

SORROW
TURNED INTO JOY

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by

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY BELOVED WIFE

SORROW TURNED INTO JOY

Messages of Comfort for Sorrowing Hearts

*“ He knoweth the way that I take : when he
hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold ”*

(JOB 23 : 10)

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P r e f a c e



I LOOK UPON IT AS A DUTY, most gladly undertaken, to publish this little book containing messages of comfort in memory of, and as a tribute to, my beloved wife. Ours was an exceptionally happy married life of just over 37 years' duration. We were quite different in temperament and disposition, but, both owning the Lordship of Christ, the blend made for an ideal marriage. Notwithstanding our trials it could not have been more felicitous.

For almost thirty years my wife was a sufferer, principally from ophthalmic troubles, but during that period she also underwent a major operation. In her earlier years she was most active in the Lord's service being in charge of a large primary department of the Sunday School, and engaging in all assembly activities, being particularly keen on open-air work. The leader often desired her to sing with her brother, as their voices blended so beautifully, and they would always draw a considerable crowd. She was wholly with me in all our many activities amongst the young people of the assembly. We kept open house for them and meetings were regularly held at home, especially of a missionary character. In all these activities I could not have had more loyal and whole-hearted support and encouragement.

In the earlier years of the affliction the corneal ulcers were most painful. If there was a little respite during winter months the trouble always recurred in the spring and some years both eyes were affected together. The best ophthalmic surgeons in three London hospitals were baffled. Despite

numerous tests and periods in hospital they seemed unable to discover what gave rise to the ulcers, and could only burn them off when the pain became unendurable. Often ulcers came on the margin of sight so that the resultant scars made the tissue non-transparent and eventually, to her natural grief, she became totally blind.

In 1942 her cup of sorrow was filled full. On 13th March our son, John, an only child, died suddenly and unexpectedly two days after his eighteenth birthday. Later that year, it may be as a result of the acute emotional stress, one eye became so painful and diseased that it had to be removed. When, in those later years, she was no longer able even to distinguish light from darkness, and became to a greater extent dependent upon others, although sometimes she chafed at the limitations, she manifested predominantly a cheerful and indomitable spirit. She never lost her interest in the Lord's work or in life generally. It was always a delight to be found at the meetings taking a most lively interest in those in fellowship, recognizing them after only a short time of acquaintance by the voice.

It was perhaps a supreme test to her love and devotion to the Lord that in 1950 she was willing to leave London, with all the relatives and friends there, for unknown Bath. However, she recognised that it was evidently of the Lord that I had been set free from the Civil Service, to help as an Editor and Treasurer of "Echoes of Service."

During the period of blindness she was in fellowship with three different assemblies — at Southport, Walthamstow and Bath. Her bright happy disposition, the entire absence of self pity, made her a general favourite, and friends were most kind and helpful particularly when I had to be away on the Lord's service. Not a few found her very presence a tonic and an inspiration.

After her Homecall in August 1957 many testimonies reached me. I quote from some : —

"We recall Mrs. Pulleng with joy and have spoken many times through the years of her bright spirit. We have come

to regard her as a shining example of true Christian serenity even in affliction. Your memories of her must be full of encouragement for you for you saw all this most intimately."

Another wrote — "It was always a benediction to me to meet Mrs. Pulleng and her constant cheerfulness was a wonderful testimony to the grace of God."

Another doctor friend wrote — "Mrs. Pulleng's sweetness and grace under such a long testing handicap and your unfailing devotion to her have been an inspiration to us all for many years."

Another speaker who came to various conferences at which we were present wrote — "Dear Mrs. Pulleng, she was one of the most delightful and sunny Christians I was ever privileged to meet and that in spite of the great trial and handicap of blindness and the terrible grief of losing your son."

Another ministering brother wrote — "Your dear one was a help and comfort to many. She loved her Lord dearly and sought to serve Him faithfully and devotedly. She has left a magnificent record behind her and many will rise up and call her blessed. By and by the greatest and grandest of all re-unions shall take place when the entire company of the redeemed, garmented in white, shall surround the throne praising Him Who loved them unto death, never again to be separated throughout a dateless eternity."

It was in that distressing year of 1942 that I wrote the article entitled "The Treasuries of Pain" which was published in the Witness of January 1943, and afterwards printed as a booklet. It bears the impress of the events of that year. Manifestly I was taught of God and comforted by Him as a result of the sufferings of my dear one. Doubtless He had several purposes in this, and one such surely is to comfort others with the comfort wherewith one has been comforted of God. In putting these messages into a more permanent form it is with the desire that others whom my voice may never reach will be blessed in the discovery that behind the mystery of the present lies a benignant over-ruling providence.

Yes, on a sudden she is young once more ;
Life's long fatigues are all for ever o'er ;
With steps more free than fall from girlhood's feet
She walks the blessed bowers and golden street.
'Tis youth, but richer youth than earth could know,
Dower'd with uncounted treasures won below ;
Immortal youth, that draws a deeper breath
For pilgrim-patience in a world of death ;
The long result and slowly-garner'd gain
Of heaven-given disciplines of joy and pain.

Handley Moule

For Now But Then

AT THE END OF HIS DISSERTATION on the nature of Christian love Paul vividly contrasts the present and the future in a dual manner. “For *now* we see through a glass darkly but *then* face to face.” i.e. — spiritual vision is now blurred, dim, imperfect, being clouded by earthly sights but in that glorious future, summed up in these alluring words “face to face”, all vagueness and uncertainty will be dispelled by that direct vision of God. *Now* I know in part — knowledge is limited, partial, incomplete in so many ways, but *then* shall I know even as also I am known. All questions will be resolved, every mystery made plain, when we fully know even as we are fully known.

It is inevitable that we should oft-times be deeply affected by this present time. Events occur which are of momentous significance to us as individuals, far-reaching in their effects, changing sometimes the whole course of life. Sometimes they are sad happenings — a knock at the door and the fateful telegram is handed in, intimating some sudden and unexpected loss which alters completely the future, or a happening in a remote part of the world may lead to the collapse of a business in which we thought we had a secure post with a comfortable competence, thus forcing us to face a bleak future. Or it may be the onset of some crippling disease which robs us of strength and ability to work, changing us into an invalid dependent upon others, which may cause perplexity and despair.

Such events affect us deeply ; they colour our thoughts and influence our plans. We cannot ignore them for we are

not able to shut ourselves away in some monastic seclusion. It is not intended that we should, but rather that, in those circumstances and conditions, we should prove and demonstrate to the world the reality and the sufficiency of the grace of God to sustain with calmness and poise of spirit.

Sometimes present events bring gladness. An apparently chance meeting, which in the providence of God soon shows that twin souls have been brought together, to make an ideal union, to mean much for personal happiness, and the furtherance of the Gospel. The attaining of some coveted scholastic honour, long sought for, and which opens up a vista of happy prospects, or the obtaining of a commercial post which places our feet firmly on the ladder of success; these are things which deeply affect us. Although this is, in measure, inevitable, nevertheless, there is the danger of an undue occupation with the time that now is, and if the present is coloured with deep sorrow, or some inexplicable and insoluble problem, we may well become depressed, discouraged, debilitated and so robbed of peace and joy. Or, if the present is full of dazzling and brilliant prospects there is the danger of being swamped with a materialistic spirit, or of becoming lethargic and of losing our zeal for the Lord. Either way, whether the present be full of perplexity or prosperity, it is good to have that glorious future prominently before our minds, to lay hold of the hope set before us fully and tenaciously.

There are several ways in which we might pursue the suggested contrast between the present and the future.

COMMUNION

Communion with God is indubitably the highest and loftiest privilege, and, yet, the most difficult occupation of the believer. To sit at His feet; to converse with Him; to listen to His voice making known His will to us in that mysterious way is to discover that the place at His feet is indeed glorious (Isa. 60 : 13).

I would commune with Thee my God
E'en to Thy seat I come
I leave my joys, I leave my sins
And seek in Thee my home.

Oh this is life ! Oh this is joy !
My God to find Thee so.
Thy face to see, Thy voice to hear
And all Thy love to know.

(G. B. Bubier)

How difficult it is to reach such an ideal ! We recognise the sentiments as being grand and wistfully reach out after them to find them so illusory even in corporate communion. True, most have experienced gatherings for worship when the veil which hides the unseen and eternal from us has seemed very thin, when souls have been transported so that the things which belong to earth have receded into the background, heaven has seemed to touch earth and souls have been hushed as His presence has been realised.

But such occasions are all too rare. Many things are against us in this restless busy age, when activity is almost worshipped and is so inimical to communion. Frequently we are like the bride in the song (Song of Solomon 2 : 9) as she sits in the arbour of the eastern garden. Suddenly, as she waits rapt in silent reverie, she becomes conscious of the presence of that loved figure, dimly seen as he looketh in at the windows and showeth himself at the lattice. However near He may seem to draw to us now in His communion there is always the lattice, the veil that hangs between. Our vision of the Lover of our souls is obscured, sometimes it may be through worldliness and carnality. It accentuates the sense of distance and we long for something more intimate and close. There is always the lattice. Sometimes we sing "Here we find the dawn of heaven while upon the cross we gaze," and in ecstasy of soul, heaven verily seems to draw near to us.

but it is only the dawn and what a difference between the dawn and the sun shining in meridian splendour !

Through the lattice I behold Him
Of the much-marred face,
My Redeemer, Lord and Master,
Full of truth and grace ;
There in glimpses, sweet though transient,
Doth His Form appear ;
And He speaks in accents tender
Words of love and cheer.

Through the lattice ! Ah, but faintly
Beams that love-lit Face ;
For the veil of flesh divides me
From His holy place ;
Yet my heart He ever draweth
Closer, closer still,
And my soul with deeper longings
More and more doth fill.

Thus, I wait this side the lattice,
Wait to hear Him say,
“ Winter now is past, my fair one,
Rise, and come away ;
Come unto the many mansions,
Fashioned not with hands,
Where My Father’s house eternal
Glory-lighted stands.”

There shall I His wondrous counsels
Perfectly discern,
There His boundless love and mercy
Through the ages learn ;

There, no lattice intervening,
But in close embrace,
Throned and crowned shall I behold Him
Of the much-marred face.
(*J. C. Jeffers*)

But *then* face to face. How difficult it is to explain this beautiful expression! How it draws our souls! It is the language of earth, borrowed in an attempt to express the wonder of that intimate communion of the redeemed in heaven. It is expressive of immediate proximity and of intimacy of communion. As our eyes open in eternity their gaze will be fastened upon the Lamb, as it were newly slain. Then we shall have eyes and heart for none other; we shall see no distracting sights and hear no conflicting voices, but be absorbed in adoration to worship in nobler sweeter strains.

