continued to be disappointed with everyone and they, in turn, were disappointed with him. He never kept a girl friend. They always told him that he was a disappointment to them because of this, that or the other; and he likewise found each to be a disappointment and certainly never loved any of them.

It was just the same with work. With a double first from a prestigious university he should have been able to obtain and keep a top job; but he never did. Sooner or later his employer would tell Samuel that he was a disappointment and Samuel himself would find the job equally disappointing.

After his fourth job and fifth girlfriend, Samuel realized that he found life itself to be a disappointment. "What," he thought, "is the point in carrying on living?"

He decided to end it all and take his own life.

When he woke up in hospital, he was at first bitterly disappointed. It seemed that his fall from the cliff was thought to have been an accident. Also, it seemed that he had been incredibly lucky (or, as he thought at the time, unlucky) in that his fall had been broken by scrub and that he had reached the bottom with nothing worse than some broken ribs and a worrying, and possibly serious, concussion.

He was somewhat surprised to find Sonia, his first girlfriend, by his beside when he woke up in the hospital. He was even more surprised when he learnt that he had been in a coma for the last three days and that Sonia had come and sat by his beside for two or three hours each day. He was puzzled by this. Hadn't he been a disappointment to her?

Sonia came every day to see him and it gradually dawned on his befuddled brain that she actually *loved* him despite everything. Was that why he had been saved from death? "No, no," he thought, "that's absurd; things don't work like that."

As he lay in hospital each day he thought about his past life. Why had he found everything disappointing? He remembered his childhood – his drunken father and timid, long-suffering mother. They had told him time and time again that he was a disappointment. He began to see that it was because of this he had become convinced that he *really* was a disappointment and that everything else was a disappointment.

His father had died many years ago from kidney failure and other complications; his mother had survived her husband but dementia had set in early. She was, as far as he knew, still alive, but in a world of her own. She would not know who he was. But should he not visit her? She was his mother. Yes, he would visit her when his bones were mended and he had been discharged.

He did a lot of thinking over the next week or so. He realized that his father and mother were largely the victims of their own

upbringing. He had been extremely fortunate to have escaped from that limiting environment. They were, he now came to see, to be pitied, not resented.

He saw too that his teachers had meant well and tried as best they could. He must have been an indifferent and arrogant pupil. Why had friends told him he was a disappointment? Was it not because he had been disappointed with them in the first place?

He thought again of Sonia. He really appreciated her visiting each day; indeed, he now realized, he would be upset if she did not. He actually loved her. Yes, she may not be perfect – but who was? He most certainly was not.

He found it very strange that he should *love* someone. But he came to see that although neither life nor the world was perfect, one need not be disappointed all the time.

He determined to renounce the name 'Disappointment'; he would reclaim his own name 'Samuel'. There was, he now saw, hope; one could have faith and, above all, one could love. Hadn't he heard something like that before about faith, hope and love once, years ago, at school?

He did, indeed, find religion and, with it, humility – but that is another story. Suffice it to say that he recovered and left hospital. He kept his promise to visit his mother and saw her most days until she died.

But long before that he and Sonia married. He made sure that he never told any of his three children that they were a disappointment. Indeed, it would have been untrue – they were not. He went out of his way to encourage them and praised them when they did well.

Now, as he approached his ninetieth birthday, he looked back at his life. He still loved Sonia as much as when they'd married. How many grandchildren did they have? Ten, wasn't it? And they had four great-grandchildren. He was sure there would be more.

He was very grateful that his pathetic attempt at suicide had failed all those years ago. Even ninety years is brief enough, he thought. How foolish it would have been to have passed one's life consumed with disappointment. He had found faith; he had a sure and firm hope and, above all, he had love which overcomes every disappointment.