CHARACTER

The second contrast is related to the transformation of character. Let two scriptures be set alongside each other. *Now*, — “But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are being changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3 : 18). *Then*, — “His servants shall serve him and they shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Rev. 22 : 3, 4). In 2 Cor. 3 : 18 there is an emphasis upon the word “all.” It is set in contrast to Moses who alone was privileged to pass through the bounds set at the foot of Mount Sinai, into the presence of God; the people had to tarry below. Now every believer, even the lowliest, may behold the glory of the Lord for there are no limitations as to persons, no privileged class. Moses veiled the face that shone with the radiance of God’s glory, albeit, to hide the diminishing glory as he got farther from the presence of God, but every believer with unveiled face is to behold the glory, and then to reflect that glory amongst men. The light that shone on

Moses' face was outward and ephemeral, but with the believer it is inward and works a transformation into His own likeness that shall abide.

Thus the Scripture suggests briefly four things —

- (1). There is, or should be, a transfiguration proceeding with us all (the word is the same as that used in Matt. 17 : 2).
- (2). This takes place as we behold the glory of Christ.
- (3). The change is into the image (*Ikon*), the likeness of Christ. The same word is used in Heb. 1 : 3. "The express image (*Ikon*) of His person."
- (4). We reflect what we behold.

What is the glory of Christ that we are to behold which effects such a transformation? It is not, of course, that incommunicable glory which belongs to His deity; but that glory of which John speaks as he tabernacled amongst men "full of grace and truth" (John 1 : 14). The glory which he manifested in speaking loving, tender, gracious words; the glory of those deeds of mercy and compassion which He wrought; the glory of God working through a dependent and perfectly obedient Man; the glory of a faultless and complete manhood.

The transformation of character will be achieved by a life of contemplation, of beholding Him, of meditation upon all that is recorded of Him in the Scriptures. And by beholding — just that — we are changed. The subtle indefinable power which perfects our characters, which changes us into His likeness lies in looking upon the Lord Jesus Christ. No mere casual glance will accomplish this, but a continual and intense gaze with hearts full of devotion and love which will draw us by silent and intensified longing into the likeness of His wondrous beauty who is fairer than the children of men. As, like the disciples, we sit at His feet to learn of him and ponder such sayings as the Beatitudes, insensibly we shall be drawn into a desire to see the formation of the same character in ourselves.

In earthly relationships it has been frequently found that those who live with each other for any length of time and love

strongly become like each other. It is even more true in the spiritual realm. Oh! that we may so contemplate, love, think about, and dwell in His presence that we absorb His spirit; that we may behold and be like Him.

The immediate purpose is that we may reflect Christ. What we *see* we shall *show* — neither more nor less. If our hearts are beholding Christ He will be mirrored and manifested in them. And men ought to see that image so plainly as to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

Now! We see the ideal, we know what we ought to do, how to do it and the result which will accrue, but the process seems such a slow one. We have to confess that we are not much like Him. We do not look often and long enough. It is so difficult to overcome hereditary dispositions or to secure times of unhurried contemplation and meditation. We do not take time to be holy. We do not behold with sufficient intensity of affection or ardour of desire for likeness, and the change, therefore, is so gradual, indeed, almost imperceptible.

But then! Now we see dimly, but then all veils will be removed. We shall see Him even as He is and we shall be like Him, at last conformed to the image of God's dear Son; this lowly body being fashioned like unto His own body of glory. Now darkly, but then "face to face"; "they shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads." Then, not only perfect communion but perfect likeness attained at last, and, furthermore, a perfect reflection. Name in Scripture connotes character. It is not simply a tag. As the name of anyone we may know intimately is mentioned, the whole personality rises before the mind, so the name of Christ includes all His lovely character. Thus it is the character of the Christ which will be seen in our foreheads, where others may discern it, not on our breasts, lest we be tempted to vaunt. This unconsciousness of the radiance on the face is part of the splendour, being aware of it would dim the brightness. *Then* we shall be to the praise of His glory: the glory of His grace wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. Meantime may our patient longing be as Samuel Rutherford's when he says,

Oh! for eternity's leisure to look on Him,
 To feast upon a sight of His face!
 Oh! for the long summer day of endless ages
 To stand before Him and to enjoy Him.
 Oh! time, Oh! sin be removed out of the way.
 Oh! fairest of days dawn.

COMPREHENSION

This is the third aspect in which this Scripture may be viewed. In our understanding of the events of life, of divine providence, how true it is "We see through a glass darkly." Life is often very much of an enigma — we know but in part. When Paul says "Now I know in part" he uses the word "*ginosko*" as distinct from "*oida*." *Ginosko* signifies understanding completely, and belongs to the realm of experience, frequently indicating an active relationship between the person knowing and the person known. *Oida* signifies rather intellectual perception, is related to knowledge gained from human observation, and is often intuitive in character. When Paul says, "Then shall I know even as also I am known" he uses the strengthened form of the word *epiginosko* — i.e. to fully perceive and understand. The familiar words of John 13:7 are relevant and are also illustrative of the distinction between "*oida*" and "*ginosko*." "Jesus answered and said unto him (Peter), what I do thou knowest (*oida*) not now but thou shalt know (*ginosko*) hereafter." Thus the Lord says to Peter, you do not perceive the significance of my act now, you have no intuitive knowledge even, but you will understand hereafter. The two words occur together again in John 21:17 — "Lord Thou knowest (*oida*) all things, Thou knowest (*ginosko*) that I love Thee."

In this present life the believer is at school, in a sense on probation. God is teaching us lessons and developing qualities of character. He is disciplining us so that we should understand what we are to renounce and turn from, and how we are to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age (Titus 2:12).

We may not understand the purpose of life's discipline, or, at least, only in part, any more than the pupil understands at first the intention of certain lessons which have to be learned at school. Certainly the problems and enigmas which seem to belong inseparably to the lives of many believers are not so easily solved as those of the child at school — there the school master has only to turn the blackboard round for all the answers to be known.

With ourselves the question "Why?" often springs involuntarily to our lips. Nevertheless, it is possible to know in part. Shafts of light shine from the pages of Scripture to illumine what would otherwise be unrelieved darkness.

Peter declares that the manifold temptations which come upon us and which, although of limited duration, bring great heaviness of spirit, are really for the purpose of testing and demonstrating the reality of our faith. As we for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully; as we are reviled and accounted as the off-scouring of the earth; as we are maligned as evil doers and falsely accused; as we are reproached for the name of Christ and become partakers of His sufferings, faith grows with the testing. Indeed, it becomes to God more precious than gold that perisheth. And we are helped to know at least this, that after we have suffered a while there is developed a spiritual maturity, and we are strengthened, stablished, and settled (1 Peter 5 : 10).

We may know in part as, in our trials, we ponder Hebrews 12 : 6-11. Thus we learn the Lord loveth those whom He chastens, that there is a kindly beneficent purpose in it all, that it is for our profit, for the direct result of being partaker of His chastisement is that we shall become a partaker of His holiness. Further, we discover that having passed through such experiences we are able to lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.

Similarly, Paul in 2 Cor. 1 : 7 shows not only that the sufferings endured are perfectly matched by the encouragement or consolation granted, but that also as a direct consequence we are able to comfort others by the comfort where-

with we have been comforted of God. Blessed indeed to know this! F. W. Robertson says: "If you would aspire to be a son of consolation; if you would partake of the priestly gift of sympathy; if you would pour something beyond commonplace consolation into the tempted heart; if you would pass through the intercourse of daily life with the delicate tact that never inflicts pain: you must be content to pay the price of a costly education — like Him, you must suffer."

In verse 6 Paul says, "And whether we be afflicted it is for your consolation and salvation." How are we to understand this unless Paul is suggesting that one reason behind his suffering was that when the Corinthians came to suffer also they would be fortified to endure, and led to experience consolation and salvation by the knowledge of the manner in which Paul had been encouraged? No man liveth unto himself. Even in the experience of suffering we have a far-reaching and blessed influence on the lives of others. Later in the epistle Paul says, "All things are for your sakes" (2 Cor. 4:15). In the preceding verses Paul sets forth a list of the trials through which he had passed and their effects. So he finds comfort in the fact that such trials were not meaningless, but were, in some sense, for the sake of the believers in Corinth and presumably elsewhere also. Such was the case, for they witnessed how grace was abundantly bestowed upon him to match the trials, and enabled him to endure though the outward man was perishing. It was so manifest that this was done in no strength of his own so that they were full of thanksgiving and glorified God. Dr. F. W. Boreham reminds us in one of his books that when, in 1856, David Livingstone stood up in the crowded Glasgow University to receive the degree of Doctor of Laws which the University had conferred upon him, bearing the marks of his struggles and sufferings in darkest Africa, with his left arm, torn by a lion, helpless at his side, he was received in silence. Instead of the customary applause, a hush fell upon the assembly. Those who had gathered that day to confer upon

that great servant of Christ an honour, looked into his face of suffering, and were challenged by its greatness.

Yet, notwithstanding all the comfort which may be derived from such revelations, to many it is so true — we know in part. But *then!* “Ah,” says Paul, “we shall fully know even as we are fully known.” We shall gaze upon Him face to face and all the enigmas will be solved and the questions will die away on our lips unasked. Looking back then over life’s history, with the discipline of school terminated, we shall realize that our times have been in His hand; He has known the end from the beginning, that behind the apparently inexplicable happenings of life a beneficent providence has been working. Then we, and angels, will find, as Peter says, that the trial of our faith has been so precious to Him and has brought honour and glory to Him. What a blessed discovery this will be! The French have a saying — “Suffering passes; to have suffered abides for ever.” Then in that glorious “afterward” will be discovered in fuller degree the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Now, the long and toilsome duty
 Stone by stone to carve and bring;
 Afterward, the perfect beauty
 Of the palace of the King.

Now, the spirit conflict-riven,
 Wounded heart, unequal strife;
 Afterward, the triumph given,
 And the victor’s crown of life.

Now, the training, strange and lowly,
 Unexplained and tedious now;
 Afterward, the service holy,
 And the Master’s “Enter thou!”

(*F. R. Havergal*)

Job was one who could but see through a glass darkly, who did not understand that mysterious aspect of his suffering wherein he was being called upon to vindicate the character of God, but he is able to say, "When He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold."

A brother was visiting a sister in hospital who had been called upon to pass through severe bereavement, and had been informed she was suffering from an incurable disease. The thought of leaving dependent children behind in an unfriendly world greatly distressed her. The brother sought to comfort, as best he could, and among the Scriptures quoted 1 Cor. 13 : 12. For a while she was silent, and then a smile of peace and calm spread over her countenance, and with deep feeling she said, "*Then* shall I know."

From the dust of the weary highway,
From the smart of sorrows' rod,
Into the royal presence,
They are bidden as guests of God.

The veil from their eyes is taken,
Sweet mysteries they are shown,
Their doubt and fears are over,
For they know as they are known.

(Selected)

Thy Burden

THE PSALMIST says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee" (Psalm 55 : 22). *Thy Burden.* Yes, there are burdens which belong to us and which cannot be borne by others, for they are not transferable. It is a peculiarity of life, with which we are all familiar, that many of its experiences are our own. Each lives a good deal of his life alone. Human love may draw near in deepest sympathy and complete willingness to lift the burden or to share it, but it is not possible. Help can sometimes be given, but only in matters external. The burdens which belong to life's deepest personal experience no one can carry for us or even share.

True, Paul says, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ," but he also says in the same context "for every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6 : 2-5). The context in which Paul exhorts us to bear another's burden is in relation to a fallen brother who has been overtaken in a fault. The word overtaken suggests the sudden onslaught of some sin which has sprung upon him like a wild beast, and has overpowered him. It is a glaring case of inconsistency, a reputation has been gravely tarnished, and Paul urges if you are spiritual you will seek to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. The same word is used of mending the broken meshes of a fishing net, and for setting the fractured bone of a limb. The same command would appropriately apply to cases of pecuniary distress, and where heavy duties and sorrows fall upon an individual. Indeed, all the ills that flesh is heir to. Sympathy and practical help as circumstances require can be rendered, nevertheless there are burdens which cannot be borne by any but the man himself.

THY BURDEN

We stand with a sister around the grave of her beloved partner in life. Our hearts are sore as we see her grief ; we weep with her, try to express our sympathy, and even as the words come falteringly from our lips we are only too conscious how dreadfully inadequate they are — the burden of bereavement is borne alone.

A dear one suffers pain continuously and unrelieved. We may be pitiful and even offer advice, but can do no more. A brother once wrote concerning a sufferer, " I feel she has suffered enough pain, I wish I could bear some of it for her." The sentiment was beautifully and sincerely expressed, but he perforce added, " but humanly speaking that is impossible." The burden of pain is borne alone.

A young man suffers fierce temptation. It comes to him repeatedly, and may be of such a character that even closest friends are unaware of it, or if known, the most that can be done is to pray. He struggles with his temptation alone.

If our friends are unable to take our burden from us, neither does God promise to do so. For the Psalmist says the result of casting thy burden upon the Lord is not that the Lord will take it away from you, but that " He shall sustain thee."

In other words, the burden remains with us, but the promise is that while we bear our burden, whatever it is, the Lord will sustain us. He will give us strength to continue doing His will calmly, resolutely, not indifferent to, but undeterred by, the load we carry. (Cf. 1 Cor. 10 : 13.)

We are, however, exhorted to cast our anxiety on Him because " He careth for you " (I Peter 5 : 7 R.V.). Self torment, aimless fear of possible evil we must fling upon God. Whatever is left of burden and trial will strengthen and ennoble us.

An experience in Paul's life furnishes an illustration of this. He prayed thrice and ardently for the removal of that thorn in the flesh. And, not for selfish reasons only, such

as to be delivered from pain. He felt it was a hindrance in his work for the Lord. How much less restricted he would be if rid of it! Nevertheless, the Lord did not take away the thorn. Paul had to keep and endure it, but there descended upon him a sufficiency of grace to sustain both him and the thorn, enabling him to continue in the Lord's service not only with fruitfulness, but joyously radiant. The result was far-reaching, for it enabled him to transmit that message of such comfort and help to multitudes of subsequent burden-bearers, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and to declare triumphantly, "most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

HE SHALL SUSTAIN THEE

It is a comforting promise, but if the margin of the R.V. be noted, something further is suggested. The literal meaning of the Hebrew is, "Cast that he hath given thee upon the Lord." The burden becomes the gift. Ah! if we could but realise and accept this, how it would hallow and transform in our estimation that which hitherto we have looked upon as a burden. We had thought of it only as evil, the effect upon us being hurtful, marring our happiness, at best to be endured as stoically as possible. But, now, to implicit trust, to absolute confidence in the wisdom and affection of an all-loving Father, we see in it another of God's blessings, not evil but good, intended not so much to hurt us, but to help us onwards. A gift is a token and pledge of love. God sent this gift to us because He loves us.

The burden of pain which robs us of so much comfort and pleasure in life, distressing to mind as well as body; the burden of sorrow, and no sorrow seems for the present to be joyous, but always grievous; the burden of some crippling loss, stripping us of so many of life's pleasant things — can these things be God's gift of love? It is hard for us to understand them so. Yet, we do know that God is our Father, and that His love for us never fails. Whatever comes

from His hand to us must be sent in love. Though, perhaps, grievous to sense, it brings to us some precious thing from the treasury of Divine love. To so look upon it will make it almost sacred. The burden may not always be easy to carry, but we shall become strong in bearing it. Above all, that Sustaining One is always near, giving the help we need, that we may never faint beneath it. Thus we may know that our burden is our Father's gift to us.

A Christian doctor, whose career had been full of noble ministry, tells how as a boy he was poor and a cripple. One day he was watching some other boys at play. They were active, strong, and healthy. As he looked on, his heart grew bitter with envy. A young man who stood beside him noted the discontent on his face, and said to him, "You wish you were in those boys' place, don't you?" — "Yes, I do," was the answer. "I reckon God gave them money, education, and health, to help them to be of some account in the world. Did it never strike you," he continued, after a moment's pause, "that he gave you your lame leg for the same reason, to make a man of you?" The crippled boy gave no answer, and turned away. He was angry, but he did not forget the words. His crippled leg God's gift! To teach him patience, courage, perseverance! To make a man of him! He thought of the words till he saw their meaning. They kindled hope and cheer, and he determined to conquer his hindrance. He grew heroic. He soon learned that what was true of his lame leg was true also of all the difficulties, hindrances, and hard conditions of his life — they were all God's gifts to him to help him to be of some account in the world — to make a man of him.

"Thy burden is God's gift,
And it will make the bearer calm and strong;
Yet, lest it press too heavily and long,
He says, 'Cast it on Me,
And it shall easy be'."

Our Burden Bearer

IN THE SECTION OF ISAIAH embracing Chapters 40 to 48 there is a repeated comparison between Jehovah and idols. Thrice the challenge is thrown out, "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal?" (Isa. 40 : 18, 25 ; 46 : 5). In chapter 46 the prophet reminds the children of Judah in terse, graphic terms that idolators collect their gold and silver at the cost of much personal sacrifice, and then commission a goldsmith to make them an idol. Lo! there it is installed in a temple, and the amazing fact is that they fall down and worship that inanimate and powerless creation of the goldsmith's art. What happens? They just carry their god around in lordly procession, set him up in a place and then remove him. It is all so futile. In times of national calamity they cry to him, but he is powerless to answer or save (v. 7).

What lesson in this has God to teach us? Just this, men carry their idols around, support their self-made religion, but in contrast God says: "I will bear, I will carry, I will deliver" (v. 4). By way of illustration the prophet foretells what would happen to the much-vaunted gods of Babylon when the city would be captured by the Medes and Persians. In Dan. 5 there is a graphic description of the last night of the Babylonian dynasty with Belshazzar making a voluptuous feast for "a thousand of his lords" in utter contempt of the besieging army.

As they drank their wine, and the dissipation increased, they praised the gods of gold and silver — Nebo and Bel in particular. The God of the Jews! Belshazzar would show what he thought of that God, and called for the sacred vessels, ransacked from the temple, and used them in that licentious

orgy. Belshazzar trusted in the gods of Babylon and the great walls of the city. The writing of doom was on the wall of his palace. Even in the midst of the carousal the course of the river Euphrates, which divided the city, was being turned, and the hosts of Darius marched under the gates to surprise the garrison and overwhelm the city in a matter of hours. The blood of kings and nobles flowed freely over the marble floors of the palace.

It is possible that the final and most sanguinary conflicts took place in the precincts of idol temples and priests fell around the altars they served. And what of the much-vaunted idols? Rough soldiers took them down from their lofty pedestals, and unceremoniously loaded them either on to the backs of elephants, or flung them into ox-drawn carts (Isa. 46 : 1). They could not deliver themselves but were taken into captivity (v. 2). How ignominious! Previously they had been borne in procession amidst the acclamation of devotees, but now they are borne away contemptuously as so much mere baggage by these sun-worshippers from Persia who had scant regard for such idols.

‘‘HEARKEN UNTO ME’’ (v. 3)

God calls upon the house of Jacob to hearken, for He has an important message for them, and a lesson to be learned. In contrast to the importance of idols, whether they be Bel or Nebo or any others, He declares “ . . . will I carry you : I have made, and I will bear ; even I will carry, and will deliver you,” and that “ even to your old age . . . and even to hoar hairs ” (v. 4). God is thus the great Burden Bearer. What a vivid contrast there is between religions which men carry, and a religion which carries men !

The first great burden which He has borne is the burden of sin, the greatest of all. As this same prophet declares, “ He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ” — “ He shall bear their iniquities ” (Isa. 53 : 4, 11). “ It pleased the Lord to bruise Him,” and there was laid on Christ the iniquity of us all. Thus John the Baptist significantly cries, “ Behold

the Lamb of God, which taketh (or 'beareth,' R.V. margin) away the sin of the world" (John 1 : 29). That great burden He took up, lifted it, and carried it away, so that our sins and iniquities would be remembered against us no more for ever. "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," when God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Oh, glad never-to-be-forgotten day when the burden of sin was removed, and we went on our way rejoicing !

But there is so much more implied here. To know Christ as the Bearer of sin is glorious, but in all that pertains to the Christian life, however diversified its character, and to whatever age we may live, He bears us from within, supporting us and our burdens.

"He breathes into us the strength by which we can carry the heavy task of duties, and endure the crushing pressure of sorrows. All the endurance of the saints is God in them bearing their burdens" (MacLaren).

We emerge all too soon from adolescence to discover, albeit gradually, that life brings burdens. For some, heavy responsibilities have to be shouldered. It may be the support and the guidance of a growing family in an age of ever increasing temptation to carnal indulgence. It may be the care of a business or profession in a highly competitive age which makes such demands as tax physical and mental resources to the utmost. Some again are called upon to bear responsibility for aged, and, possibly invalid parents. And none of us can ignore completely the need of tempted and possibly persecuted believers around us, or in the wide world without.

Adolescents facing life with all its boundless possibilities are perplexed to determine God's purpose, and, when this is discovered, are burdened to pursue it diligently to its intended goal. Then, oftentimes, there flashes upon us a sense of accountability ; that we must face the *bema* of Christ, and we become concerned as to the conscientious use of talents entrusted to us. To us all He says, "I will carry. I will bear."

THE ASSURANCE

God supplies an assurance or confirmation in the statement, "I have *made*, and I will bear." We are His purchased possession, belonging to Him as bought with a price. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2 : 10). We are 'partakers of the divine nature,' in fact made 'a new creation in Christ.' We have been sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10 : 10).

Of Israel, in relation to the great deliverance from Pharaoh, it is said, "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. 19 : 4), and later, "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them ; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. 63 : 9). Well might the Psalmist exclaim, "Blessed be the Lord who daily beareth our burden" (Psa. 68 : 19. R.V.). Rule and dignity, are the predominant ideas in the word "Lord", and yet there is blended the notion of condescension as He stoops to be the burden bearer of all who trust in Him. He that 'sitteth upon the circle of the earth and before whom the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers' is the God that daily beareth our burdens. If God has made us, and planted within us certain spiritual appetites and desires He will satisfy them. If we are His children, born of His Spirit, brought into His family, then we may be sure He will care for us. If He has committed to us certain tasks and responsibilities in His service, however much they may be beyond our natural ability to shoulder, He will furnish all that is needed for the task. The work which He has begun, the building of a spiritual character, He will complete. In days of temptation and stress, anxiety and foreboding, when facing the unknown future, let us then derive comfort from the words, "I have made, I will bear even to old age and hoar hairs."

The Lord Waits To Be Gracious

ISAIAH 30 : 18

THE THIRTIETH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH is in the nature of a sermon preached by Isaiah to the people of Judah when it had been decided to contract an alliance with Egypt and an embassy loaded with treasures was already on its way South (v. 6). A tug-of-war had been going on in the court of the King for some time. The two great powers of Isaiah's day were Assyria and Egypt. They eyed each other with suspicion and fear, watching anxiously lest one should gain an advantage and upset the balance of power either by conquest or by alliance with the smaller nations lying between them, such as Phenecia, Philistia, Syria, Damascus, Edom, Moab, besides Judah and Israel.

When the military leader, Tiglath Pileser II ascended the throne of Assyria he was determined upon world conquest, and proceeded to overwhelm one small State after another. There was an oriental savagery about the methods of Assyria. The annals of their kings are full of dreadful accounts of atrocities as indeed are some of the historical books of the Old Testament. The peoples of conquered nations were ruthlessly up-rooted and transported to remote parts of the Empire. In these circumstances Ahaz deemed it expedient to offer tribute to Assyria in an attempt to stave off the evil day. Thus to the majority in Israel, Jehovah had ceased to be an effective force. It became the role of the prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah to proclaim that Jehovah was Sovereign over the whole world, and supreme even over Assyria.

Judah soon wearied of paying tribute to Assyria and sought an ally. First Ethiopia, then a power to be reckoned

with, sent an embassy with an offer of help. Strengthened by the uncompromising stand taken by Isaiah, Hezekiah, despite pressure from his courtiers, refused their help. Subsequently Egypt came. Isaiah insisted that any treaty would be in vain. Egypt would probably sit still and do nothing. In any case they were a long way off, and if, as seemed so probable, Assyria swooped suddenly it would be a case of "too late" and "too few." However, the influential band of courtiers felt alliance with Egypt was their only hope and resource, and eventually they won the day.

Thus it was that Isaiah preached to the people, describing them as rebellious in not asking help of Jehovah, but, instead, seeking to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh (v. 2). The help of the Egyptians would be utterly in vain and to no purpose; they would just sit still and do nothing (v. 7). It would be like trusting in a shadow, so fleeting and unreliable, and could only lead to their confusion (v. 3). Judah was like a tottering high wall with a huge bulge which would soon fall and break so that there would not be a piece large enough to carry a little water, or fire from the hearth (v. 14). "Your only hope," he declares, "is in returning to God, resting and expressing confidence in Him — that will be your strength and thus you will be saved" (v. 15). What was the response of Judah? They said, "Get out of the way," we do not want to hear what the Holy One of Israel would say to us (v. 11). We now have promise of horses and chariots in abundance; we will run at the enemy. On the contrary, scornfully replies the prophet, "at the battle cry of one of the enemy a thousand of you will flee whilst when five cry out the whole nation will run away" (v. 16, 17). Therefore will the Lord wait. He will do nothing until you do return and acknowledge your folly and declare your utter dependence upon Him. When you do so, "He will be very gracious to you at the voice of thy cry" (v. 19).

Thus it transpired. The Assyrian host by-passed Judah, knocked out Egypt with one decisive blow and turned back to overthrow Jerusalem. The court were dismayed. Isaiah had

been right after all! Rabshakeh was sent by the King of Assyria to Jerusalem with a great army (36 : 2). Rabshakeh, in an impious message addressed to the people, sought to destroy any confidence Israel may have had. He pleads with them not to listen to Hezekiah who is evidently seeking to get the people to trust in the Lord (36 : 15). He pointed to the inability of the gods of other lands to deliver their peoples from the Assyrian conquering army, and postulates that Israel could not, therefore, expect any deliverance from the Lord (36 : 18-20).

Hezekiah spread the whole matter before the Lord and in this day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy returns to the Lord, leading the people, stimulated by the heartening words of Isaiah, "Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard wherewith the servants of the King of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold I will send a blast upon him." Thus returning to the Lord, resting in full confidence in Him they found their strength and deliverance. The Lord who waited that they should learn this lesson was indeed then very gracious at the voice of their cry (30 : 19). The blast fell. The angel of the Lord smote 185,000 of the flower of Sennacherib's army with death during the night hours. How graphically has the poet depicted this dramatic event : —

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming with purple and gold,
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

But the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed,
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still.

And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail,
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances uplifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal,
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Has melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.

Sennacherib returned home in shame to be slain later by two of his sons. Assyrian records pass over the event in silence but the Egyptians have a record of it. A statue was erected in Egypt to commemorate this event, and the figure holds a mouse in one hand. Appended is the inscription "Whosoever looks at me let him fear the gods." The disaster may have been caused by cholera or some virulent plague, but we need not limit God to known means. What an encouragement is thus afforded by this incident to have implicit faith in God, and never to resort to any compromise or expediency in the spiritual life !

The words, "The Lord waits that He might be gracious" have thus been examined strictly in accord with their context. They embody, however, a truth of general application to the spiritual life. The Lord often waits. He does not answer our earnest petitions at once. We get impatient, fretful, restless, almost vexatious, at the delay which appears so purposeless. We know God could deliver, supply the desired object, but for some unexplained purpose He refrains from so doing. The delay is not due to caprice, nor is it due to indifference or negligence. Behind all lies a beneficent purpose. He waits to be gracious. The delay is part of life's discipline. He chastens those He loves. We are precious indeed to Him. The delays are by no means denials.

Paul says, "Now I know in part but then shall I fully know even as also I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13 : 12). Looking back over life's history we come to understand, at least in part, the reasons why God did not answer immediately but waited. As one has said, delay never thwarts God's purpose but polishes His instrument.

1. *In the waiting period we come to an end of our own resources.* We discover our limitations. While we felt we

could do something ourselves we were permitted to try. The self life becomes worn out with long waiting. Whatever it may seem at the time, it is a gracious thing which God does when He destroys all self assertiveness and pride in our capacities.

The stilling of the storm on lake Galilee is illustrative of this (Mark 4 : 35-41 and Luke 8 : 22-25). When the Lord announced His desire to pass over to the other side it seems that Peter and the other apostles assumed charge. It was they "who launched forth"; "they took Him even as He was into the ship." He was to be a passenger, not the pilot. They knew the vagaries of the lake, the way to steer and get safely across. It was not long before they came to an end of their puny resources. The Master lay asleep, apparently oblivious of their difficulties, and what they considered to be grave danger. At length, facing disaster apparently, they awoke the Lord. The imperious words, "Peace be still" were uttered, and immediately there was a great calm. He waited, allowing them to get into a great extremity, but only that they might get to know Him and His power in a way that previous miracles had failed to accomplish. Thus they exclaim, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4 : 41).

Similarly in the other lake scene we read that the Lord constrained the disciples to get into a ship while He went to a mountain apart to pray (Matt. 14 : 22-23). The language suggests that the disciples were unwilling to be parted from the Lord; perhaps being vaguely apprehensive of impending trouble. As they were tossed with the waves, the wind being contrary, they toiled in their rowing. They must have wondered at the Lord's absence through the long hours of that dreadful night. He waited and only came eventually in the fourth watch. He waited to be gracious for it enabled them to say, "Of a truth Thou art the Son of God."

2. *In the waiting period we often cease to want the objects upon which we had set passionate desire. We come to discern that God had good reasons for with-holding and are*

thankful. How often little things have been denied us that the larger things might be granted! The sisters of Bethany earnestly desired that the Lord would hasten to their side with all speed as they sent the moving message, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." Although the scripture says explicitly that He loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, nevertheless, quite deliberately, the Lord abode where He was until Lazarus was buried and corruption had set in. The sisters were persuaded that if only the Lord had come in time their brother would not have died, but He waited only to be gracious. Otherwise they would never have experienced the thrill of seeing death vanquished, and their loved brother loosed from the grave clothes. They would never have known the Saviour as the Resurrection and the Life or hear Him say, "He that believeth on Me, though he were dead yet shall he live" (John 11 : 25). Further, what an untold blessing these words have been to a multitude of believers since that day! He waited to be gracious.

3. *The discipline of delay leads to the development of Christian character.* It is thus that lessons of faith, patience and humility are best learned. The forty years in the desert in the school of God must have seemed a long wearisome time to Moses ere he was ready to become the leader of the Exodus. But what a man he became — meek above all the men which are upon the face of the earth! (Numbers 12 : 3).

Abraham waited 25 long years between the promise of an heir and the birth of Isaac. True there was one lapse wherein he failed to wait but he believed in God and it was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15 : 6). They long delay must have been very mysterious to Abraham, but what heights of faith he reached culminating in the offering up of that heir. He became the Friend of God, and the Father of all them that believe.

David was anointed king of Israel in boyhood, but he had to wait until mature manhood before he ascended the throne of Israel. On two occasions Saul lay at his mercy, but despite remonstrance by perplexed followers he refused to slay

the Lord's anointed. He preferred to wait God's way and time for enthronement. Strange indeed were the experiences through which he passed during the years that the Lord waited. What precious lessons were thus learned! Lessons which fitted him to be a man after God's own heart, the sweet singer of Israel, so that through the many psalms which he wrote, mostly during the period of waiting, an untold blessing has been bestowed upon the people of God for all time.

How beautifully the prophet concludes the verse under consideration with the words, "Blessed are all they who wait for Him!" The Lord waits, but we must also wait for Him. We dare not emulate impetuous Saul who could not wait for the arrival of Samuel and presumed to usurp functions which were not his with disastrous spiritual results.

Then in chapter 26 : 8 the prophet declares that "in the way of Thy judgments O Lord have we waited for Thee." The blessed issues, following this waiting for the Lord, are indicated in the preceding verse, namely, the way of the just was directed to a prosperous issue; the path of the just was weighed with infinite solicitude and tenderness.

The prophet unfolds another blessing which falls to those who patiently wait for Him. He says that God is working for such (64 : 4 R.V.). So amidst the silence and gloom that may envelop life's pathway let us dare to believe that God is working out His purposes and is preparing us for the fuller appreciation of those heavenly joys and blessings which He is preparing for them that love Him (1 Cor. 2 : 9). All things are working together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8 : 28). In the afflictions common to so many lives He is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4 : 17). When the waiting period is over it will indeed seem light affliction in comparison with the weight of glory which has become ours. He is ever working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight (Heb. 13 : 21). Blessed indeed are all they who wait for Him who, in the waiting period, is constantly working and preparing on the behalf of His own.

Sorrow Transmuted

AS THE SAVIOUR draws near to the end of His farewell talk with His intimate band of disciples, they realize at last the significance of previous somewhat veiled references to His impending death. They say, "Lo, now Thou speakest plainly and speakest no proverb" (John 16: 29). He is about to leave them, "A little while and ye shall not see Me" (John 16: 16). They are to be bereft of that One whom they had grown to love so passionately, who, they were persuaded, knew all things, and who, they were convinced, came forth from God. How much they would miss Him, the Saviour alone fully knew! And He says, "Ye shall weep and lament," and, then, using words describing more poignant distress, declares, "Ye shall be sorrowful." Their sorrow would, perhaps, be intensified by the fact that the world would rejoice.

Then the Master makes this wonderful promise, "But your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16: 20). Your sorrow will be very deep and real, but it is going to be changed into joy and so become joy. For it is not so much that sorrow would be taken away, and that joy would take its place (i.e., to be changed for joy), but that the cause of sorrow would become the source of rejoicing. Sorrow transmuted! Further, that joy would be independent of circumstances, for "No man taketh it from you," whatever may be the opposition and hostility in a persecuting world.

How was this to be? He says, "Ye shall see Me." "Ye now, therefore, have sorrow, but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice."

The historical and immediate fulfilment of these words lies in the resurrection. For almost three days the Cross was the occasion of intense sorrow, of near panic and abject

despair, but when the fact of the resurrection dawned upon them, that which had been the occasion for their deep grief, for their apparently hopeless despair, suddenly became transformed into a joy that was indeed full. Fear is dissipated as He stands in their midst, saying, "Peace be unto you." As He then showed them His hands and side, it is said, "then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20 : 20).

They saw Him, however, for a brief period only in His resurrection body, for soon they were to know Him no more after the flesh. Nevertheless, although He speaks of leaving the world and going to the Father, He yet says, "Ye shall see Me" (John 16 : 16, 17). The secret of the transmutation of their sorrow lay in the fact that they would see Him, see Him with the eyes of faith. He would become real to them. They would still be in the world, physically, and would have tribulation, but, spiritually, they would be in Christ, and would thus have peace in Him who is the Overcomer of the world (John 16 : 33).

"Ye shall be sorrowful . . . In the world ye shall have tribulation." How true this is in the experience of most believers ! One of earth's heaviest sorrows is sudden, unexpected bereavement, the loss of a life-partner upon whom one has leaned for support and help, leaving a sense of devastating loss. Life seems so empty. A heavy torpor hangs over the spirit, and all zest for life has disappeared. Or, it may be the sorrow of some intense disappointment ; something in life has not turned out as we hoped, an opportunity has been missed and gone beyond recall, a mistake has been made and we feel we can never be the same again : God's first choice for us has been bungled. That is a grievous sorrow. Or, it may be some serious and permanent impairment of health, the loss of some limb, or priceless faculty, and instead of a busy life we are compelled to live as a recluse. If this comes in the prime of life it can mean unassuageable grief. "Ye shall be sorrowful" : it is the inevitable concomitant of life. But your sorrow shall be turned to joy. How ? The Lord

is biding His time. We do not see Him when preoccupied with our sorrow.

Soon we may begin to discover that there is benignant purpose in His will. That the pain which goes before is inseparable from the gain which follows ; not only inseparable, but not to be compared with it. Our Lord uses the illustration of a woman in the travail of child-birth soon forgetting all the anguish for the joy of the child born. As one has beautifully said, "Our distresses are to be viewed as the oyster-shell and as the matrix in which God's pearl can be fashioned."

"Ye shall see Me." He says, also : "*I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice*" (John 16 : 22). *Ye shall see Me : I will see you.* Here are two ways of expressing the same mutual relationship, and both suggest, as the foundation of sorrow being transmuted into joy, the fact that communion with the Lord, and a real sense of His presence will correspond to sight. There is, however, a difference of emphasis. "Ye shall see me" fixes attention upon us and our perception of Him. "I will see you" stresses rather His beholding of us. "Ye shall see Me" suggests our occupation with Him, and, of finding transcendent joy and bliss in Him. "I will see you" predicates His perfect knowledge, and His loving care of us, so that He may communicate His peace and joy without measure. "Ye shall see Me." Oh, may we see Him through our griefs, be led so to love Him as to yearn for His dear companionship, that the eternal Lover of our souls may come to mean more to us than the sorrowful experience — whatever that has been. That we may no longer be consumed with self-pity, engrossed and engulfed in personal sorrow, but, turning from our losses, receive Him afresh to discover the truth of His words. "In Me ye might have peace . . . be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "I will see you." May we so abide in Him as to derive, without intermission a consciousness of His gracious and bountiful provision to offset completely all the calamities and distresses which may befall us. Seeing Him, and being seen by Him sorrow will be transmuted.

Perfect Peace

THE PROMISE, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace" (Isa. 26 : 3), is conditional, firstly, upon the mind being stayed upon Jehovah, and, secondly, on an implicit trust in the Lord. Isaiah, chapter 26, is part of a hymn of thanksgiving which the prophet declares the faithful remnant will sing on their return from the Babylonian captivity.

Perfect peace! How this allures us at all times, but alas! eludes us so often. To maintain a calm poise of spirit is easy when there is nothing to disturb the even tenor of life. But when threatened with some seemingly insupportable loss, when faced with a serious operation, or the loss of some precious faculty indispensable to obtaining a livelihood, or a bereavement which leaves us desolate and forlorn, how difficult then to know peace and tranquility of soul, still more, perfect peace.

It would be unwise to apply all the promises contained in Isaiah to believers in this dispensation, but it is appropriate to consider the indicated conditions which make perfect peace of mind possible.

A MIND STAYED ON JEHOVAH

The R.V.M. suggests that the word "mind" could be translated "imagination." Indeed, the word is thus translated in Genesis 6 : 5, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually." "Whose *imagination* is stayed upon Thee!" The change is significant. Imagination is a gift which has its delights and dangers. Children often

live for a time in a world of fantasy. They imagine themselves to be persons of their dreams and attempt to act accordingly. It is all so vivid and delightful, if short-lived. Of its dangers most adults are fully aware. It is so easy to dwell upon what we think is going to happen, so to brood over possibilities that those feared events seem quite inevitable. How apt we are to put the worst possible construction upon events! To bring, by anticipation, into today the evils which we imagine will happen on the morrow will certainly disrupt our peace. Well does the Lord say, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6 : 34). The changing currents of hope, desire and fear will rob us of peace unless the imagination is stayed upon God.

Let us not conceive of imagination as being a harmful thing. Indeed, it is a choice gift from God, but it needs to be disciplined as to its use. The Hebrew word for "stayed" is an expressive one. When the psalmist speaks of the commandments of God which *stand fast* for ever and ever (Ps. 111 : 8), and of the heart of the righteous, being *established* (Ps. 112 : 8), he is using the same term emphasizing that which is settled and fixed securely. The mind or imagination needs to be occupied and engrossed, not with remote possibilities or vague apprehensions, but with the unchanging character of God.

A TRUST THAT IS IN THE LORD

This then is the second secret of the heart being maintained in perfect peace. It suggests a complete repose which enables a man to cast away every anxiety. It is a faith based, not on credulity, but on a sure knowledge of God. Observe the terms in which the prophet speaks of God and His actions —

1. *He is described as the Lord Jehovah or Jah Jehovah.* This strengthened form of Jehovah is used only four times in the Scriptures, here and in Isa. 12 : 2 ; Ex. 6 : 3 ; Ps. 83 : 18. Isaiah, chapter 12, is also a hymn of thanksgiving and

appropriate to the same period as chapter 26, i.e., the return from the captivity. There is also associated with the reference to Jah Jehovah in that chapter, the notion of trust, and the statement that Israel will not be afraid, but sing with joy. These expressions are analogous to perfect peace. To the unchanging character of the Self-existent One is allied the concept of supreme power.

2. *He is also described as an everlasting Rock* (v. 4 R.V.) or the rock of ages (see Deut. 32 : 4, 15). Thus is combined the conception of immutability and impregnable strength. The power of Jehovah was to be demonstrated in a remarkable way, and the prophet foretells two events which would not only justify faith in God, but would also cause them to sing this song in the land of Judah, formerly so desolate.

3. *Isaiah foretells that the Lord would restore Jerusalem and the temple.* God was going to establish His salvation as walls and bulwarks. The former walls and bulwarks failed to keep out Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem was going to be a strong city indeed (v. 1). Its gates were to be opened to the godly remnant, returning from the captivity, to enter (v. 2). The prophet predicts the raising up of Cyrus (Isa. 45 : 1). It was certainly most remarkable that this king should reverse the policy of the Assyrians and Babylonians which was to transfer the people of countries conquered to other parts of their dominion. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the remarkable facilities authorised by the kings Cyrus and Darius which resulted in many of the Jews returning from the captivity to Judah. Such an astonishing event can only be attributed to the power of Jehovah.

4. *Isaiah prophesies that the Lord would utterly overthrow and destroy Babylon.* Babylon is the lofty and proud city referred to in verse 5. Its magnitude and magnificence are almost incomprehensible. Herodotus, who visited Babylon shortly after its conquest by Cyrus, describes the city as a perfect square, each side being fifteen miles in length : thus the whole circuit amounted to sixty miles. It was surrounded by a deep, wide moat filled with water, and then by a wall

87 feet in breadth and 350 feet in height. The earth dug out for the moat was used to make the bricks for this enormous wall. On each edge of the top of the wall was a line of houses facing each other. The road between was wide enough to allow a chariot, drawn by four horses, to turn. In the circumference of the wall were 100 gates, twenty-five each side, all made of brass (Isa. 45 : 2). Strabo declares that this outer wall, and the famous hanging gardens were among the seven wonders of the world. It is not surprising that Belshazzar thought his city impregnable and that he could feast with a thousand of his lords contemptuous of the host besieging the city. It is no wonder that the Babylonians were proud of their magnificent city. But the lofty city was to be laid low, and destroyed as completely as was Sodom and Gomorrah ; it would never again be inhabited, for not even the Arab would pitch his tent there, nor the shepherds make any part of it a fold for their flocks. It would be populated only by wild beasts (Isa. 13 : 19-22).

Thus, with our minds dwelling upon such proof that our God is of unchanging power, we shall be kept — guarded as in Phil. 4 : 7 — in perfect peace. “Stayed upon Jehovah hearts are fully blessed, finding as He promised, perfect peace and rest.”

Not Stumbled

IN LUKE'S GOSPEL our Lord describes certain persons as "blessed", and states the qualities which induce or promote that condition, so different from the best that the man of the world knows as happiness; these Scriptures form an interesting study in themselves (Luke 1 : 45 ; 7 : 23 ; 10 : 23 ; 11 : 28 ; 12 : 37 ; 14 : 15).

One of the most interesting is the statement "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me" (7 : 23). The word for offended (*skandalon*) may be better translated as in the R.V. "stumbled." Thus the statement describes as blessed that person who is not stumbled by reason of the Lord's actions or failure to act in a manner desired.

Our Lord had been performing many astonishing miracles reaching a climax in the raising of the widow of Nain's son from the dead. The bazaars of Judæa buzzed with the exciting news. His name was wonderingly on everyone's lips. The news was conveyed to John the Baptist in the gloomy gaol of Macchurus, hidden in the fastnesses of the Judæan hills, whither he had been incarcerated by Herod, infuriated by John's daring denunciation of his immoral life. He had not been protected; God had allowed the tyrant to imprison this faithful servant. Languishing there, with only his thoughts and vermin for company, he is deeply affected by the news the disciples brought. Memories were stirred, and he sends two of his disciples with the enquiry, "Art thou He that should come or look we for another?" What prompted this embassy? Some think John's faith in Christ was under an eclipse, and that he wondered whether, after all, he had made some mistake in designating his cousin, on that

memorable day, as the Lamb of God (John 1 : 29). It would not be surprising for a feeling of despondency to overwhelm a man of such passionate feeling, that there should be some reaction after the stirring life he had lived, the fearless way in which Scribes and Pharisees had been denounced and the zeal manifested in calling sinners to repentance. In this, as in many other respects, he would resemble Elijah. But was doubt as to the Messiahship of Jesus uppermost in his mind ? Our Lord's action would at first seem confirmatory of such a suggestion. The rumours the disciples of John had heard were dramatically confirmed. Before their very eyes the Master demonstrated His power to restore long-lost faculties to many impotent folk, to heal immediately and completely the woefully diseased, and, more wonderful still, to exorcise demons and to restore sight to the blind. In fact, the wonders which the prophets of old had foretold the Messiah would do. Now, says our Lord, "Go your way and tell John the things ye have seen and heard, and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." It is these latter words which cast a different reflection on John's thoughts. If the sending of his disciples to Jesus was prompted by lack of faith then what his disciples had seen, and the testimony to the power of Jesus which they carried back, far from stumbling John, would have been completely reassuring. But suppose John secretly hoped that our Lord, if He were possessed of the miraculous power of which rumour had told, would exercise it on his behalf and wrest him from the power of the tyrant Herod — then the significance of the words can be understood. Yes, says the Lord, I have the power, there is the evidence of it, and now go and tell your master how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and even the dead are raised. He did nothing more. He could have saved him but He left him in Herod's power. That one who cried, "Behold the Lamb of God" with the result that some of his own disciples forthwith deserted him and followed Jesus; who so humbly said, "He must increase, I must decrease", whose clarion call to repentance stirred the

spiritual life of Israel to its depths, and brought the thronging multitudes to Jordan's banks to be baptized ; he may have thought himself deserving of divine intervention, but he is left with the words, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be stumbled in Me."

John's reaction is not revealed. Probably he was not stumbled and retained a calm faith in Christ to the end. If such be the case the attitude of John furnishes the greatest of many remarkable testimonies to the outstanding greatness of this man sent from God. He succeeded where others failed.

Jesus returned to His boyhood home, Nazareth, and entered the synagogue He knew so well, and, as His custom was, He taught them, supplementing His teaching by miracles. At first the congregation were astonished, but this gave place to scepticism as they exclaimed, "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works ; is not this the carpenter's son ; is not his mother called Mary and his brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas ? " And they were offended in Him with far less reason than John Baptist (Matt. 13 : 57).

The end draws near ; the Lord's supper has been instituted, a hymn sung, and the Master and the disciples wend their way to the Mount of Olives. And, as He announced His death, the full meaning of which had been so little appreciated by them, but which meant the extinction of their hopes of an immediate and earthly kingdom, the Lord says, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night " (Matt. 26 : 31). They were stumbled, and it took no less than the mighty wonder of the resurrection to effect a recovery.

These words may bring a message of encouragement to others for, whilst the actual circumstances of life may differ widely from those in which John the Baptist was found, yet there has been a cry to the Lord more than thrice repeated for deliverance, for the life of a loved one, perhaps almost indispensable to us, to be spared. We believed the Saviour had the power but no deliverance came. Or, we have sought for healing and the sickness remains, or the removal of the thorn in the flesh, but the messenger of Satan is left with us.

And it can be true of us also, “ Blessed is he whosoever shall not be stumbled in Me.”

It is touching to note that whilst our Lord took no steps to effect the deliverance of John Baptist, nor even to send back by his disciples some eulogy, yet, after the disciples had left, He turned immediately to the bystanders and uttered the highest praise conceivable. He declares him a true prophet indeed, one who fearlessly declared the counsel of God, uninfluenced by the attitude of the majority, one who resisted every temptation to live luxuriously, being content with the raiment of coarse camel’s hair, and the sparse fare of locusts and wild honey. A prophet, yea, and much more than a prophet, for among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John Baptist (Luke 7 : 24-28).

Is it not possible that while angels survey the struggle and strife in the arena of life below, at souls quietly saying, amidst all the perplexities of the way, “ He doeth all things well ; He knoweth the way that I take ” ; I cannot see the solution of this problem but I rest in His love — He will be uttering the praise of such and, in a coming day, they will more fully understand what they begin to realize now, “ Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me ” ?

THE ILLS WE SEE

The mysteries of sorrow deep and long,
 The dark enigmas of permitted wrong
 Have all one key,
 This strange, sad world is but our Father’s school
 All chance and change His Love shall grandly overrule.
(Selected)

Grace and Glory

GRACE is one of the distinctive words of the New Testament. In ordinary Greek parlance it referred to any occasion of pleasure, joy, and delight, but like so many other words its use in the New Testament has lifted it to a far higher level. It is almost impossible to define it adequately. Perhaps, one of the best attempts is the following.

“Grace is that in God which is at the heart of all His redeeming activities ; the downward stoop and reach of God ; God bending down from the heights of His majesty to touch and grasp our insignificance and poverty.” In the New Testament it is related both to the salvation of the sinner, and to the walk and work of the saint.

If grace is one of the most distinctive words of the New Testament, then glory is one of the most beautiful. This word also is used in two different ways : on the one hand to describe the character of God, embracing all the blessed attributes which compose His Name ; and, on the other hand, to set forth the state of blessedness into which the believer enters as a result of union with Christ.

Men do not associate glory with grace ; but rather power and wealth. The union of grace and glory would seem strange to them but to the believer — how blessed ! They are linked in John 1 : 14, when in that wonderful parenthesis the Apostle says, “we beheld His glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The hymn writer associates the two in these words : —

But boundless joy shall fill our hearts

When gazing on thy face,

We fully see what faith imparts

And Glory *crowns* thy grace.

That glory should be superimposed on grace, the fitting climax to grace, and consummation which grace had always in view, is a delightful concept.

These dual themes are associated in several Scriptures.

LIFE'S PRIVILEGE

Peter, in order to encourage those who were afflicted and who were suffering for a while, declares that God is "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5 : 10), He is the God of pardoning and justifying grace for the sinner ; of supporting grace for the weak and weary ; of comforting grace for the bereaved and sorrowful ; of strengthening grace for the tempted and tried ; and, indeed, any grace of which any soul may stand in need lies resident and stored up in Him. This, Peter declares, is demonstrated and proved by His having called us by Grace to Glory. Looking back over life's history it is evident we would never have come within the circle of divine favour of our own volition. The bent and bias of our unregenerate hearts was ever to take us further from Him. How true it is, "By grace have ye been saved through faith" (Eph. 2 : 8 R.V.).

The calling is a vital link in that chain of mercies which leads us to glory. "For whom He did foreknow, them He did predestinate ; and whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called them he also justified, and whom He justified them he also glorified" (Rom. 8 : 30). Being called we may be assured of the ultimate issue, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

But the privilege is emphasized by the fact that the calling is to a glory which belongs essentially to God, and as such is eternal in its character. His eternal glory — how can we evaluate and grasp this ? We may think of it in contrast to what men account glory on earth, which is transient, for the memory of men who have done glorious deeds soon fades ; it is tawdry and tainted, since it belongs to a sin-polluted scene. But His glory is age-abiding, undefiled and unailing, and to it, amazing privilege, we have been called by grace.

LIFE'S PILGRIMAGE

In Psalm 84 : 9-12, the Psalmist describes in glowing terms the depth of his emotion as at length he has arrived in Zion, appearing before God and resuming his loved service. Probably the Psalm tells of the experience of some Levite deprived in troublous times of taking the journey to Jerusalem, and thus prevented from taking his turn at being a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. The deep longings of his soul for the courts of the Lord have at last been fulfilled, and, despite the difficulties and dangers of the way, he has now arrived to declare that a day in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand elsewhere. He would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Firstly, he bursts out in a rapturous description of God. He is a sun and shield. As the sun gives light and heat so essential for the life of man, creatures, and plants on earth, so the Psalmist looks upon God as providing all that is necessary for life's pilgrimage. As a shield He protects from the ever present foes without and within.

Secondly, he tells of what God gives, namely grace and glory ; indeed no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. He gives grace now for each step of the way, and glory at the end of the pilgrimage.

He recalls so vividly, the grace that was given as he passed through the valley of Baca (v. 6). This valley is unidentified. No doubt it was some gloomy gorge where bandits often waylaid pilgrims. It had for such a sinister reputation. As he journeyed he found that grace enabled him to go from strength to strength. How different is the pilgrimage of the Christian pressing on into closer communion with God from that of the Moslem as he journeys from some distant part of the world towards Mecca ! Many succumb on the way, others arrive worn out with fatigue or weak from disease. " From strength to strength " suggests that far from the effort of the pilgrimage weakening us it invigorates. Grace

enables us to draw on hidden resources, for says the Psalmist, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee ; in whose heart are the highways to Zion."

There are various suggestive renderings of verse 6, "Who passing through the valley of weeping, make it a place of springs" (R.V.). "Who going through the valley of misery uses it for a well." "Who make it a place of fountains" (MacLaren). All these versions indicate that the very place of trouble may, instead, become a place of refreshment and comfort such as wells were to the peoples of Palestine. We need grace that it may be so and He giveth grace for grace.

Life for most spiritual pilgrims is made up of joy and sorrow, and we are apt to look upon them as excluding one another, or, at least, only in a future day shall we derive ample compensation for sorrow experienced now. As Paul says, "our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4 : 17). But Scripture teaches us that sorrow may be transformed or transfigured, if not into joy, then into blessing and even song. Bitter tears may become refreshing springs, gloomy places may be filled with glory, and sorrow may be found to be the parent of joy rather than its enemy. If, as grace is given, our sorrows cause us to get closer to God then our tears become sources of refreshment and fertility. As Dr. MacLaren so beautifully declares, "It makes it possible to gather our tears into reservoirs which shall be to us sources of many a blessing and many a thankfulness. He puts our tears into His bottle : we have to put them into our wells."

Then also it is said, "The early rain covereth it with blessings." The blessings in the Psalmist's thoughts were possibly the waving crops following the copious showers of rain. However this may be, certain it is that receiving the grace which is being constantly ministered to us, and rightly using the sorrows of the pilgrimage, we shall not only find spiritual refreshment ourselves, but there will descend the benediction of rain from heaven. So, to comfort us in trial and nerve us to press on in our pilgrimage to God, there is

promised for the present, grace sufficient for each trial ;
whilst for the future we are assured of glory to share and to
reflect His own lustrous perfection.

He has promised grace and glory,
Grace for all our journey here ;
Grace, should we with time grow hoary ;
Grace for every fleeting year.

Grace for trials ; grace for sorrows ;
Grace for problems which arise ;
Grace to meet the unknown morrows,
With their vague uncertainties.

Afterward 'twill be the glory,
When the shadows flee away ;
When we've finished life-time's story ;
When shall break the endless day.

Glory past all comprehending,
In that Land where all is fair ;
Glory, wondrous and unending,
Which, through grace, we then shall share.

(J. Danson Smith)

L I F E ' S P A T T E R N

“All things are for your sakes” declares Paul (2 Cor. 4 : 15). This may refer to the entire providence of God as in 1 Cor. 3 : 22 but in the immediate context Paul sets forth a catalogue of sufferings. He is pressed on every side : brought into a narrow place from which there is no escape (v. 8 R.V.). Probably he refers to the inward aspect of bodily trials, He is persecuted and “cast down” (v. 9), as a pursued man being overtaken is struck a blow which is not fatal, and from which he rises again. His sufferings are summarized in the statement that he was, “always bearing about in the body the

dying of the Lord Jesus.” He does not say the death of the Lord Jesus, but the dying, as though it were a continuous process producing death. The constant pains, perils, spiritual pressure, with the emotion of repeated danger and successive deliverances, were wearing him out physically, so that he was “dying daily.”

How can such trials which other believers may suffer today be for our good ? Because with them there is bestowed abundant grace enabling us so to triumph over them as not to be distressed or in despair, not forsaken (left forlorn), or destroyed. Grace thus preserves us in trials, ministering resurrection life when all seems lost. It thus provides, for many, an occasion for thanksgiving, reminding us that such experiences in life do not happen arbitrarily, as though we only are concerned ; others observe the strife and the struggle in the arena down here, and magnify the grace which alone enables weak mortals to triumph over adversity. Still more wonderful, it redounds to the glory of God. There is no glory to the individual ; we are but recipients of His grace, which witnesses recognize, and so glorify the Bestower of the grace. The glory of God is to be found in His work on individuals ; it is to shine in the church as the demonstration of the fulness of redeeming love. We shall be now, and forever, to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1 : 6).

The Treasuries of Pain

“**M**AN IS BORN UNTO TROUBLE, as the sparks fly upward.” Such is Eliphaz’s conclusion derived from a wealth of experience. Who will contend that his conclusion is not sound? It is, indeed, a strange and unusual life that is not confronted sooner or later with the problem of suffering.

The riddle of injustice and sorrow in a God-created world is a very ancient trouble. It was this that made Job’s soul even more miserable than his sorely afflicted body. It almost led Asaph, as Psalm 73 shows, to renounce his faith in a good God. It is age-long and universal. It affects all closely and personally; never more so than in these troublous times.

The Christian is not excepted: indeed, he may suffer more acutely than the unbeliever. The very faith that he professes may draw upon him bitter persecution. The offence of the Cross has not ceased. His more sensitive soul and refined nature winces at the wrongs perpetuated on others, often innocent and defenceless, whilst the unbeliever seems inured, callous and unaffected.

Again, so many saintly ones are called to bear an unusual burden — sore bereavement; the loss of some precious faculty essential to normal life; continuous pain and ill health; the deprivation of earthly possessions or the means of earning a livelihood. In contrast, many a worldling escapes all these trials and prospers.

If the Christian is not excepted, neither need he be surprised. In fact, he has been warned to expect trial. The

One in whose steps he is called to follow in this, as in other matters, says "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Thus the certainty of suffering is made clear by the Lord as well as by Job. Peter, writing to the scattered suffering strangers of the Dispersion, declares ; " Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you."

THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

If he is not excepted, neither need he be altogether mystified.

Suffering is a trial of faith. As the Christian endures, so he demonstrates the reality of his trust in God. Job's example when he could say, " Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," has been emulated in the lives of many humble Christians often unknown and unnoticed. It is easy to say, " I believe God," when the sky is blue and not a ripple breaks the calm of life. It is another thing to say confidently, amidst the wreckage of life's dearest hopes, as Paul did : " I believe in God."

Suffering develops character. There are graces, distinctive of the Christian life, such as patience, humility and unselfishness, which seem only to reach their full development in the furnace of affliction. Peter asserts that the God of all grace has such a beneficent purpose in view when he says, " after that ye have suffered awhile God himself will perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you," as though antecedent suffering is the necessary norm of the perfect character. If we would be strengthened, stablished, settled, as well as soar, we must suffer.

The cocoon of the emperor-moth has a very small means of egress compared with the size of the butterfly's body. In consequence, the butterfly has to spend hours of striving and struggling before it emerges with fully developed wings with which to fly. If the silken threads holding the cocoon are cut the butterfly will emerge far more easily, but will be a poor

stunted creature, utterly unable to soar into the heavens. Soon it will be helpless and die. It is by the very struggle and effort to escape from the cocoon that nature equips the butterfly's wings with power for flight. Only through suffering can it become fully developed, and enter into and enjoy its new life.

“ So sorrow is the furnace fire,
The fuller's soap, the vale of tears ;
Yet sorrow works my deep desire,
His image in my soul appears ! ”

ITS NATURE

Suffering may be varied in its character. Those to whom the Apostle Peter wrote were in heaviness through manifold testings. It is probable that no two persons suffer exactly alike either in degree, length, or nature of trial. With some it may be a “ fiery ” trial, fierce and intense while it lasts. With others it may be prolonged without relief. Yet, all the time the Lord is weighing with infinite solicitude the path of the just. The Lord may wait, but it is only that He may be gracious ; that He may bestow upon us blessings, or produce within us results, which would not have been possible had intervention taken place earlier.

ITS LIMITS

Over one of the main entrances to Milan Cathedral is to be seen this inscription : “ All that grieves is but for a moment. ” Suffering is limited in time and extent. Paul, in 2 Cor. 4 : 8-18, summarises much that the early apostles endured, and testifies that the affliction was light and but for a moment, in comparison with that eternal weight of glory which they would soon possess. Peter reminds other sufferers that they were in heaviness ‘ for a season. ’

How beautifully it is written that the Lord, "shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver" (Mal. 3 : 3). To perfect His saints He puts His precious metal into His crucible. He does not leave it for a moment. He sits by it intently watching. Love is His thermometer. Not one unnecessary degree of heat will be allowed. As soon as the dross is released, so that He sees Himself reflected, the trial ceases. If it is limited in time it is confined also in extent. Paul soberly reflects on this aspect of his life, and says, "I reckon the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

ITS COMPENSATIONS

The Apostle Peter declares that the early Christians in their fiery trial were partakers of Christ's sufferings. Usually when in trouble it is not difficult to discover another in worse plight. Thereby a sense of comfort is derived. How much more so when the example of the Divine Sufferer is considered. He suffered infinitely more than any will ever do. Furthermore, He companies with His people in their sufferings, sustaining them therein by His unceasing and effective intercession based upon perfect knowledge and sympathy.

Peter makes a truly wonderful statement when he asserts that upon those who suffer 'the Spirit of Glory and of God resteth.' As though upon harassed, torn, afflicted, tormented souls a Sabbath rest descends, bringing calm and poise to the spirit. When the world treats such souls as evil, unwanted, infamous, the glory of God will shine upon their pathway. When they have least of human love they will enjoy most of God. Cast out, ostracized by those who hate, God Himself draws near. When hands are upraised in scorn His are placed upon them in blessing.

As if this were not enough, it is said that thereby souls become partakers of Christ's holiness, and to those who are exercised thereby discipline yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Yet, despite all that has been said, the problem may still rest heavily upon some. At best, all now see through a glass darkly ; we know in part only, until we see Him face to face.

“ I know not now why came that loss,
Nor why I needed such a cross.
I know not now, the need of pain,
Nor why the sickness should remain ;
Hereafter, I shall know, shall see,
These very things were best for me.”

Then we shall *fully* know. In a moment all questions will be resolved. We shall then see more perfectly the results arising from our ensuing escorted passage through the valley of Baca : results which will have fitted for a special sphere of service then, and produced a capacity to assimilate the Divine ; results which will be “ found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” No suffering saint’s life is disregarded, still less is it wasted. What blessed discoveries there will be ! Then indeed shall we esteem the experiences of our pilgrimages as the treasuries of pain.

Bereaved

MANY A SORELY STRICKEN HEART has echoed the words of Jacob, "If I be bereaved I am bereaved" (Gen. 43 : 14). Despair and pessimism filled Jacob's soul, but Joseph was not dead as he imagined, and he was not seeing the last of Benjamin as he feared.

To us, however, the bereavement is no distorted imagination; alas! it is only too real; never again shall we see on earth that loved child, husband or wife. They are gone from our side for ever leaving an acute sense of loss. Life can never be quite the same again, however bravely the new situation is faced.

Some bereavements are particularly hard to bear such as the loss of an only child, of a husband in the prime of life leaving the widow with the responsibility of providing for a young family, or where the one left is an invalid, or suffering from some chronic disease and in need of special love and care.

There must ever be a sense of destitution, loneliness and in our forlorn despair, we may feel quite unequal to face the changed future. Sometimes the bereavement happens with dramatic and unexpected suddenness.

I seek to write with tenderness as one who has passed this way and now have no immediate family. The believer can face this, the greatest of all earthly sorrows in a way different from the worldling. Doing so we give a testimony to our firm belief in what the scriptures teach on the subject of death.

There must be some sense of sorrow, that is inevitable. when the dear one can no more return to the familiar place

to share the life, home, companionship and counsel. There is an acute difference between the living person, and the dropping of the veil between. The sense of bereavement and desolation, however, is mitigated as we dwell upon certain statements in the Scriptures.

Paul says we ought not to sorrow in the same way as others because they have no hope whereas we have (1 Thess. 4 : 14). He describes the dead as those who "sleep through Jesus", and states categorically that God will bring them with Him, i.e. they are not gone for ever, there will be a blessed reunion for we shall be caught up *together with them* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

Further, Paul declares that the dead not only sleep through Jesus, but they are "with Christ which is far better" so that "to die is gain" (Phil. 1 : 21, 23). To describe death as being desirable, in itself, can only be as we esteem it the entry into a joy and glory of which at present we have no true conception. Paul is, of course, mainly emphasizing in that passage the gain and the joy of a life which is lived with Christ as its supreme object. For to him "to live is Christ" (Phil. 1 : 21). Hence he is in a strait betwixt the two, his personal preference being to depart to be with Christ, but, on the other hand, he recognizes that continuance in this life would be more needful to the Philippians. As Bishop Moule beautifully points out — "On either side of the veil Jesus Christ is all things to him. So both sides are divinely good ; only the conditions of the other side are such that the longed-for companionship of the Master will be more perfectly realized there."

Yes, think of all things at the best ; in one rich thought
 unite
 All purest joys of sense and soul, all present love and
 light ;
 Yet bind this truth upon thy brow and clasp it to thy
 heart,

And then nor grief nor gladness here shall claim too great
 a part,
 All radiance of this lower sky is to that glory dim ;
 Far better to depart it is, for we shall be with Him.
(Moule)

Then death is described as a dissolution of this tabernacle (lit. tent house), and a being clothed with our new house which is a building of God eternal in its character (2 Cor. 5 : 1-2). The body is designated a tent dwelling appropriate and sufficient for persons not dwelling in their own country. It is a light, provisional shelter, and, like the bedouin tent, can be removed at any time. Happy the man who spiritually lives in a tent !

But in this nomad tent house we may be burdened (v. 4), it seems so frail to withstand the conflicts and storms of life. Over this earthly tent in which we groan and long for release is to be built the habitation which is from heaven ; in contrast to the tent house, a building and an edifice, durable and stately. The same word is used to describe the temple of Herod (Mark 13 : 1) It will be an abode perfectly adapted and fitted for that life of glory. While at present we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord, when the gentle dissolution takes place we shall be absent from the body and at home (R.V.) with the Lord (2 Cor. 5 : 8).

Then death is also described as a departure (lit. exodus) (2 Peter 1 : 15 R.V.) i.e., a going out. But if it is that, it is also a coming in for, says Peter, in the same context, an entrance shall be ministered abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Looked at from this side it is a going out, but from the other side it is a coming in. It is as though we are transplanted, as from a broken flower pot, to blossom more perfectly in the celestial garden, as though we enter a tunnel, short and dark, to emerge immediately in that land of fadeless day.

So death is (i) to be put to sleep through Jesus ; (ii) to be with Christ far better ; (iii) to be at home with the Lord :

(iv) to dwell in that abiding place which He has gone to prepare for us (John 14 : 1-3), so different from the transient tent house. In the resurrection, too, we shall receive the things done in the body (2 Cor. 5 : 10). In this world we have not seen the last of anything. The things we have done will then come back to us.

We may trustfully accept such truth, but in the early days of sore bereavement our grief will seem hard to bear. As a help one would prefer to quote the words of another writer than narrate one's own experience. Soon after the death of his wife, following that of an only child, Bishop Moule says — "I wish to be neither weak nor selfish in my grief. I am both weak and selfish, but my Lord can and will lift me over myself into Him, and make me care most for others who sorrow over this sudden loss. I mean to take care of health and after five or six weeks' rest, to work on." In another letter at that time, he writes — "He keeps me still and quiet, consenting under His mighty hand. That keeps gloom away. My natural tendency is to brood over the past longingly, regretfully, but gradually the predominant note has become one of thanksgiving for all that has passed. I find thanksgiving, prompt and earnest, a real anodyne."

One has found during the waking hours of the night, and at times of anniversary, a strange lonely and sad feeling settle unbidden upon the spirit. What is to be the panacea for this ? To learn to thank Him for the wonderful riches which recollection of the past adds to life dispelling its sense of emptiness. Things which are undying in their fruits which continue to enrich one's whole being making us at once tender, resolute, linking us still more intimately and really with that happy and holy future which we too shall know when we leave this schoolroom below for the sunlit and all-beautiful upstairs to meet face to face in His dear presence the loved ones whose memory is so precious.

Not only should we dwell upon happy memories of the past in a thankful sense, but we should discipline ourselves to continue with undiminished zest the normal duties of life ; the

blessed continuance in the Lord's service has proved a wonderful alleviation to the sorrowful spirit. Said one bereft of wife and five children, "My relief is in work, in plunging into efforts on behalf of that cause that can never die." Seek strength and grace for this and it will be vouchsafed.

Nevertheless, the sense of sorrow may last even until we pass the veil despite all life's activities and beautiful memories. Bishop Moule tells how for some days there had been the thought of, and the longing for, his beloved wife and daughter, and "were it not for Christ it would indeed be a death in life, but oh how He alters things! He does enable me, in some measure, to feel that it is grandly worthwhile to be bereaved if one is the better able thereby to help others' sorrows."

This Night That Day

WHAT CONTRASTS are presented in these words used by the Lord in those fateful hours immediately precedent to Calvary! As he leaves the upper room immediately after the institution of the Lord's supper, and after speaking the ever memorable words recorded in John 15, 16 and 17, and before entering the shadows of dark Gethsemane, He turns sorrowfully to the intimate band of disciples and says, "All ye shall be offended because of Me *this night.*" To these same disciples he had just said so wistfully, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until *that day* when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom" (Matt. 26 : 29-31).

This night ; the night in which He was betrayed. It was the night season for the Master. His spirit was oppressed foreknowing all that was immediately to transpire. He had handed the sop to Judas who left the company immediately, and significantly it is stated, "and it was night" (John 13 : 30). Judas hurried to consummate the arrangements for betrayal : the Master entered the silence and shadows of Gethsemane, there to wrestle with the powers of darkness, and to begin to be sore amazed and very heavy. His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. He looked for the sympathy of disciples who might watch and pray during those hours of darkness, but although their sorrow and oppression was not to be compared to His they failed Him and slept. 'Ere long the darkness is illuminated by the lanterns and torches carried by the temple soldiers as, led by the arch betrayer, they advance to arrest Him. How majestically He stands forth, realizing that the hour had come saying, "Be ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves? When I

was daily in the temple ye stretched forth no hands against Me but this is your hour and the power of darkness” (Luke 22 : 52-53). Not only was it the night of betrayal ; it was also the night of desertion. The Shepherd was about to be smitten, and, as He said, they were stumbled, for they all forsook Him and fled (Matt. 26 : 56).

THE NIGHT OF CALVARY

As Jesus hung upon the Cross, He who knew no sin being made sin for us, at mid-day a supernatural darkness enveloped both Him and the whole scene “ as though nature was expressing sympathy with her Lord ” (Stalker). What that night season meant to the Crucified we shall never fully know. We glimpse it, so inadequately, in the first words issuing from His lips after the darkness had passed, “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? ” A cry out of the depths of despair. He was accustomed to being forsaken — His own brethren did not believe in Him ; His fellow townsmen of Nazareth rejected Him ; multitudes who had witnessed His miracles and listened to the words of grace and beauty which fell from His lips took offence and went away. Ultimately the nation cried, “ Away with Him, crucify Him.” Finally, His disciples added to the gloom and sadness of that night by fleeing from His side. Now in the depths of the grief and darkness of His spirit He has to say, “ Why art Thou so far from helping Me ? ” Stalker puts it, “ He did not belong to death ; yet He was falling into death’s grasp. No angel came to rescue Him ; God interposed with no miracle to arrest the issue, He was abandoned to His fate.” This should not only captivate our hearts with wonder but cause us to cast ourselves adoringly at the Redeemer’s feet.

Blessed Saviour, we remember
Thou didst meet our foe,
When the darkness gathered round Thee,
And the woe.

Lord and Saviour, we remember
And would prize Thy love ;
All its fulness do Thou teach us
From above !

THAT DAY

In instituting the Lord's supper the Lord made it clear that it was primarily a memorial feast, "He took bread and gave thanks and brake it and gave unto them saying, This is My body which is given for you : this do *in remembrance* of Me" (Luke 22 : 19). But in each of the Gospels it is stated that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until *that day*, the day when the Kingdom of God should come. There are many indications that as the cross drew near He could look beyond the cross to that day of ultimate triumph and glory. So lifting up His eyes to heaven He could pray, "Father the hour is come, glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may also glorify Thee" (John 17 : 1). It was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross (Heb. 12 : 2).

There is therefore implicit in the feast of remembrance a prophecy ; the Master clearly foretells the coming of a day when He would feast with His disciples in totally different circumstances. He bids us *hope* as well as *remember*. Paul associates the same notion with the Lord's supper when he says, "Ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11 : 26). The symbols quicken faith and love and aid remembrance but they are anticipatory. One day the symbols will disappear. We shall need them no longer for we shall be in the immediate presence of Him whom not having seen we love. The Lord's supper points onward to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to its own cessation. "He shall then gird Himself and make them to sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12 : 37).

THIS NIGHT

For all believers this is indeed a night season. It is, however, man's day, his time of earthly and sensual delights.

It is but temporary and transient for his understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4 : 18). Soon sudden destruction cometh with the gloom and terror of an eternal night of banishment and separation from all that is pure, holy and good.

In this night season the believer is not immune from the troubles of the world. The Master did not promise an easy path but said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Here indeed we suffer grief and pain, misunderstanding, stigma and reproach are the portion of most, and, for some, vilification, malignity and even a martyr's death. But all that we shall ever know of such trials is in this night season for "we are not in darkness but are the children of light and of the day ; we are not of night nor of darkness " (1 Thess. 5 : 4 and 5). "The night is far spent, the day is at hand " (Rom. 13 : 12). "And there shall be no more night and they need no candle neither light of the sun for the Lord God giveth them light " (Rev. 22 : 5).

THAT DAY

In the light of our Lord's words at the supper, that day may be likened unto a prolonged festival, one of repose, satisfaction and gladness, a feast not only shared with the Lord, but with all the hosts of the redeemed. Down here in the night of this world the believer experiences a blessedness in hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It is good to have hunger which impels us forward and attracts our souls, but only in measure, feeble measure, are we truly satisfied here. Oft-times we are spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not.

The vision of the Christ is oft bedimmed, the realization of His presence sadly limited, earth's voices too near and too raucous to distinguish the tender whisper that comes to us from the Lover of our souls. Earth's sights are too entrancing and alluring to be shut out completely. The veil of sin hangs between us and the Bridegroom and we see only as through

the lattice (Song of Solomon 2 : 9). In that day we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness ; when we sit down in that day to eat bread with Him in His Kingdom (Cf. Luke 14 : 15). We shall be blessed with perfect repose. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God," asserts the writer to the Hebrews, but amidst the cares and trials, the unremitting spiritual warfare we are wearied, and the rest seems a long time coming. In that day, however, and in that festal hall we shall find His rest is glorious (Isa. 11 : 10).

The cares and burdens which, in the night season, we sought to cast upon Him will have gone for ever. The fret and anxiety which robbed us of peace will have vanished so completely that even the memory of it will utterly fade, when the words are fulfilled, "Ye shall sit with Me at My table."

Wine is an emblem of joy, the Saviour says it is *new* wine that He will drink with His own in the Kingdom. In that period of darkness and separation we have known much of the joy of the Lord. "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full" (John 15 : 11). But here is the hint of new joys, of bliss and happiness which we have not known and cannot possibly know as yet ; the fulfilment of Paul's words, "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard and neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2 : 9). It will be joy and rest to the highest level, unmixed, pure, transforming. "At His right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Finally, how sweet are the words "*with Me* in My Father's Kingdom" ! The Saviour with us and we rejoicing in each other's communion. And so shall *we* ever be with the Lord. In this dark night the way seems lonely, we tread a solitary way, a desert drear. One by one our relatives and friends leave us for the better land, and we feel deserted and forlorn. Oh ! joyous day when we shall be reunited, coming together again with them and with Him, never more to part, or to go out, but to see His face and sit eternally in His presence. "With you will I drink it" ; then fully to see of

the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Satisfied with the presence of those whom he has purchased with His own blood in whose love, loyalty and receptiveness He will find His delight and we, His brethren, will also enter into that felicity and joy in a deep and wondrous fashion.

Sacred pledge that nought can sever,
Blessed Saviour, from Thy love ;
Sealed to be Thy guests for ever,
At the ceaseless feast above.

There, in sweet communion blending,
With the vast, ingathered throng,
Ours shall be a bliss unending,
An eternal, festal song !

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